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The Impact of ChatGPT on English Language Teaching, Learning, and Assessment: A Rapid Review of Literature

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Abstract
This study aimed to explore the impact of ChatGPT on English language teaching, learning, and assessment. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions: 1) How can ChatGPT enhance English language learning, teaching, and assessment? and 2) What are the issues associated with ChatGPT in terms of language teaching, learning, and assessment? Utilizing Rapid Literature Review as a methodology guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, this study found that ChatGPT can support and enhance English language learning by providing meaning-focused inputs, offering scaffoldings during the production of meaning-focused outputs, giving feedback on the accuracy of learners’ language outputs, and facilitating fluency development through extensive language practice. Moreover, this study also found that ChatGPT can enhance English language teaching by assisting teachers in designing bespoke lesson plans, facilitating language learning inside and outside language classrooms, developing customized instructional materials, assessing L2 learning, and giving immediate, individualized feedback. However, despite the benefits it can provide to English language teachers and learners, its use in the classroom is faced with many issues such as inaccurate responses, academic dishonesty and plagiarism, skills deterioration, generic responses, inherent biases, privacy breaches, non-emotionality, technical limitations, educational inequity, and teacher job security threat. Detailed results and implications for policymaking and language teacher development are discussed.

Keywords: ChatGPT in English language teaching (ELT), ChatGPT and language assessment, generative Artificial Intelligence, impact of ChatGPT on L2 learning, issues of ChatGPT

Introduction

One of the most popular text-based generative AI is the ChatGPT. Trained on billions of human-generated texts, it has the capability to predict the next word in a given sequence and generate a coherent and contextually appropriate text (Bonner, et al., 2023). It also has the ability to interpret human written and oral requests and predict and generate a natural human-like response, like essays, reports, letters, emails, speeches, etc. (Health, 2023; Roumeliotis & Tselikas, 2023). In addition, it has the capability to solve verbal insight problems comparable to human subjects (Orrù et al., 2023). Lastly, it has the capability to translate language, summarize texts, answer questions, write poems, stories, or movie scripts, write articles, blog posts, or emails, respond to prompts in conversations, explain complex topics or concepts, fix errors in existing codes or generate new codes, and describe images in detail (Adiguzel et al., 2023).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2023) has outlined various applications of ChatGPT in higher education, particularly in the areas of teaching and learning, research, administration, and community engagement. As outlined, ChatGPT can help enhance the teaching-learning process by assuming various roles such as possibility engine, Socratic opponent, collaboration coach, guide on the side, personal tutor, co-designer, Exploratorium, study buddy, motivator, and dynamic assessor (UNESCO, 2023). It can also help expedite the research process by helping researchers generate ideas for research questions, identify data sources, gather and process data from various sources, code and analyze data, and write the research report following the appropriate language and style. Moreover, it can improve the efficiency of institutions’ administrative services by helping carry out tasks 24/7 across various platforms and can help respond to queries from current and prospective students, send reminders or notifications to various stakeholders, and translate information for international students. Lastly, it can support institutions in exploring ideas, developing strategies, and implementing relevant activities for community involvement (UNESCO, 2023).

In the study by Rudolph et al. (2023), it was found that ChatGPT had a positive impact on teaching and learning in higher education. Though it had some limitations and issues, it opened opportunities for teachers and school leaders to leverage the tool for more effective teaching, learning, and assessment. In another study by Kovačević (2023), it was also found that ChatGPT could personalize the learning experiences of students studying English for specific purposes (ESP), hence facilitating better language acquisition and successful learning. A quantitative study by Ali et al. (2023) also found that ChatGPT could generally motivate learners to develop reading and writing skills. Lastly, in the exploratory study by Koraishi (2023), it was revealed that ChatGPT was a valuable tool for EFL materials development and assessment. It could streamline the process of developing engaging and contextually relevant resources tailored to the needs of individual learners and could offer real-time, personalized feedback on learners’ performance, thereby enhancing the overall learning experience of L2 learners.

However, despite its affordances and great potential to transform learning, teaching, assessment, research, work productivity, and community engagement, ChatGPT is faced with many issues and challenges. Since its release in November 2022, there have been concerns from the academic community regarding its potential threat to academic integrity, data privacy and security, information accuracy, soft skills development, intellectual property rights, and economic sustainability (UNESCO, 2023). Due to its impressive ability to generate human-like text outputs, academics are worried that students may misuse or abuse it in preparing their course requirements (Adiguzel, et al., 2023). Also, since it collects and keeps whatever the users input when they use
the tool, it raises a concern about data privacy and security (Adiguzel, et al., 2023). In addition, since its responses to queries are based on whatever data available online, it is not certain whether these responses are complete and accurate (Adiguzel, et al., 2023). Moreover, since it provides responses without even indicating or acknowledging authoritative sources, it may be violating copyright or intellectual property regulations (Adiguzel, et al., 2023). Lastly, since it heavily relies on training data which may be biased in some respects, it may also yield biased responses.

**ChatGPT and the Four Strands of L2 Teaching and Learning**

In English language teaching, learning, and assessment, Nation (2007) describes a framework that outlines the conditions that can ensure meaningful and productive L2 learning. This framework is divided into four strands namely: 1) meaning-focused input; 2) meaning-focused output; 3) language-focused learning; and 4) fluency development. The meaning-focused input strand involves learning the language receptively. In this strand, L2 learners receive language input (usually through reading and listening). They try to focus on trying to find the meaning of the inputs which must be “comprehensible” or not too hard to understand. In the meaning-focused output strand, L2 learners learn the language productively. They are pushed to produce language (e.g. by speaking, writing, or representing) and focus on getting the message (meaning) across. The language-focused learning strand involves the deliberate learning of language features such as pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. L2 learners focus on using the language accurately. In the fluency development strand, L2 learners engage with all four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing without too much difficulty. In this strand, the learners are helped to make the best use of what they already know. They focus on using the language more productively without worrying much about accuracy.

Given the affordances of ChatGPT and the processes involved in second language teaching and learning under the Four Strands Framework, this study aimed to examine how ChatGPT can enhance English language learning, teaching, and assessment within the Four Strands framework. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How can ChatGPT enhance English language teaching, learning, and assessment?
2. What are the issues associated with ChatGPT in terms of language teaching, learning, and assessment?

Utilizing a systematic rapid review of literature, this study analyzed academic articles published in peer-reviewed journals from November 2022 to August 2023. It focused on identifying the ways ChatGPT impacts English language teaching, learning, and assessment, and the issues involved in using it for language teaching and assessing learning. As the first systematic review of literature on ChatGPT in the field of English language teaching (ELT), the findings of this study can be useful in formulating relevant academic policies in different ELT contexts for more appropriate, ethical, and productive use of generative AI. Findings can also offer pedagogical practices and insights that may guide school leaders and classroom practitioners for better use of the tool to enhance English language teaching and learning in different educational contexts.
Methodology
The Rapid Review Approach
This study utilized the rapid review approach since its purpose was to examine and synthesize findings about the impact of ChatGPT on English language teaching, learning, and assessment based on studies published between November 2022 and August 2023. According to Tricco et al (2015), “a rapid review is a type of knowledge synthesis in which components of the systematic review process are simplified or omitted to produce information in a short period of time” (p.2). Given that ChatGPT evolves very rapidly and that conducting a comprehensive systematic review can take several months or years, a rapid review of the literature was deemed an appropriate method for this study since it allows faster completion of the review in order to provide timely and valuable insights for ELT practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.

Search Strategies
This rapid review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) 2020 statement developed by Page et al. (2021). Searching for articles online was conducted from May 15 to August 22, 2023 (six to nine months after the release of ChatGPT in November 2022). The ChatGPT versions included in the articles were versions 3.5 and 4.0. The two major reputable electronic databases (Web of Science and Scopus) were used in the study to ensure the quality and credibility of the articles. The search strings “ChatGPT and language education”, “ChatGPT and English language education”, “ChatGPT and English language teaching”, “ChatGPT and Second Language Learning”, “ChatGPT and Teaching Writing”, “ChatGPT and Teaching Reading”, “ChatGPT and Teaching Speaking”, “ChatGPT and Teaching Listening”, “ChatGPT and Teaching Vocabulary”, and “ChatGPT and Teaching Grammar” were used in each database to search relevant articles. The publication period specified was November 2022 to August 2023. Given the newness of the topic, only a few relevant articles were found.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for article selection

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<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Inclusion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Article topic</td>
<td>Discuss ChatGPT in English language teaching, learning, and assessment</td>
<td>Does not discuss English language teaching, learning, and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article type</td>
<td>Peer-reviewed English academic journal articles</td>
<td>Non-academic articles published in all languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time period</td>
<td>November 30, 2022 to August 22, 2023 (date of the final search for this rapid review)</td>
<td>Articles published outside the time period</td>
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Table 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting articles to review. As shown, only peer-reviewed English academic journal articles (print and online) published between November 30, 2022 and August 22, 2023 were included. Non-academic articles published on mainstream and social media, blog posts from personal and institutional/corporate websites, review articles from technology magazines, etc. were excluded. To be included in the review,
articles had to discuss ChatGPT in English language teaching, learning, and assessment. Retrieved articles pertaining to ChatGPT in education, in general, were used as background references and were excluded from the rapid review.

**Analysis of Data**

The raw data (findings and conclusions of articles reviewed) were manually analyzed and interpreted following the deductive and inductive analysis approaches. For research question 1, the deductive approach was used following the Four Strands of Second Language Teaching and Learning by Nation (2007) as the framework of analysis. For research question 2, the inductive analysis was used which involved the stages of organization, description, and interpretation (Mertler, 2019). In the organization stage, the raw data were outlined and were condensed into brief summary format. A coding scheme was used to group data that provided similar types of information. In the description stage, the main features or characteristics of the categories resulting from the coding of data were described, and the connections between the data and the original research questions were made. In the final stage (interpretation), relationships, similarities, and contradictions between and among the coded categories were examined.

In manually analyzing the data, the following steps were followed: 1) coding the raw data on a Microsoft Word document; 2) organizing and cleaning up the codes to ensure consistency throughout the process; and 3) developing a thematic framework based on the codes generated during the analysis. To ensure validity and reliability in data analysis, a second coder was hired. The second coder was briefed on the purpose, research questions, research method, and codes and coding scheme of the study. A calibration session was also conducted to discuss ways to consistently analyze the raw data.

**Findings**

**Results of the Search and Selection Process**

![Flow diagram of article selection]

*Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of article selection*
Figure 1 shows the results of the search and selection process, from the number of records identified in the database search to the number of studies included in the review, following the PRISMA flow diagram. As reflected, there were 235 records identified from the Web of Science and Scopus databases. After removing duplicates, the records were trimmed down to 223 for screening. After scanning the records, 208 articles were excluded as all of them fell outside the scope of this review. Many fell under other disciplines (e.g., nursing, medicine, engineering, etc.) and broadly discussed ChatGPT’s application to education in general. Some of the excluded articles but closely relevant to the topic of this study were used as references for the background of the study. Using the inclusion criteria, 15 articles were eventually included in the review.

RQ1: How can ChatGPT enhance English language learning, teaching, and assessment?

The following tables outline how ChatGPT can support and enhance English language learning, teaching, and assessment. Table 2 shows how ChatGPT can enhance language learning in alignment with the established L2 learning theories and principles, while Table 3 demonstrates how ChatGPT can support English language teachers in the discharge of their varied roles and responsibilities. Table 4 illustrates how ChatGPT can facilitate language assessment processes and how it can help in giving feedback.

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<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Sample Findings</th>
<th>Reviewed articles</th>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning-focused input</td>
<td>Interesting and easy-to-understand language inputs</td>
<td>Creates meaningful texts in various genres that can be used as samples and inspiration for writing</td>
<td>Barrot (2023) Bonner, Lege, &amp; Frazier (2023) Chan &amp; Hu (2023) Dergaa, Chamari, Zmijewski, &amp; Saad (2023) Khonke, Moorhouse, &amp; Zhou (2023) Ross (2023) Yan (2023)</td>
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<td>Identifies the meaning of a word in context and adjusts the complexity of a text to make it more suitable for learners from different proficiency levels</td>
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<td>Annotates texts and offers dictionary definitions, example sentences, and translations.</td>
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<td>Generates short texts based on the words entered by a user to help students memorize the words</td>
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<td>Summarizes long texts/articles with level-appropriate language and key information</td>
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<td>Helps generate topics and questions for academic writing and research</td>
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<td>Personalized learning resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provides learning resources tailored to students’ specific needs and interests</td>
<td>Barrot (2023) Bonner, Lege, &amp; Frazier (2023) Chan &amp; Hu (2023)</td>
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<td>Operates as a prompt generator, creating unique/bespoke prompts that fit the instructional needs of a task</td>
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<td>Creates appropriately-leveled topical texts based on the existing level of proficiency of the students</td>
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<td>Authentic and interactive learning activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provides interactive language learning experience by simulating authentic interactions/conversations and answering learner queries in real-time</td>
<td>Chan &amp; Hu (2023) Khonke, Moorhouse, &amp; Zhou (2023)</td>
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## The Impact of ChatGPT on English Language Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

### Meniado

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<th>Theme</th>
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| Meaning-focused output     | Guided production of language outputs         | - As a virtual learning partner, it allows social interaction and reduces communication hurdles such as social anxiety  
- Assists students with tasks such as outline preparation, content revision, proofreading, and post-writing reflection  
- Assists students in coping with the structural and linguistic challenges in producing language outputs | Mohammed (2023)                    |
|                            | Cognitive offloading during the process of language production | - It reduces the cognitive demands required by a task by providing support/scaffolding during the process  
- Creates presentation notes and can convert student scripts into presentation notes or outlines to guide learners so that they do not need to rely on verbatim scripts.  
- It can break a text into core components | Bonner, Lege, & Frazier (2023)  
                      | Sub-theme                                      | Sample Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Reviewed articles                  |
| Language-focused learning  | Noticing language errors                      | - Can identify most surface-level errors in a student’s written output  
- Allows learners to notice their errors and improve their written outputs  
- Offers learners precise and prompt feedback on the accuracy of their language use (performance) | Mohammed (2023)  
                      | Sub-theme                                      | Sample Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Reviewed articles                  |
|                            | Language error correction                     | - Corrects and explains language mistakes (vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and mechanics)  
- Provides customized recommendations | Barrot (2023)  
                      | Sub-theme                                      | Sample Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Reviewed articles                  |
|                            | Guidance on language, structure, and style of a specific genre | - Provides feedback to scaffold the structural and language aspects of argumentative essays  
- Troubleshoots the writing process, and offers tips to strengthen the dialogic aspect of the argumentative writing  
- Helps learners improve their meta-linguistic knowledge in writing about a particular topic;  
- Can suggest appropriate words or phrases during writing | Perkins (2023)  
                      | Sub-theme                                      | Sample Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Reviewed articles                  |
| Fluency development        | Meaningful language use in varied contexts    | - Provides students with many opportunities for language exposure and practice (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, and writing), irrespective of their location and schedule | Bin-Hady, Al-Kadim Hazaea, & Ali (2023)  
                      | Sub-theme                                      | Sample Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Reviewed articles                  |

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**Notes:**
- Chan & Hu (2023): Explains how ChatGPT can assist students in tasks like outline preparation and proofreading.
- Su, Lin, & Lai (2023): Discusses the role of ChatGPT in creating presentation notes and converting scripts.
- Bonner, Lege, & Frazier (2023): Highlights ChatGPT’s ability to break a text into core components.
- Perkins (2023): Provides insights into ChatGPT’s impact on language error correction and noticing.
- Barrot (2023): Highlights ChatGPT’s role in language error correction and noticing.

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**References:**
The Impact of ChatGPT on English Language Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

As shown in Table 2, ChatGPT can support L2 learning following the four strands framework of Nation (2007). It can provide meaning-focused inputs by generating interesting and easy-to-understand texts, personalized learning resources, and authentic, interactive learning activities. It can also help in the production of meaning-focused language outputs by providing scaffoldings and support throughout the language production process. In addition, it can also facilitate the language-focused learning process by helping learners notice language errors and by providing language error corrections. Lastly, it can facilitate language fluency development by providing meaningful language use in varied contexts, guided language practice, and a friendly space to interact or communicate. While ChatGPT seems to function in alignment with the L2 learning theories and principles, it is important to note that the academic articles reviewed were within the context of higher education. Researchers/authors of the articles were mainly teaching in universities and they reported their personal experiences and results of studies that were conducted within university settings.

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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Sample Findings</th>
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| Lesson planning               | Lesson planner                  | ▪ Assists in creating lesson plans and designing activities suited to the individual learning needs/styles and proficiency levels of learners  
                                 |                                 | ▪ Helps generate new lesson ideas for a wide range of topics.  
                                 |                                 | ▪ Helps teachers ensure that their lessons are educational, meet learning goals, and are engaging. | Bonner, Lege, & Frazier (2023)  
                                 |                                 |                                             | Mohammed (2023)                  |
| Facilitating learning         | Teaching Assistant or Virtual Tutor | ▪ Can assist teachers in providing personalized learning support and answering questions from students  
                                 |                                 | ▪ Can check grammar errors and provide meanings of difficult words | Chan & Hu (2023)  
                                 |                                 |                                             | Jeon & Lee (2023)               |
Table 3 shows how ChatGPT can support English language teachers in performing their key roles and responsibilities. It can help plan lessons appropriate for a specific type, level, and group of learners. It can also help facilitate the teaching-learning process inside or outside the classroom by acting as a teaching assistant, virtual tutor, or virtual writing tutor. As a teaching assistant or tutor, it can provide an immediate response to a learner’s question, provide personalized feedback, and offer some suggestions on how to improve a certain work. Lastly, it can help the teacher find or develop appropriate teaching materials for specific groups of learners. Evidently, ChatGPT can help teachers save time and effort, hence making their work less burdensome. However, it is important to note that the studies reviewed are within higher education contexts where findings were derived from the experiences and insights of university professors and students.

Table 4. How ChatGPT can facilitate language assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Sample Findings</th>
<th>Reviewed articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Exam development    | Question / prompt generator         | ▪ Can produce testing materials  
▪ Can generate comprehension questions and expansion questions to accompany reading tasks.  
▪ Assists teachers to generate bespoke writing prompts that fit learners’ contexts and proficiency levels | Bonner, Lege, & Frazier (2023)  
Jeon & Lee (2023)  
Khonke, Moorhouse, & Zhou (2023) |
| Marking / Scoring   | Automated scorer                    | ▪ Can be used to provide initial grading of students’ writing  
▪ Can automatically grade students’ written work based on predefined criteria and provide specific comments to support the assigned score  
▪ Has a certain level of accuracy and reliability and can provide valuable support for human evaluations  
▪ Can be effectively utilized as an automatic essay-scoring tool, potentially revolutionizing methods of writing evaluation and feedback in both research and practice | Barrot (2023)  
Jeon & Lee (2023)  
Mizumoto & Eguchi (2023) |
| Feedback            | Feedback provider                   | ▪ Helps teachers provide more accurate and immediate feedback to the students  
▪ Can provide feedback highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the text and | Barrot (2023)  
Chan & Hu (2023)  
Mohammed (2023) |
Table 4 shows how ChatGPT can support the language assessment process. It can assist in developing summative and formative assessment tools by generating different types of questions, prompts, or tasks. It can also help in scoring or marking essays, which teachers usually find laborious and time-consuming. By using pre-defined criteria, ChatGPT can efficiently grade essays with a certain level of accuracy and reliability. This was particularly found in the study by Mizumoto & Eguchi (2023). Lastly, ChatGPT can also help teachers in providing immediate feedback on written work. Using pre-defined criteria, it can provide feedback on different aspects of writing (e.g., richness and relevance of the content, clarity, depth, focus, language, organization, etc.). The samples of assessments involved in the reviewed academic articles were high-stakes English tests and classroom-based summative tests (essays) for college/university students. Evidently, ChatGPT can be a great help for teachers in designing and marking exams.

**RQ2: What are the issues associated with ChatGPT in terms of language teaching, learning, and assessment?**

Table 5. Issues associated with the use of ChatGPT in language teaching, learning, and assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sample Findings</th>
<th>Reviewed articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inaccurate responses</td>
<td>▪ Gives a very impressive-sounding answer that’s just dead wrong</td>
<td>Barrot (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Guesses the meaning of users’ ambiguous expressions rather than asking for clarification</td>
<td>Chan &amp; Hu (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Produces plausible-sounding but incorrect or nonsensical content or generates fake or misleading responses</td>
<td>Khonke, Moorhouse, &amp; Zhou (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Hallucinates and provides wrong or misleading information.</td>
<td>Mohammed (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Produces a list of references that are inaccurate or non-existent</td>
<td>Su, Lin, &amp; Lai (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic dishonesty and Plagiarism</td>
<td>▪ Can be used as a cheating tool as it can generate original content that may not be detected by online plagiarism checkers</td>
<td>Barrot (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Does not provide any sources or citations; its responses are not entirely original but paraphrases of sources that have not been appropriately cited</td>
<td>Chan &amp; Hu (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Can identify most surface-level errors but cannot detect writing errors related to deep structures and pragmatics</td>
<td>Khonke, Moorhouse, &amp; Zhou (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Lacks expertise and nuanced understanding in detecting errors related to the more complex aspects of writing</td>
<td>Mohammed (2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplistic responses</td>
<td>▪ Produces texts that may lack semantic coherence and lexical diversity</td>
<td>Perkins (2023)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Impact of ChatGPT on English Language Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Table 5 shows the issues associated with the use of ChatGPT in language teaching, learning, and assessment. As revealed, the tool may generate responses with information that is inaccurate or non-existent. It has also the capability to facilitate academic dishonesty and plagiarism, as it can generate written outputs without acknowledging the sources of information and can complete writing tasks on behalf of the users (i.e., students and teachers). At times, the AI tool generates information, which is too generic or simplistic, hence, affecting the quality of its responses. In some instances, it generates written outputs that lack complexity in terms of meaning, language, and structure. Since it has the capability to respond to queries in real-time and can generate written outputs in seconds, users tend to over-rely on it to perform their roles and tasks. This over-reliance can lead to skills deterioration among users, especially those skills that are essential in the 21st century (e.g., creative thinking, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills). The tool also carries inherent biases since it is trained on billions of data which may contain different types of biases. Consequently, it may reproduce these biases as part of its responses to queries or prompts. In addition, the tool can also breach users’ data privacy as it can capture and store their data and make them part of its training data. Moreover, the tool also has some technical limitations such as the capacity to serve massive simultaneous users and the ability to check pronunciation and detect AI-generated texts. Lastly, the tool also lacks emotionality, can foster educational inequity, and can threaten teachers’ job security. These issues presented in the articles

| Skills deterioration | Over-reliance on AI may hinder people’s growth, skills, and intellectual development over time. | Chan & Hu (2023)  
Barrot (2023)  
Yan (2023) |
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May lead to a decrease in critical and creative thinking and problem-solving skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The complex process of reading-writing-revision could be simplified to text-generation and post-editing which demands an apparent lower level of language competence and writing skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Inherent biases      | Contains a language that may perpetuate biases and stereotypes                                                 | Khonke, Moorhouse, & Zhou (2023)  
Mohammed (2023) |
|                      | Unwanted biased texts related to violence, sexism, and racism may be generated                                 | Su, Lin, & Lai (2023)                                         |
| Privacy breach       | Collects personal information from messages to improve the system                                              | Chan & Hu (2023)  
Mohammed (2023) |
|                      | Carries potential privacy violations and data protection concerns                                              |                                                               |
| Technical limitations | Hangs and lags when many users are using it at the same time                                                  | Mohammed (2023)                                               |
|                      | Limitations in pronunciation and intonation feedback                                                           |                                                               |
|                      | Limited capabilities when checking for potentially plagiarized texts and adjusting the text to a specific group of audience |                                                               |
| Non-emotionality     | Lack of human connection and personalization                                                                   | Barrot (2023)  
Mohammed (2023) |
|                      | Lack of emotional depth, writing voice and identity                                                             |                                                               |
| Educational inequity | Students who have access to and knowledge of using ChatGPT can have an enormous advantage to outperform their peers who do not have access and knowledge/skill of using it | Yan (2023) |
|                      | Written works generated with the help of ChatGPT can lead to an unfair evaluation                              |                                                               |
| Job threat           | Can replace teachers for some roles                                                                            | Chan & Hu (2023)                                             |
reviewed are based on the experiences and insights of authors/researchers who work in higher education contexts.

Discussion

The findings reveal that ChatGPT can support English language learners in various aspects and stages of their learning process. Based on the results, ChatGPT can generate meaningful language inputs and can facilitate the processing of such inputs. It can also support learners in various stages of producing meaningful language outputs by providing various forms of scaffoldings. Moreover, it can also help L2 learners enhance the quality of their outputs in terms of meaning, language, and structure by providing relevant feedback on the outputs’ contents, organization, and language and grammatical accuracy. Lastly, it can also support L2 learners’ fluency development by providing many opportunities to practice using the language in structured or self-directed ways.

These findings support the claims outlined by UNESCO (2023) in its quick start guide on ChatGPT and artificial intelligence in higher education, stating that the tool can help enhance the teaching-learning process by assuming various roles such as collaboration coach, guide on the side, personal tutor, co-designer, study buddy, motivator, and dynamic assessor. The findings also support earlier claims that ChatGPT has a positive impact on teaching and learning in higher education (Rudolph et al., 2023) by being able to personalize L2 acquisition/learning (Kovačević, 2023) and by being able to increase language learners’ motivation (Ali et al., 2023). Considering its ability to support and transform language learning experiences, learners should be taught/trained how to properly and ethically use the tool to gain optimum benefits.

The findings of the study also indicate that ChatGPT can be useful for teachers. It can help them in various aspects of their job – from designing learning or lesson planning, facilitating learning, instructional materials development, assessing learning, and giving feedback. This is related to the findings of Koraishi (2023) where it was found that ChatGPT is useful in ELT materials development and assessment. It can help teachers develop engaging and contextually relevant resources and give immediate, personalized feedback on learners’ performance. Given all the support the tool can extend to English language teachers as they carry out their various roles and responsibilities in the English language classroom, it is important that the teachers are given proper training on how to leverage the tool to unburden themselves from the many tasks and responsibilities assigned to them.

Lastly, the findings of the study also disclose the key issues related to the use of ChaGPT in English language learning, teaching, and assessment. These include the inaccuracy of its responses, facilitating academic dishonesty and plagiarism, giving very generic responses, allowing skills deterioration among language learners and teachers, proliferating many forms of biases, breaching data privacy of users, technical limitations during peak hours, inability to emotionally connect with the users, facilitating educational inequity, and posing a job security threat to some teachers. These findings support the issues outlined in UNESCO’s (2023) quick start guide on ChatGPT and AI in higher education, such as potential threats to academic integrity, data privacy and security, information accuracy, soft skills development, intellectual property rights, and economic sustainability (UNESCO, 2023). Results of this study also support the findings of Adiguzel, et al.(2023) highlighting the concerns on academic integrity, data privacy and security, accuracy and completeness of information, and cultural biases. These issues are serious and need immediate and long-term solutions. The use of ChatGPT in English language
education is a new reality and a new challenge that needs concerted efforts from different stakeholders in order to optimize its benefits and mitigate its risks to language teachers and learners.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the impact of ChatGPT on English language teaching, learning, and assessment through a rapid review of the literature. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions: 1) How can ChatGPT enhance English language teaching, learning, and assessment? and 2) What are the issues associated with ChatGPT in terms of language teaching, learning, and assessment? Based on the findings of the study, ChatGPT can support and enhance English language learning by providing meaning-focused inputs, assisting language learners in producing meaning-focused outputs, providing feedback on the accuracy of learners’ language outputs, and facilitating fluency development through extensive language practice. Moreover, ChatGPT can also enhance language teaching by assisting teachers in designing bespoke lesson plans, facilitating language learning inside and outside language classrooms, developing customized instructional materials, assessing L2 learning, and giving immediate, individualized feedback. However, despite all the support it can provide to English language teachers and learners, it is surrounded by many issues such as inaccurate responses, academic dishonesty and plagiarism, simplistic responses, skills deterioration, inherent biases, data privacy breaches, technical limitations, non-emotionality, educational inequity, and job security threat.

Given the kinds and amounts of support it gives to English language learners and teachers, it is important that its use is adopted or adapted in various ESL/EFL contexts. Teachers and learners should be properly trained to use the tool judiciously and ethically to gain maximum and sustainable results (Meniado, 2023a; Meniado, 2023b). For example, Generative AI literacy programs should be conducted at the beginning of the school year or semester to orient the students on the proper use of ChatGPT and the risks of misusing/abusing it. Teachers should also be trained on how to properly integrate the tool in various stages of language instruction through a series of hands-on workshops. As generative AI is the currency of today’s ELT landscape, pre-service and in-service teachers should be trained on different AI-inspired curricula, pedagogies, and resources. To address the identified issues related to the use of ChatGPT in language teaching, learning, and assessment, relevant national and institutional policies should be formulated and implemented. The issues identified are serious and can be devastating for the future of humanity. They can impede the growth and proliferation of new knowledge and can hamper progress if humans cannot and will not develop the essential skills needed in the 21st century and beyond. The policies to be formulated should be based on research and should serve as bases for formulating specific guidelines and procedures to guide the behaviors of English language learners and teachers in using the tool. These policies should clearly stipulate whether or not generative AI is allowed, when it is allowed and not allowed, and how it should be used as a tool/aid in language learning, teaching, and assessment. As ChatGPT has become an integral part of human existence, all stakeholders of the educational system should be involved in policymaking.

This study is particularly useful for English language teachers, curriculum developers, education leaders, and policymakers as it gives them a holistic view and insights on how to leverage ChatGPT in transforming the English language education landscape. However, it should be noted that the findings and conclusion of this study might be limited considering the limited number of studies examined. Future systematic reviews should include more studies representing...
different ESL/EFL contexts from different continents or regions to establish a broader picture of the impact of ChatGPT on English language learning, teaching, and assessment.

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Abstract
In Foreign Language Teaching, investigating the multiple variables that intervene in first language use is essential to uncover learning processes and design optimal teaching practices. Past studies have mainly focused on identifying teachers’ reasons for their first language use, while research on learners’ views is scarce. This mixed-method case study aims to provide a comprehensive description of first language use in a foreign language classroom through the examination of its pedagogical functions and the corresponding views held by the teacher and his students. This article adds to the scholarly body of knowledge about the role of first language use in Foreign Language Teaching with the yielding of constructive insights from non-formal education—a non-previously researched context. Specifically, this study was conducted in “Mar Menor” Center of Adult Education (Southern Spain). The main research questions address the quantification of the pedagogical functions of first language use generated by the instructor in certain classes and the comparison of his views with those of his students, concerning L1 use in general teaching and his sessions. Data comprised classroom observations, teacher’s stimulated recalls, students’ diaries and questionnaires addressed to both sets of participants. The results revealed the multifunctional nature of the teacher’s first language use and a fairly degree of alignment between his views and those of his students. This study underscores the importance of fostering learners’ agency. Furthermore, its findings can potentially inform Foreign Language Teaching by deepening the understanding of the myriad of factors and perspectives involved in first language use.

Keywords: Classroom observation, English as a Foreign Language, first language use, non-formal education, students’ views, teacher’s views

Introduction

Probably one of the thorniest issues in the history of Language Learning and Teaching has been whether and to what extent the learning of a new language can benefit from the inclusion of the students’ first language (L1) as a teaching tool (Hall & Cook, 2012; Shin et al., 2020). This controversy is clearly reflected in the allusions to L1 use as “the skeleton in the cupboard” (Prodromou, 2002, p. 6), “the elephant in the room,” or “the gorilla in the room” (Levine, 2014, pages 332 and 346 respectively), with constant pendulum swings for and against. The importance of this topic is immense since it subsumes virtually all the questions of (Instructed) Second Language Acquisition/(I)SLA (Macaro, 2014). These questions converge on the role of attention and consciousness in the process of learning a new language.

As shall be detailed in the literature review below, past research has tried to identify the teachers’ purposes and underlying reasons for using the L1, mostly utilizing self-reported data. The effects of L1 use on the knowledge of a new language have also been studied. Surprisingly, however, research about learners’ perspectives is less abundant, and there are no studies dealing with state-run non-formal education. In this context, instructional management is not regulated by any official laws; thus, teachers have considerable leeway to proceed as desired in their daily classroom praxis. Furthermore, the issuing of official certificates of assessment or performance is often not compulsory. Classes are voluntarily attended by adult learners who want to complement or expand their academic training to enhance their opportunities for work development and promotion. These courses are located within the framework of subsidized life-long learning programs, which are strongly endorsed by worldwide organizations such as UNESCO (2023).

The present article reports a case study aimed to fill the aforementioned research gaps to provide a comprehensive description of L1 use in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Spanish elementary-level teaching group. The findings of this case study will contribute to the scholarly body of knowledge about the role of L1 use in a non-researched context: that of non-formal education. Specifically, this case study can provide valuable insights into the myriad of factors determining how and why the L1 is used, as observed in real classes and the preferences expressed by instructors and students toward this use. Therefore, this research is expected to inform (Foreign) Language Teaching directly and, indirectly, ISLA. Its objectives are threefold: i) to determine the functions for which the (male) teacher resorts to the L1 (shared by himself and his students); ii) to identify this teacher’s perspective on L1 use in general EFL teaching and concerning real examples from his own teaching practice, and so uncover the underlying reasons why he resorted to specific functions, and iii) to compare this instructors’ views with those of his students. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the functions of L1 use enacted by a teacher in an elementary-level adult EFL class within a state-run non-formal education context?
2. How much does the teacher use each L1 function?
3. What similarities and differences are there between this teacher’s and his students’ perspectives about L1 use in general EFL teaching and concerning the L1 functions enacted by this instructor in his classes?

4. Literature Review

This section will be structured in three parts. The first one includes a clarification of the terminology concerning the topic of this study. Secondly, the theoretical framework surrounding the two positions regarding L1 use in the foreign language teaching classroom will be briefly covered. The third subsection will comprise a concise account of the past empirical research on L1 use and the existing research gaps.

A Note on Terminology

In this study, we will indistinguishably refer to “own language” as L1 or “first language,” which is shared by the participants in a language teaching classroom. In contrast, the “new language” to be learned (Hall & Cook, 2012) or the “additional language” (Anderson, 2022) will be variously referred to as “foreign language,” “target language” and L2 (regardless of the status of this additional language, that is, whether it is the students’ second or third foreign language). Concerning L1 use per se, two options have been used lately: the sociolinguistic term “codeswitching” (Macaro, 2001, 2005) and the term “translanguaging,” whose popularity emerged with research on bilingual education policy in the United States, specifically focusing on Hispanic minoritized children (García, 2009). Whereas the analysis of codeswitching is executed from a linguistic perspective, translanguaging “regards the concept of named languages such as English, German, Dutch, etc. as primarily socio-political and highlights the human capacity to transcend the boundaries between named languages in meaning making” (Wei, 2021, p. 167). Moreover, the borders between codeswitching and translanguaging practices in the classroom are blurred (Bonacina et al., 2021). Due to the aforementioned issues, and as was the case in Macaro’s latest publication (Molway et al., 2022), we shall resort to the terms “L1 use” or “first language use” for our study: how and why L1 is used from a pedagogical perspective in a non-formal foreign language education context with an official L1 shared by all the participants.

The Pendulum Swing For and Against First Language Use in Foreign Language Teaching

In the literature, two main stances reflecting the controversy surrounding the debate on L1 use in Foreign Language Teaching can be distinguished. Firstly, the position that supports the monolingual principal or L1 banning, reinvigorated by the Language Teaching field since the nineteenth century (Hall & Cook, 2012; Lee, 2018). This exclusion of the first language by the Direct Method, the Audiolinguual Method, the Total Physical Response Method, the strong version of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-based Language Teaching was premised on the grounds that L1 use interferes with L2 learning, and that language teaching should prepare learners to operate in a similar fashion to native speakers in monolingual environments; therefore,
it should ensure maximum opportunities for L2 exposure and production. The absence of a specific role for L1 use was also promoted with the work of SLA researchers such as Krashen (1981), Long (1996) and Swain (1995), who highlighted the role of input, interaction and output for successful L2 learning (Molway et al., 2022).

The second stance argues that complete and systematic exclusion of the students’ L1 is counterproductive from several theoretical perspectives (Lee, 2018). In psycholinguistic terms, Cook (2016) advocates changing the view of L2 learners from deficient monolinguals to multicompetent learners, a stance also endorsed by the Council of Europe (2001, 2020) with its defence of plurilingualism. Furthermore, some cautious L1 use has been argued to render the L2 input more comprehensible and thus foster intake and L2 learning (Turnbull, 2001). Vygotskian socio-cultural theory also supports the fact of resorting to the learners’ L1 in the L2 teaching classroom. First language is regarded as an ideal cultural tool to mediate cognitively complex thinking and facilitate the process of idea construction (Hall & Cook, 2012). Also, from an ecological angle of language learning and teaching, L1 use represents an example of (pedagogical) scaffolding which can foster learners’ agency by, for example, making them engage in critical language reflection (Van Lier, 2011). Ultimately, sound L1 use may be considered a teaching strategy framed within the principles of Positive Psychology (Jin et al., 2021). It can help students counteract negative emotions generated by the lack of understanding in the L2 and/or the potential lack of efficacy of the target language to build an empathetic atmosphere in the foreign language classroom.

As can be seen, the previously described second stance, adopted in this study, seems to concur with Levine’s (2014) resolution that “the aim of our pedagogy should thus be to optimize L2 use through a principled approach to L1 use” (p. 337).

**Empirical Studies on First Language Use in Language Teaching**

Especially since the 2000s, the specialized literature has witnessed an array of empirical studies which has primarily focused on i) the identification and quantification of the purposes for which teachers use L1, mainly extracted from questionnaires rather than classroom observation data; ii) teachers’ general perspectives about L1 use and its specific purposes in general foreign language teaching (either obtained from interviews or, more frequently, questionnaires), rather than in connection with real cases from their classes; and iii) effects of L1 use on different areas of L2 knowledge. Such research has been conducted in different countries with classes of dissimilar educational stages, students’ age groups and proficiency levels. For reviews, see Neokleous et al. (2022) and Shin et al. (2020).

In a nutshell, past findings from the scarce classroom-based studies available revealed a variety of teachers’ functions underlying their L1 use, with the academic category being the most frequent one, specifically translation, metalinguistic explanation, etc. (e.g., 62% in Jeanjaroonsri, 2022; 73.3% in Moafa, 2023, and 59% in Sali, 2014). The second most frequent category is the classroom management function, related to clarifying task instructions, managing discipline and
administrative issues, etc., followed by the interpersonal function, targeted at establishing a
caring affective atmosphere by praising and encouraging students, etc. Overall, despite the
complex mixture of multiple variables exerting influence on teachers’ L1 use—multilingual or
shared-L1 contexts, teachers’ native or non-native status (the latter being the most
overwhelmingly frequent category), their beliefs and expertise, student teachers vs. in-service
instructors, students’ variables (age, proficiency and motivation), institutional requirements, etc.,
there seems to be a generalized agreement among teachers that the L1 emerges as a “lesser evil”
strategy to aid students’ learning. This pattern especially applies in the case of teaching low-level
proficiency students (e.g., Bruen & Kelly, 2017; De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Izquierdo et al.,
2016; Jeanjaroonsri, 2022; Khelalfa & Kellil, 2023; Millán, 2017; Moafa, 2023; Romli et al.,
2021; Sobkoviak, 2022; Temesgen & Hailu, 2022). The few studies examining learners’
perspectives point to similar views (Kang, 2008; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2020), while some
(higher-level) students favor more L2 exposure and interaction (Macaro & Lee, 2013; Ye, 2023).

Regarding the effects of L1 use on L2 knowledge and learning, most of the previous research
seems to agree on their beneficial or, at least, non-detrimental nature in L2 grammar, vocabulary
and writing (De La Fuente & Goldenberg, 2020; Shabaka-Fernández, 2023).

A careful examination of the previous literature reveals the following research gaps and
methodological omissions:

1) First of all, very few studies have implemented stimulated recalls with teachers to learn
about the reasons underlying concrete real cases of L1 use generated by themselves in
their classes (cf. De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Millán, 2017; Temesgen & Hailu,
2022; Zainil & Arsyad, 2021). Ascertaining teachers’ views on how and why they use
L1 in certain specific instances of their regular class teaching can provide a more
precise account of the role of L1 use in the teaching group studied and a valuable
opportunity to stimulate teachers’ reflective practice.

2) Studies considering learners’ perspectives (Brevik & Rindal, 2020; Brooks-Lewis,
2009; Macaro & Lee, 2013; Wang, 2020) are more scarce than those dealing with
instructors’ views. As Wang (2020) claimed, “Their [learners’] feedback and comments,
personal experiences, as well as their classroom language practices are all
valuable data that can help us re-examine the monolingual myths in language teaching”
(p. 9).

3) Most studies focused on learners’ perspectives have resorted to one-shot
questionnaires and interviews to inquire about their preferences for L1 use. Except for
Brooks-Lewis (2009), who focused on undergraduate students, to our knowledge, no
previous studies have relied on learner diaries as an instrument to obtain more
personalized data from the students and to stimulate their agency in the learning
process.

4) The juxtaposition of teachers’ and students’ perspectives in the same study is unusual
(cf. Jeanjaroonsri, 2022; Kang, 2008; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2020, and Ye, 2023). This
aspect is crucial to fine tune our global understanding of what and why happens in
specific teaching groups, given the local, contextualized nature of classroom
instruction (Tekin & Garton, 2020).

5) To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies that have jointly examined the functions of L1 use—as identified in classroom observation—with the teacher’s and students’ views about L1 use in general foreign language teaching and concerning real cases of L1 functions occurring in their classes. Furthermore, there are no studies which have implemented the method triangulation employed in this study to extract both the teacher’s and students’ views: the teacher’s stimulated recalls, students’ diaries and questionnaires addressed to both sets of participants.

6) And finally, there is no research on state-run non-formal education for foreign languages within the framework of adult life-long learning programs. Surprisingly, this is an underrepresented area in research despite its growing importance worldwide. For instance, in 2016, 41.4% of the European Union’s adult working-age population (25-64 year-old) attended non-formal education modules (European Commission, 2021), while recommendations for supporting and regulating non-formal education in the Arab States are being successfully implemented, examples being Saudi Arabia and Oman (UNESCO, 2020). Thus, our case study intends to fill in the aforementioned research gaps as well as conduct the necessary methodological improvements identified.

Method

In order to answer the three research questions, the authors opted for case study research since it is a form of inquiry in which data are collected from a small number of participants for in-depth observation and analysis. The unit of study was one teaching group consisting of a teacher and his students from an EFL module in a non-formal education context. Additionally, this case study relied on a mixed-method approach, which is premised on the idea that “the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 52).

Participants

This case study took place in “Mar Menor” Center of Adult Education, located in southern Spain. Spanish Centers of Adult Education are usually state-run institutions that offer formal education options (preparation for the attainment of the Certificate of Compulsory Secondary Education and the University Entrance Exam for learners over 25 and 45 years-old), as well as non-formal education alternatives such as courses on Spanish for Immigrants and English as a Foreign Language, computer workshops, etc.

This case study involved a teaching group selected by convenience sampling. Its students attended an elementary EFL yearly module (A2 according to Council of Europe, 2001). The participant teacher was a 38-year-old Spanish male EFL specialist with eleven years of teaching experience in state-run adult education institutions. The student data for this article were collected from the seven students of the group, which comprised five female and two male learners (71.4%
and 28.6% respectively). Their age ranged from 21 to 58 years-old (mean = 39.9; SD = 15), and all of them were Spanish-native speakers. Table One in Appendix A includes their remaining sociodemographic and academic characteristics, as well as their language experience, in correspondence with the answers to a questionnaire administered at the end of the data collection period (see Instruments section).

The textbook selected by the teacher as the course material was *Speak Out Elementary Student’s Book* in its second edition (Eales & Oakes, 2016). This textbook series reflects the weak version of CLT (Howatt, 1984).

**Research Instruments**

Six different data collection instruments were used:

1) Five observation grids from each classroom observation, which also included field notes from each observed class.
2) Five audio recordings of classroom observations and their corresponding transcriptions.
3) Five stimulated recall sessions with the teacher.
4) One teacher’s questionnaire (with closed-ended questions).
5) One students’ questionnaire (with closed-ended questions).
6) Four diaries to be filled in by the students individually.

Method triangulation occurred with instruments one and two, which helped to obtain more accurate detection and quantification of the L1 functions, while the same type of triangulation generated by the remaining quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments allowed for a richer comparison between the teacher’s and his students’ views about L1 use. Likewise, findings from the teacher’s stimulated recall sessions and his questionnaire potentially helped to cross-validate the functions for which he used the L1 as identified in the classroom observations. Thus, dependability was hopefully enhanced. Further measures adopted to increase the trustworthiness of the qualitative data (Riazi, 2017) regarding dependability and credibility will be indicated in the remaining text of this Method section when appropriate. As for transferability, the authors have tried to describe all the data in a way as detailed as possible in the present text.

**Classroom Observation Audio recordings, Grids and Field Notes**

The second researcher observed and recorded five complete instructional sessions during two weeks in the second term of the module. Such sessions covered Unit 7 in *Speak Out Elementary* (2016), whose topic was holidays. The total time of these five classes was 457 minutes, with a mean duration of 91.4 (min.-max.: 81-98; SD = 6.9).

To foster credibility, every effort was made to mitigate the phenomenon of the “observer’s paradox” (Labov, 1972, as cited in Mackey & Gass, 2012). This accounts for the selection of audio recording instead of video recording due to the former’s allegedly less obtrusive nature.

There was a preliminary class observation grid adapted from previous studies (e.g., De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Sali, 2014, etc.). It consisted of macrofunctions which included microfunctions. The reader is referred to Table Two in Appendix B for the list of the final macro-
and micro-functions identified. For each microfunction, an original L1 or L1-L2 example followed by its complete rendering into English is included. The L1 Spanish segments appear in italics to differentiate them from the L2 ones.

Teacher’s and Students’ Questionnaires
The students and their teacher were asked to complete a successfully piloted questionnaire. These questionnaires were devised based on the data from the classroom observations and the teacher’s stimulated recalls to render them as relevant as possible to the two sets of participants.

Both questionnaires coincided in their structure. The first section introduced the general topic of the questionnaire to the participants and provided reassurance on the anonymous nature of their responses. The second section inquired about their sociodemographic and academic characteristics (see Table One in Appendix A). The third part included the same close-ended items for both sets of participants. Such items tapped into their perspectives on the functions of L1 use enacted by the teacher during his in-class interaction with the students, in a 4-point Likert scale (where 1 = totally useless, 2 = not very useful, 3 = useful, and 4 = totally useful).

Teacher’s Stimulated Recalls
Five stimulated recall sessions were implemented corresponding to the five observed audio-recorded classes. Following the transcription of the L1 episodes in each class, the researchers selected the most frequent and representative microfunctions within each macrofunction. The second author conducted the stimulated recall interviews, all of which were audio-recorded, with consent, for a more accurate analysis. The duration of the stimulated recall sessions ranged from 25 to 46 minutes (M = 33.4 minutes, SD = 8.1). See Appendix C for a sample of the oral instructions (translated from the original Spanish).

Students’ Diaries
The authors considered diaries (also referred to as “journals” or as one type of journal; Rose et al., 2019) to be an ideal research instrument to tap into students’ opinions on L1 use, given that diaries not only allow learners to reflect autonomously, but also more profoundly and more freely than with other instruments such as questionnaires or in-person interviews.

Four diary entries that covered the five sessions were assigned to be optionally completed by the students. Seventeen diaries (all hand-written) were returned: five for the first diary entry and four for each of the second, third and fourth diary entries. The total word count of this corpus is 2,205. The language of the writing guides was Spanish except in those instances which reproduced the teachers’ use of L2 English. Similarly to the teacher’s stimulated recalls, the students were allowed to write in Spanish to facilitate the report of their reflection. See Appendix D for an example of the writing guide of a diary entry (translated from the original Spanish into English).
Research Procedures

This section describes the two following aspects: the structure of the different stages involved in the implementation of the case study and the procedure for data analysis of each research instrument.

Structure of the Stages Involved in the Case Study

The data collection process spread over three weeks, as can be seen in Table Three (Appendix E). Before the first day, permission to conduct the study had been obtained from the Head of the Center and consent to participate had been affirmed by the teacher once informed about its basic purpose and procedures. The second researcher guaranteed both the Head and the instructor the anonymous treatment of all the data collected and the security measures adopted for their preservation. On Day 1, the same information was conveyed to the students. They were also notified that their behaviour during the classes as well as their anonymous diaries and questionnaires were not to be assessed in any way. Also, they were reassured that their completion of the last two instruments was optional.

As can also be observed in Table Three (Appendix E), each stimulated recall interview took place 48 hours after its corresponding instructional session, which is the maximum threshold recommended by Bloom (1954) to ensure the reliability/dependability of the data (as cited in Gass & Mackey, 2016). Regarding the diaries, there was a period of seven to eight days between the observed session and the corresponding assignment of the diary, which could have arguably augmented the learners’ memory decay (Rose et al., 2019). However, prompted by their experience in previous classroom research, the authors prioritized not overwhelming the students with too many tasks from the very onset of the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Concerning data from the classroom observation, as a first step, the lessons were transcribed following Analysis of Discourse (Long, 2015). Secondly, the procedure to identify the oral stretches by the teacher that included L1 episodes relied on whether such stretches reflected a single thematic thread or not. Thirdly, to identify the underlying functions of the L1 episodes, both researchers engaged in a preliminary joint round of deductive and inductive thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017) to unify codifying criteria. Similarly to Tekin and Garton (2020), the researchers noted the difficulty of assigning some L1 episodes to a single microfunction due to the multifunctional nature of L1 use. They decided to select the primary function and to count each L1 episode only once. Fourthly, after this joint round of preliminary analysis, an inter-rater reliability process was conducted in an attempt to cater for confirmability (Riazi, 2017). Twenty percent of the sample of L1 episodes was randomly selected, and each researcher analyzed it independently. The Kappa value was 0.924 (95% CI: 0.913-0.932). The remaining 80% was divided into two halves, and each author was randomly assigned one half for analysis. Finally,
descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) was applied to obtain the total number of microfunctions in each macrofunction.

As for the teacher’s stimulated recalls, their content was transcribed verbatim. These texts and those generated from the students’ diaries were analyzed inductively by both researchers through various recurrent readings to find similar or different patterns. The fact that the stimuli provided in the stimulated recalls and the diaries were neatly framed within specific macrofunctions helped focus the analysis and identify patterns more precisely.

For the analysis of the data from the close-ended items of the teacher’s and students’ questionnaires, descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) was computed. All the statistical analyses in this study were performed with IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 27 (IBM Corp., Armonk, N.Y., USA).

**Results**

In this section, the results for each data collection research instrument will be reported separately.

**Classroom Observation**

Table Four in Appendix F shows the results of the frequencies and percentages of the three macrofunctions and their microfunctions in descending order of values. As can be seen, the academic macrofunction was the most frequently used one, followed by the procedural and rapport-building macrofunctions. The frequencies of the microfunctions are also detailed in Table Four.

**Questionnaires**

For all the close-ended items which tapped into the participants’ views about the usefulness of the L1 microfunctions, the teacher selected the “totally useful” option only. The students’ views were more varied than their teacher’s, but the general pattern is that they regarded their teacher’s use of L1 Spanish as useful. Table Five in Appendix G includes the results of the students’ answers. Given the concentration of responses in the same levels, the results were grouped in two sets: answers from levels 1 + 2 and 3 + 4.

**Teacher’s Stimulated Recalls**

The teacher’s stimulated recalls provided rich insights into the varied reasons for the multifunctionality of his L1 use. Likewise, they confirmed the high degree of usefulness he assigned to L1 functions in his answers to the questionnaire. See Table 2 in Appendix B for the original L1 or L1-L2 wording of the examples included in the following account, where the translated L1 Spanish segments appear in italics.

Concerning the academic macrofunction, the teacher often cited the need to use L1 Spanish to ensure his students’ comprehension of the L2—a strategy that was followed many times by a comprehension-checker particle such as “right?” or “OK?” This agrees with the highest frequency of this macrofunction in the classroom observation data. For instance, in one case after his students had read a text silently, he told them:
Teacher: “Well, we already know two things from the text. That, according to him, that is the most fabulous route in the world, huh? ‘The greatest.’ ‘The greatest.’ And second, that it crosses seven different countries, right?”

The teacher commented at the corresponding stimulated recall session that he had resorted to the L1 “to check if the students had really understood the text well. If I had said it in English, they would not have self-corrected their understanding of the text after a first individual reading and an activity.” The teacher also acknowledged that “perhaps if these students had had a higher level of English, I would have expressed myself in English at this moment.” Certainly, the students’ low level is a factor that accounted for his L1 use in many microfunctions. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, in the debriefing phase at the end of the data collection, he insisted to the second researcher that he conceived his use of the L1 as “a last resort,” and that he only applied it when he perceived that the students had not managed to understand something in the L2.

In addition to the aforementioned reason, the instructor’s judgment of the complexity of the content being dealt with, as derived from his previous teaching experience, justified his use of the L1 to explain language forms; for example, when he presented and translated vocabulary:

Teacher: “OK, rows? Do you know what a row is? It’s like ‘filas’ [Spanish word for rows], like columns in this case.”

The teacher valued the efficiency and saving-time bonus of using the L1, as he explained concerning the previous example: “There was no possibility of saying the same thing in English without having to resort to a time-consuming and complex explanation for them.”

Such a saving-time advantage was not usually planned in advance. The teacher acknowledged the usual spontaneous nature of his decision-making process to use the L1, which was guided by his assessment of the student’s needs on the spot, as can be seen in the following classroom extract related to the procedural microfunction of giving task instructions. The teacher informed the second researcher that he had perceived from his student’s faces that they had not correctly understood what they had to do. Therefore, he quickly decided to opt for an L1 explanation:

Teacher: “And this says, ‘Read the introduction to the article about the ‘Silk Route Tour’ and answer the questions.’ What is it telling us to read, to read what?”

Conversely, the instructor consciously used his L1 due to an a priori decision in the procedural microfunctions of informing about administrative issues and structuring the lessons. For instance:

Teacher: “Have you all signed, please?”

The teacher indicated that he always conveyed attendance checks in Spanish, as “I don’t consider it to be part of the English class itself” and “they [the students] were already collecting their things to leave the classroom, and it made sense to use Spanish at that moment.” Likewise, the instructor was convinced of the benefits of using the L1 to structure the lessons for the sake of clarity.

Finally, the teacher was definitively aware of the need to make his students feel comfortable in a non-threatening atmosphere. Besides treating his students with respect, he sometimes opted to include humor in the L1:

Teacher: “I have sometimes thought about it, about participating, right? And thinking of people to participate with. It’s funny, a teacher and his student, OK? The student practices the English that the teacher has explained to him, right? In Pekín Express,
the teacher leaves him abandoned to his fate [students laugh], so he is forced to find his way.”

This example reflects the teacher’s eagerness to connect his students’ interests and background knowledge with the learning of English, as well as to persuade them about the real-world, practical facet of this process. He did so in this case by referring to a famous TV contest in Spain.

Students’ Diaries

Overall, the students’ reflections confirmed their answers to the questionnaire. Also, they supplied very insightful data about these perceptions, as will be illustrated next with several literal fragments translated into English from the original Spanish.

The students largely supported the use of L1 Spanish for many academic microfunctions (mainly concerning explanations, feedback and cross-linguistic analyses). Most of them appreciated the value of L1 use to reduce the difficulties imposed by their limited level of proficiency; for example:

“Regarding the use of Spanish as a supporting complement to English in grammar explanations, I think it is appropriate for this purpose, especially when dealing with low-level students like us” (Student 4).

The importance of L1 use in some academic microfunctions is such that it was indirectly claimed as a strategy to counteract dropout rates:

“From my point of view, a Spanish grammar explanation is always positive. In fact, many students drop out from English lessons because they can’t understand the contents in English” (Student 3).

Some students, echoing their teacher, welcomed the time-saving consequence of his resort to the L1 for explanatory purposes:

“In the specific case of the comparative and superlative, I appreciate that the teacher explains that in Spanish since, if he did it in English, it would be more complicated for us at this level, and it would take us much more class time” (Student 6).

The same benefit was mentioned by the students for the feedback academic microfunction:

“When the teacher solves a student’s doubt by using some Spanish, this involves saving class time that can be dedicated to other activities, and the class can continue its course. It also helps us to learn more effectively from our mistakes” (Student 3).

Another student creatively summarized the value of L1 use for academic purposes from a learner’s perspective:

“I hope there comes a moment when we can understand full explanations in English; for the meantime, I believe Spanish is a useful crutch that helps us in our language learning process” (Student 2).

The students did not refer to any procedural microfunction except for the usefulness of L1 to clarify task instructions. They did write at length about the rapport-building macrofunction, which they strongly supported, to the extent that it was regarded as another crucial variable to contribute to solving the dropout phenomenon (similarly to the academic microfunction of presenting/explaining grammar, as indicated before).

“Humor is always useful in class. It can be used to relieve mental stress from the language learning effort, and the student can also see that there is no hostility from the teacher to the students. In this sense, it is helpful as a teaching tool, to alleviate or solve
the psychological shock which causes such high dropout rates in some English courses” (Student 1).

Discussion

The first and second research questions respectively concerned the identification and quantification of the functions of the teacher’s L1 use. From a broad perspective, our findings contribute to the existing literature on the functions of L1 use in Foreign Language Teaching in general and in Spanish classrooms; from a narrower angle, our findings are also significant since, to the best of our knowledge, this issue had not been studied in the increasingly frequent context of non-formal education.

It should be considered that the critical comparison of the results of the quantification of L1 use unveiled in this study with those of the past literature becomes a daunting task. The reason is due to the multitude of specific L1 functions detailed above and the differences with prior studies concerning crucial methodological aspects such as students’ age and proficiency level, variations in the terminology of the L1 macro- and micro-functions and, especially, the usual absence of quantification of L1 functions (e.g., Millán, 2017; Sobkowiak, 2022; Temesgen & Hailu, 2022; Ye, 2023; Zainil & Arsyad, 2021). Owing to the latter aspect, only those studies that quantified the frequencies of the L1 functions detected in classroom observation will be referred to to discuss the second research question.

Overall, the general tendency that appears to transpire from the results of the first and second research questions when compared with those of past studies is that the variables of “non-formal context” and “students’ level” do not seem to entail dramatic or clear-cut discriminant differences in most of the macro- and micro-functions identified.

Specifically, the three macrofunctions detected underlie academic, procedural and rapport-building purposes (Brevik & Rindal, 2020; Sali, 2014; Sobkoviak, 2022; Temesgen & Hailu, 2022, which focused on secondary-school classes in Norway, Turkey, Poland and Ethiopia respectively; cf. Romli et al., 2021, centered on Malay secondary education). Also in congruence with past studies, the academic macrofunction was ranked first. The higher frequency of the academic microfunction in this study (ensuring L2 comprehension) was idiosyncratic in comparison with previous studies, where this microfunction either overlapped with elicitation (Sali, 2014) or it was exclusively focused on texts (Romli et al., 2021), but it did not appear in isolation. Future research dealing with different linguistic levels in non-formal education could examine the extent to which this microfunction is distinctive or not in such a context. The presentation and explanation of grammar and vocabulary, which were the third and fourth most frequent academic microfunctions in the present case study, are largely concurrent with the previous literature regardless of students’ educational level; for example, in university settings (Moafa, 2023) and secondary education (Brevik & Rindal, 2020, who included translation in “scaffolding” as separated from “metalinguistic explanation;” Izquierdo et al. 2016; Romli et al., 2021; Sali, 2014). Despite its scarce presence (the lowest one in this study), the academic microfunction “discussion of cultural topics” stands out as an original finding in our data since cultural issues are not distinctively present in the previous literature (cf. “drawing upon shared cultural expressions” in Sali, 2014, which was ranked the tenth most frequent microfunction). Given the attested benefits of plurilingualism, pluriculturalism and intercultural competence in speeding up linguistic and cultural learning (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020), it is surprising that L1 use remains either absent or scant in classroom observation research. Perhaps in this study, however, the limited proficiency of the
students influenced the teacher’s attitude towards the cultural sphere, which became superseded by the purely linguistic dimension (e.g., in the description of cities and tours, giving directions in the street, etc.).

Regarding the procedural macrofunction, the results of this case study largely resemble the previous literature concerning the fact that the delivery of task instructions in the L1 was the most frequent microfunction in this category, ensuring clarity (in parallel with the secondary-school classes in Brevik & Rindal, 2020 and Sali, 2014, as well as with the undergraduate classes in De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Jeanjaroonsri, 2022 and Moafa, 2023). Conversely, structuring the lesson, the second most frequent procedural microfunction in this case study, is hardly mentioned in past research as an explicit individual microfunction. The specific context of this case study (non-formal education) can arguably be accounted for as an explanatory variable for this dissimilarity with previous studies. Future research could help to confirm or nuance this finding. Finally, both categories of using humor and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere were more abundant than some microfunctions from the other macrofunctions, similar to Jeanjaroonsri (2022) and Sali (2014). Thus, this result seems to point to the importance of the social/affective sphere as one important motive for L1 use in a class of non-advanced learners, regardless of their age. However, in the secondary-school classes observed by Brevik and Rindal (2020), the empathy/solidarity function was scarce (2%). Future research could aim to determine the specific significance of the rapport-building macrofunction in low-level classes across various contexts.

The results of the third research question revealed an interesting general coincidence between the instructor’s views and those of his students in the items of the questionnaire, the teacher’s stimulated recalls and the students’ diaries. While this pattern seems to be in line with past studies focused on low-level students (Brooks & Lee, 2009; Bruen & Kelly, 2017; Macaro & Lee, 2013; Ye, 2023), the main contribution of this study regarding the previous literature is not only rooted in the innovation of the context being researched (non-formal education), but also in the method triangulation following its mixed-method approach, as will be discussed next.

The teacher and his students considered that L1 use helped to uncover similarities and differences between the L1 and the L2, to facilitate speed and efficiency in the comprehension of grammar and vocabulary, as well as to create a stress-free and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. More specifically, the teacher fully agreed with all the L1 functions indicated in the questionnaire. In general, though less homogenous, his students’ responses were fairly similar to their teacher’s except for the procedural microfunction of administrative information, which they did not consider very useful (contrary to Kang’s [2008] young learners and Macaro and Lee’s [2013] young and older learners, both studies set in South Korea). The method triangulation implemented allowed for a plausible explanation: as the teacher admitted in the stimulated recalls, he did not ascribe such moments to “proper” learning time, which might have been perceived by his students (either consciously or unconsciously). The importance of resorting to the L1 in low-level proficiency students was corroborated by the teacher and his students. The former’s view, manifested in the stimulated recalls, revealed the “unavoidable” nature of L1 use in this respect, a judgment widely attested in the previous literature with instructors teaching learners of different ages and educational levels (Bruen & Kelly, 2017; Jeanjaroonsri, 2022; Khelalfa & Kellil, 2023; Moafa, 2023; Romli et al., 2021; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2020; etc.). As revealed in their diaries, the students of this case study agreed with the teacher’s favorable view regarding the academic functions (similar to Kang’s [2008] and Macaro and Lee’s [2013] elementary-school learners, Ye’s [2023] secondary-school learners and Brooks-Lewis’ [2009] undergraduate students). Both sets of
participants also appreciated the practical advantage of L1 use as a saving-time strategy. Arguably, the student’s profile in this research–workers with hardly any time to attend classes and study, usually with no previous academic training–accounts for this novel finding in contrast with previous empirical literature. The students’ profile likely led to another new advantage of L1 use in this study: the potential prevention of dropouts, as mentioned in some diaries.

The significance of the L1 rapport-building macrofunction for an optimal development of foreign language classes was supported by the instructor and his students. The former praised the value of L1 use for the insertion of humorous comments and for showing empathy to his students, an opinion which coincides with other teachers’ views in different educational levels (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Jeanjaroonsri, 2022; Sali, 2014; Sobkowiak, 2022, etc.). All the students’ diaries reflected an enthusiastic endorsement of the rapport-building macrofunction, in agreement with Brooks-Lewis (2009), Jeanjaroonsri (2022), Wang (2020) and Ye (2023).

A relevant differentiating finding of this case study is that the teacher did not allege several variables which have been reported to influence instructors’ L1 behavior in other studies (Millán, 2017; Neokleous et al., 2022; Shin et al., 2020): teacher training, native or non-native status, external sources such as institution type, colleagues, teacher associations or specialized literature in L2 acquisition. He did not allude to the textbook as a defining aspect of his teaching practice either (cf. Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Bruen & Kelly, 2017), which could arguably be considered an indirect sign of a non-subservient attitude towards it. Certainly, the overwhelmingly prevalent element that guided this teacher’s varied and multifunctional use of the L1 was his students’ needs (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Kang, 2008; Sali, 2014; cf. Tsagari & Giannikas, 2020), coupled with his teaching experience, which points to the crucial importance of immediate or direct classroom context-mediated factors (Tekin & Garton, 2020).

Interestingly, this teacher openly acknowledged the benefits of the L1 functions he drew upon in spontaneous (Sobkowiak, 2022) and in less frequent, specific, planned instances (related to the procedural microfunctions of administrative information and lesson structuring). Perhaps his desire to comply with his students’ needs was rooted in his guilt-free attitude toward using the L1, contrary to a relatively widespread tendency in the literature (e.g., Tsagari & Giannikas, 2020).

A fascinating finding of this case study is that the instructor’s positive or non-guilt motives and perspectives on L1 use seem to be supported by an array of different theories, which evidences the richness of his stance. From a cognitive perspective, the teacher potentially attempted to mitigate the limitations of his students’ working memory (Bruen & Kelly, 2017; Macaro, 2005) with his use of the L1 to ensure L2 comprehension and facilitate or accelerate the learning of complex aspects of grammar, vocabulary and phonetics. Indeed, L1 use seemed to stand as a productive strategy to alleviate the cognitive load imposed mainly by the students’ low proficiency level, a factor highlighted by the students in their diaries. Within an ecological and sociocultural perspective of language teaching and learning (Van Lier, 2011), the use of L1 for academic purposes, as well as for clarifying task instructions and structuring the lesson, can be regarded as an example of “pedagogical scaffolding.” Indeed, the teacher’s skillful L1 use generated potential affordances (or learning opportunities), which the students seemed to recognize and exploit as revealed in their diaries. Moreover, as Jin et al. (2021) asserted, students with a self-perceived low proficiency level are usually more anxious, which may lead to negative emotions and deprived learning. The L1 rapport-building microfunctions appeared to contribute to nurturing beneficial emotions, which allegedly supported students’ learning, as also reflected in their diaries. Therefore, the teacher’s L1 humorous comments and his conveyance of empathy...
and solidarity in cases of lack of understanding of content went in line with Positive Psychology (Jin et al., 2021).

Overall, the teacher’s attitude aligned with Macaro’s (2001) “optimal position.” Indeed, his reflections evidenced appreciation for the beneficial consequences of L1 use, mainly due to his students’ non-advanced or emerging proficiency level. However, following a generalized pattern of the previous literature (Bruen & Kelly, 2017; Moafa, 2023; Neokleous et al., 2022; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2020), in the debriefing phase, the teacher also explicitly admitted that he used the L1 as “a last resort,” which arguably underlies his ultimate belief in the need to provide learners with quality L2 exposure and opportunities for interaction as much as possible. In this respect, all the students’ voiced opinions in their diaries reflected their approval of explicit learning (explanations, feedback, cross-linguistic analyses, etc.), which does not correspond to the monolingual stance. Also, as previously mentioned, the students extremely valued the role of the L1 in the affective dimension of learning. In other words, their views supported a learner-centered approach, which is in line with their teacher’s stance. Importantly, therefore, the diaries emerged as a potentially valuable tool to allow students to exercise their agency and actively engage in language learning (in a comparable way to Brooks-Lewis, 2009).

Finally, two important limitations should be acknowledged in this case study. First, its small sample prevents the generalization of findings to other situations. Second, some memory decay and derived omission of relevant data in the diaries cannot be precluded due to the time span of seven to eight days from the observed sessions to the assignment of students’ diaries (a methodological decision consciously undertaken by the authors out of their past classroom-research experience). Nevertheless, the analysis of the students’ diaries did not reveal any visible trace of a negative influence exerted by such a time span. Despite the previous limitations, the authors believe that this small-scale study has contributed to expanding scholarly knowledge from empirical and methodological angles. The results of this mixed-method case study are significant as they provide valuable insights about how much and why the L1 is used in non-formal foreign language education (a context not studied before in this respect), together with the classroom participants’ perspectives on this instructional tool. Furthermore, the triangulation generated from the different methods (classroom observation, questionnaires with close-ended items addressed to both sets of participants, the teacher’s stimulated recalls and students’ diaries) has also aided in enriching our understanding of the myriad of factors and perspectives involved in such a complex issue as is L1 use in the foreign language classroom.

Conclusion

This mixed-method case study aimed to provide a comprehensive description of L1 use in a Spanish EFL classroom located in the non-previously researched context of state-run adult non-formal education, both concerning the in-class functions as well as the teacher’s and students’ perceived degree of usefulness ascribed to L1 use. The three main macrofunctions identified in the classroom observations—academic, procedural and rapport-building—confirmed the essentially scaffolding nature of L1 use. Ensuring L2 comprehension and structuring the lesson emerged as distinctive innovative microfunctions compared with the previous literature. Also, the teacher’s and his students’ views were fairly comparable as both sets of participants positively assessed L1 use in general EFL teaching as well as most L1 microfunctions emerging in each macrofunction (as reflected in the teacher’s stimulated recalls, the students’ diaries and the questionnaires completed by both sets of participants). The students’ profile likely led to another novel advantage
of L1 use in this study: the potential prevention of dropouts, as mentioned in some diaries. Ultimately, the affordances facilitated by the instructor’s skillful and, many times, reactive L1 use seemed to benefit his students’ learning from cognitive and affective perspectives and allow for the establishment of a stress-free, supportive atmosphere.

The practical classroom recommendations resulting from this case study, which should be cautiously approached due to its small sample, are rooted in the consideration of teachers’ on-the-spot reactions to their students’ needs in class. Instructors might use the L1 to provide explanations of form-focused aspects, ensure students’ comprehension, respond to their students’ comments or questions, clarify task instructions, provide feedback, etc. Guiding students in the structure of the development of the lesson might also be useful. Additionally, any L1 instance that helps build a positive teacher-student rapport seems to be an effective strategy to contribute to the overall aim of facilitating students’ learning.

Methodologically, this study has supported the value of stimulated recalls to tap into teachers’ cognition, with powerful implications for reflective practice and teacher training and development. The relevance of students’ diaries has also been corroborated—as a research tool to obtain insightful learner data and as a productive way of exercising students’ agency. Both aspects point to the value of listening to learners as one plausible strategy to optimize teaching.

Finally, an unsurprisingly expected implication of this case study is the impossibility of recommending universal optimal guidelines for L1 use in non-formal (and also formal) educational contexts, especially in terms of quantity. The reason is due to the ecological nature of classrooms (students from different ages, regions, countries, educational levels and contexts, with varied and dynamic motivations, experienced and novice teachers, institutional policies, etc.). Fruitful avenues for further research could be to continue examining L1 use in different non-formal education classes. Thus, a bank of optimal teaching techniques for different L1 purposes extracted from specific local contexts could be devised, subject to constant revision and updating, along with essential information regarding teachers’ and students’ views on such techniques, and their effects on the learners’ attainment of different areas of L2 knowledge. Ideally, as a result, the abstract but useful construct of “judicious” and “principled” L1 use (Macaro, 2005) would turn tangible and informative for both teachers and researchers.

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Exploring First Language Use in Non-Formal Foreign Language Education

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Appendices

Appendix A

**Table 1. Students’ Sociodemographic and Academic Characteristics Plus Language Experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality, n (%)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>5 (71.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuadorian</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic qualifications, n (%)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Education</td>
<td>3 (42.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary Education</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Training</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Familiarization with a different language from the native one, n (%)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4 (57.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3 (42.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Familiarization with additional languages other than native one, n (%)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>2 (75)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix B

**Table 2. Macro- and Micro-Functions of L1 Use Identified in the Classroom Observation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic microfunction</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Presentation/explanation of grammar forms   | Teacher: *Pero si queréis poner a la persona que estáis comparando, tenéis que poner “than” y la otra persona, o el objeto de la comparación. “My sister is taller than me”: no lo confundáis y pongáis “that.” Es un error muy común poner “that”.*  
Teacher: But if you want to mention the person you are comparing, you have to put “than” and the other person or the object of the comparison. “My sister is taller than me”. Please don’t confuse it and don’t put “that.” Putting “that” is a very common mistake. |
T: OK, rows? Do you know what a row is? It’s like “filas” [Spanish word for “row”], like columns in this case.                                      |
Teacher: Fast. We lengthen the “a” a little. Fast. And this one? Where is the stress? On the “o,” slow. After the “l,” slow, that’s what sounds strong. |
| Ensuring L2 comprehension                   | Teacher: *Bueno, que ya sabemos del texto dos cosas. Que, según él, es la ruta más fabulosa del mundo, ¿eh? “The greatest”, “la más grande”. Y, segundo: que atraviesa siete países distintos, right?*  
Teacher: Well, we already know two things from the text. That, according to him, that is the most fabulous route in the world, huh? “The greatest.” “The greatest.” And second, that it crosses seven different countries, right? |
| Activating language background knowledge    | Teacher: *OK, ¿os acordáis de este ejercicio que hicimos el otro día? ¿Los dos personajes estos, que teníamos que compararlos? Bueno, teníamos a Mr. Heavy y Eddy, y hablamos con “tired” o “strong”. Decíamos: “Eddy is stronger than Mr. Heavy”, “Mr. Heavy is more tired than Eddy”, alright?*  
Teacher: OK, do you remember this exercise we did the other day? These two characters that we had to compare? Well, we had Mr. Heavy and Eddy, and we talked about “tired” or “strong.” We said, “Eddy is stronger than Mr. Heavy,” “Mr. Heavy is more tired than Eddy,” alright? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Addressing students’ mistakes | Teacher: The last one says: “you...”  
Student: You can’t miss it.  
Teacher: You can’t miss it. What was the meaning in Spanish?  
Student: *Que no lo pierdas.*  
Teacher: *No tiene pérdida. No tiene pérdida:* you can’t miss it.  
Teacher: The last one says: “you...”  
Student: You can’t miss it.  
Teacher: You can’t miss it. What was the meaning in Spanish?  
Student: Don’t lose it.  
Teacher: You can’t miss it. You can’t miss it. You can’t miss it. |
| Responding to students’ contributions (questions, comments, etc.) | (Regarding the formation of the past simple tense of verbs):  
Student: *¿Siempre se dobla la consonante?*  
Teacher: *Consonante, vocal, consonante; doblamos, sí.* Alright?  
Student: Is the consonant always doubled?  
Teacher: Consonant, vowel, consonant; we double it, yes. Alright? |
| Cross-linguistic analysis | Teacher: Comfortable. Uncomfortable. *Tenemos un caso de un opuesto que se crea con la "un". "Un" es el prefijo negativo. Cómodo, incómodo. La "un" equivale al "in" en español.*  
Teacher: Comfortable. Uncomfortable. We have an opposite case that is created with “un.” “Un” is the negative prefix. Comfortable, uncomfortable. “Un” is equivalent to “in” in Spanish. |
| Transmission of useful language learning strategies | Teacher (full intervention in L1 Spanish): We are going to do the exercise that we have done many times, which is to listen to and underline the syllable that sounds the strongest in each word, because it is an initial step to learning the words. |
| Discussion of cultural topics | Teacher: Did you know? ¿Lo sabías? Los yeclanos dicen que tienen un castillo, pero no es un castillo. Es una iglesia, es un...  
Student: Una ermita.  
Teacher: Es como la Fuensanta, como una basílica. Y lo llaman “castle”: castillo.  
Teacher: Did you know? Did you know it? The people from Yecla say they have a castle, but it is not a castle. It’s a church, it's a...  
Student: A hermitage.  
Teacher: It’s like the Fuensanta monument, like a basilica. And they call it “castle”: castle. |

**PROCEDURAL MACROFUNCTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedural microfunction</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Implementing classroom management | Teacher: Oh, my God, it isn’t working.  
Students: *¿No?*  
Teacher: No.  
Student: *Tienes que encenderle allí, creo.*  
Teacher: *No, no. Hay que darle aquí al enchufe, pero no...* |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Scenario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with administrative issues</td>
<td>Teacher (full intervention in L1 Spanish): Have you all signed, please?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering activity/task instructions</td>
<td>Teacher: And this says, “Read the introduction to the article about the ‘Silk Route Tour’ and answer the questions.” ¿Qué nos está diciendo; que leamos qué?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structuring the lesson</td>
<td>Teacher (all intervention in L1 Spanish): Well, we’re done. Tomorrow, we will correct this, and I’ll play the song for you, huh? Among other things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport building-microfunction</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a supportive class atmosphere</td>
<td>Teacher: Do you understand, ... (student’s name)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student: Hoy estoy espesa...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher: Bueno, no pasa nada. Mira, te lo explico. Tenemos que hacer lo mismo que hemos hecho ahora, ordenando cuáles serían las instrucciones para dar la dirección a este sitio, a Liverpool 1, que ha sido la segunda historia, ¿eh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher: Do you understand, ... (student’s name)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student: Today I feel clumsy...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher: Well, don’t worry. Look, I’ll explain it to you. We have to do the same thing we just did now: to order the instructions to give the address of this place, in Liverpool 1, which was the second story, huh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using humor</td>
<td>Teacher (full intervention in L1 Spanish): I have sometimes thought about it, about participating, right? And thinking of people to participate with. It’s funny, a teacher and his student, OK? The student practices the English that the teacher has explained to him, right? In Pekín Express, the teacher leaves him abandoned to his fate [students laugh], so he is forced to find his way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix C**

**Instructions of Stimulated Recall Interview Addressed to the Teacher**

“We begin with the first “stimulated recall” session of the EFL A2 group. I am now with the teacher of this group, XXX, who has agreed to carry out these “stimulated recall” sessions, which will be recorded to ensure their accurate preservation for later access and analysis.

XXX, the fragments that you are going to hear next were extracted from the first class of this research study. At the end of each fragment, I will stop the recording and ask you about the thoughts you had at that moment about using the L1. Please try to answer with as much detail as possible about what you remember concerning those specific moments. You should not assess whether the use of the L1 at each moment was appropriate or not, or if you should have acted differently. I inform you that you can stop the recording at any time you consider appropriate to make any observation about what you are listening to or to ask me a question. During the presentation of your thoughts, I will write down what I believe is relevant to the object of the study. Do you have any doubts? Are you ready to start?”
Appendix D
Sample of Instructions of Students’ Diaries

Read the following excerpt from the February 24 class. [See Appendix B for the extract of the rapport-building microfunction “using humor”].

The previous excerpt exemplifies the use of humor in class by your teacher, for which he uses Spanish. What is your interpretation of the humorous use of Spanish in each excerpt? Do you remember how you felt in those specific moments in class? Why do you think your teacher uses Spanish in these cases? Do you think that the fact that your teacher uses Spanish for humorous purposes in class makes you feel more relaxed and with greater freedom to express yourself?

Note: There are no right or wrong answers in this activity. The important thing is that you reflect your point of view in as much detail as possible. Thank you in advance for your sincerity, and please let me remind you that this activity is completely anonymous and voluntary.

Appendix E
Table 3. Structure of the Data Collection Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST WEEK</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1. Class session 0.</td>
<td>• Researcher’s introduction to the students about the basic purpose and procedures of the study.   • Collection of signed consent forms from the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2. Class session 1.</td>
<td>Classroom observation and audio recording.   [48 hours afterward: teacher’s stimulated recall related to session 1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3. Class session 2.</td>
<td>Classroom observation and audio recording.   [48 hours afterward: teacher’s stimulated recall related to session 2]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECOND WEEK</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 4. Class session 3.</td>
<td>Classroom observation and audio recording.   [48 hours afterward: teacher’s stimulated recall related to session 3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 5. Class session 4.</td>
<td>Classroom observation and audio recording.   • Explanation and assignment of the diary entry corresponding to session 1.   [48 hours afterward: teacher’s stimulated recall related to session 4]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 6. Class session 5.</td>
<td>Classroom observation and audio recording.   • Collection of the diary entries filled in corresponding to session 1.   • Assignment of the diary entry corresponding to session 2.   [48 hours afterward: teacher’s stimulated recall related to session 5]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THIRD WEEK</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 7. Class session 6.</td>
<td>Collection of the diary entries filled in corresponding to session 2.   • Assignment of the diary entry corresponding to session 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 8. Class session 7.</td>
<td>Collection of the diary entries filled in corresponding to session 3.   • Assignment of the diary entry corresponding to sessions 4 and 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 9. Class session 8.</td>
<td>Collection of the diary entries filled in corresponding to sessions 4 and 5.   • Provision of the link to the students and their teacher for the anonymous questionnaire.   [48 hours afterward: debriefing with the teacher about the findings from his data].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix F

**Table 4. Descriptive Results of the L1 Microfunctions Within Each Macrofunction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macrofunction</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Academic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Ensuring L2 comprehension</td>
<td>416 (73.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Teacher’s responses to students’ questions/comments/contributions in L1</td>
<td>148 (26.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Presentation/explanation of grammar</td>
<td>101 (17.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Explanation/translation of unknown vocabulary</td>
<td>55 (9.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Activating prior knowledge</td>
<td>34 (6.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Addressing students’ mistakes</td>
<td>17 (3.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Cross-linguistic language analysis</td>
<td>31 (5.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Presentation/explanation of pronunciation</td>
<td>15 (2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Transmission of useful language learning strategies</td>
<td>15 (2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Discussion of cultural topics</td>
<td>15 (2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Procedural</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Delivering activity instructions</td>
<td>68 (12.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Structuring the lesson</td>
<td>19 (3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Informing about administrative issues</td>
<td>9 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Implementing classroom management</td>
<td>6 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Rapport building</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Using humor</td>
<td>45 (8.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Creating a supportive class atmosphere</td>
<td>28 (5.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>563 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix G

**Table 5. Results from Students’ Questionnaire: Usefulness of L1 Microfunctions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Totally useless (1) or not very useful (2), n (%)</th>
<th>Useful (3) or totally useful (4), n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACADEMIC MICROFUNCTIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Explaining new vocabulary (e.g., false friends).</td>
<td>7 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Explaining complex grammar points.</td>
<td>7 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Explaining the connections between English and Spanish regarding linguistic elements (grammar, vocab, pronunciation...).</td>
<td>1 (14.3)</td>
<td>6 (85.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Ensuring L2 comprehension of language forms, texts, etc.</td>
<td>3 (42.9)</td>
<td>4 (57.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Correcting and explaining students’ errors.</td>
<td>7 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Providing students with feedback about their in-class contributions.</td>
<td>7 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Reminding students of previously studied linguistic elements (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.).</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
<td>5 (71.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Discussing cultural elements.</td>
<td>1 (14.3)</td>
<td>6 (85.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROCEDURAL MICROFUNCTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i) Making recommendations on how to learn more effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) Giving task instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Structuring the lesson (opening and closing it, managing transitions from one activity to another).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) Informing students about administrative issues of the module (e.g., attendance registers, exam dates, general announcements, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) Informing students about classroom management issues (e.g., calling students’ attention, assigning homework, etc.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAPPORT-BUILDING MICROFUNCTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n) Motivating students by telling jokes, anecdotes, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o) Helping students feel more at ease when learning English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shyness and Willingness to Communicate: Levels, Correlations, and Perspectives of Saudi EFL Learners

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Abstract
A primary effort has been exerted in the literature to examine how influential affective factors are in language learning. The present study extends these attempts and aims at reviewing the levels of shyness and willingness to communicate among EFL learners and the relation between these two affective factors and their impact on communication skills inside the class from the students’ perspectives. It sheds light on the need to consider the effects of these personal traits on students’ learning. 360 Saudi EFL learners at a Saudi public university completed the shyness and willingness to communicate scales. For further analysis, the researchers interviewed 27 students to explore their perceptions of how these two aspects affect their communication skills inside the class. Quantitative data analysis showed that most participants were at the mid-levels of both scales. Furthermore, there was a negative correlation between the participants’ shyness and their overall willingness to communicate and its subcategories, with the highest correlation value between shyness and these subcategories: strangers, meetings, and public speaking. Qualitative analysis exhibited the participants’ perceptions, misconceptions, correlations of the two variables, and determinants of the participants’ levels of shyness and WTC. The findings of this study shed light on the importance of considering these factors for more successful learning/teaching experiences.

Keywords: communication skills, Saudi EFL learners, shyness, willingness to communicate.

Introduction

A zeal for mastery of language structures characterized the middle decades of the last century (Brown, 2007), and scholars devoted greater attention to cognitive factors such as memory and processing at the expense of learners’ characteristics (Martinez, 2001). But more recently, emphasis was given to developing learners’ communicative competence and using the Foreign/Second Language (FL/SL) for successful communication. Hymes (1972), who coined the term communicative competence, argued that developing such competence enables learners to negotiate meanings in different contexts as a significant goal of successful language learning. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) believed that “communication is more than a means of facilitating language learning; it is an important goal in itself” (p.3).

FL/SL learning, with its interactive nature, involves considering numerous factors and their effects on learners. In addition to external factors such as teaching methodology, internal factors play a vital role in the learning process (Brown, 2007). Known as affective, they influence learners’ overall performance and responses to particular tasks and activities (Ellis, 1994). Such variables are considered one of the reasons behind the variations among FL/SL language learners (Bashosh et al., 2013). Accordingly, students can be distinguished by their characteristics reflected in their actions and behaviors (Sun et al., 2020). Learners show differences in their tendencies to communicate using the target language; some are more active in seeking opportunities, while others are primarily silent (Khajavy et al., 2016). Neglecting such differences may result in unsuccessful learning atmospheres (Spark et al., 2018).

Shyness and willingness to communicate (WTC) are two affective factors that can contribute to the understanding of variations among learners in their tendencies to share in the target language. Researchers have studied WTC in diverse settings with different focuses (e.g., Bensalem, 2022; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018; Khajavy et al., 2016; Khajavy et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2022; MacIntyre & Wang, 2021). Similarly, shyness has received the attention of researchers in different learning situations (e.g., Babapoor et al., 2018; Kong et al., 2023; Oflaz, 2019; Sadeghi & Soleimani, 2016). The relationship between shyness and WTC has also attracted researchers’ attention in various learning settings (Bashosh et al., 2013; Lan et al., 2021; McCroskey & Richmond, 1982; Mohammadian, 2013; Rebecca Chu, 2008).

Despite the extensive body of research on shyness and WTC, the relation between these two particular constructs in the Saudi context was not sufficiently examined in the literature. To the researchers’ best knowledge, no studies explored the relation between shyness and WTC and their effects on communication skills inside the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university class. To fill this gap, this study examines the levels of shyness and WTC among Saudi EFL learners and the relation between these affective factors. The study also focuses on investigating the effects of these factors on communication skills inside the class from the student’s perspectives. This study is significant in identifying the impact of these two factors on EFL learning. Because students vary significantly in these personal traits, this study follows the theoretical framework adopted by McCroskey and Richmond (1991), as these features are significantly involved in
communication, psychology, and education. Precisely, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What is the level of shyness among Saudi EFL university learners?
2. What is the level of WTC among Saudi EFL university learners?
3. What is the relation between shyness and WTC among Saudi EFL university learners?
4. What are the effects of shyness and WTC on communication skills inside the class from the learners’ perspectives?

5. **Literature Review**

**Willingness to Communicate**

The concept of WTC in First Language (L1) communication is a personality trait that reflects the stable predisposition to communicate consistently across different communicative situations (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). In an FL context, WTC is “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p 547). MacIntyre (1994) proposed a model that considers the relations among individual difference variables such as communication apprehension and shyness and their contribution to WTC.

Nevertheless, many other variables can affect the individual’s level of WTC, such as the relation between communicators and the topic under discussion. Perhaps the most dramatic one is the language used in communication because, compared to the L1, there is a greater variety in communicative competence in the L2. This led to proposing the pyramid model that considers the effects of linguistic, communicative, and contextual factors on L2 WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Because of the different communication opportunities in the target language and the competencies that learners should possess in such situations, FL/SL WTC was seen as more variable than L1 WTC (Khajavy et al., 2018).

The concept of L2 WTC has always been an affluent area of investigation that researchers have dealt with from different angles (Altunel, 2021; Bahremand & Saeid, 2023; Başöz & Erten, 2018; Chojimah & Widodo, 2023; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Karbakhsh & Ahmadi Safa, 2020; Lee & Lu, 2023; Reinders & Wattana, 2014; Shahisavandi, 2023; Turjoman, 2016). Pawlak et al. (2016) believed in the importance of creating communicative classroom environments through a deeper understanding of the factors underlying L2 learners’ willingness and hesitancy to communicate, which in turn contributes to better linguistic achievements. They found that learners were more willing to speak in pairs or groups with familiar receivers than strangers to discuss their experience-related topics. Examining the within-person variability of WTC, Zhang et al. (2022) found a systematic variation in WTC among EFL learners affected by the psychological properties of learning settings, such as teacher support and level of task importance. Students with higher levels of WTC resulting from task interest accomplished higher scores at the end of the semester.

MacIntyre and Wang (2021) examined the impact of ESL learners’ prior experiences on levels of WTC. Learners’ tendency to communicate was affected by psychological and contextual
factors, some of which were immediate, such as their desire to speak and confidence, while others were distal, such as previous learning experience and communicative competence. In addition to perceived competencies, past, present, and future emotions shaped variations of levels of WTC. Lee et al. (2022) indicated that EFL learners with greater motivation and lower L2 speaking anxiety were more willing to communicate inside the classroom, while those with higher levels of self-confidence and risk-taking were more willing to share outside the classroom. Younger learners with higher levels of self-confidence in English and who engaged more in virtual intercultural experiences had higher levels of WTC in digital settings.

Khajavy et al. (2018) examined the relations between emotions, classroom environment, and WTC in an EFL context. They found that a positive classroom environment can enhance WTC and enjoyment, which in turn reduces anxiety among EFL learners. Turjoman (2016) showed a significant difference in the students’ levels of WTC in English based on their private and public-school education. Language proficiency can also influence WTC among Saudi EFL learners, as indicated by Alqurashi and Althubaiti (2021). They found that the participants were unwilling to communicate due to inadequate linguistic knowledge, a limited lexicon, and fear of making mistakes when speaking English.

Shyness

Numerous researchers have sought to describe shyness, what causes it, and what to do about it. McCroskey and Richmond (1982) clarified that shyness is the product of social anxiety, unimproved social skills, and low self-esteem. Shyness is a sustained attribute associated with tension, inhibition, discomfort when interacting with others, and an inclination to escape the probable feeling of uneasiness and worriedness in social contacts (Tong et al., 2011). The concept of shyness as an affective factor in the field of FL learning has been tackled from different angles (Ahsan et al., 2020; Alavinia & Salmasi, 2012; Brodt & Zimbardo, 1981; Jones et al., 1986; Liu, 2006; Marchand et al., 2023; Mohammadian, 2013; Poole & Schmidt, 2020; Tian, 2022).

In general, shyness is likely to restrict FL achievement. Learners may tend to remain inactive in the classroom because of the fear of making mistakes and being evaluated as non-proficient (Liu, 2006). As a part of his study, Oflaz (2019) investigated the effect of shyness on speaking proficiency and academic achievement of university students learning German as an FL. The findings indicated that shyness would predict nearly 25% of FL learners’ educational attainment. He further asserted that learners’ shyness increases as they reflect higher levels of anxiety to speak in the classroom.

Namaghi et al. (2015), after examining the relationship between EFL students’ shyness and speaking proficiency, attested that there was a moderate negative correlation between them and that scores of students were dependent on their degree of shyness. Since some students get low marks in EFL classes, teachers would wrongly regard them as not competent enough and would not consider probable affective factors such as shyness. These conclusions align with those of another study by Alavinia and Salmasi (2012).
In the same area, Babapoor et al. (2018) conducted a correlational study to explore adult EFL learners’ shyness and the accuracy and fluency of their performance. They concluded that this affective attribute was negatively associated with the fluent and accurate speech. Likewise, Khorambin et al. (2021) inspected the association between shyness and young learners’ language achievement. There was a negative relationship between shyness and language achievement, as non-shy young learners performed better on the placement test than shy young learners. Sadeghi and Soleimani (2016) conducted a study to identify the interplay between learner-affective factors, specifically, shyness and language learning strategies. The results showed that the shyest and the most anxious FL learners use more strategies (e.g., avoidance).

**Shyness and Willingness to Communicate**

Shyness is usually viewed as a constraining factor against making connections, initiating interactions, and participating in communicative situations (Tang & Schmidt, 2017). Thus, it provokes in communicative cases (Zimbardo, 1989). That is, it does not seem to be related to non-social settings. Shyness, hence, would involve communication apprehension and discretion as it is associated with individuals lacking confidence, thereby talking less. Such a personality trait might cause a lack of communication skills (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982).

The impact of shyness on EFL learners’ motivation and WTC was the main objective of Mohammadian’s (2013) research. The findings showed that shyness would mainly influence the participants’ intrinsic motivation. Non-shy learners reported having more inherent motivation than their shy peers, while the latter were less likely to initiate interactions. Similarly, Rebecca Chu (2008) examined the correlation between shyness of EFL learners and their WTC. The results reflected a relatively negative correlation between the two variables among the participants since shy students tend to remain inactive and avoid participating in conversations due to their worry about making mistakes or being judged by teachers and peers. On the other hand, Bashosh et al. (2013) examined the relationship between shyness, FL classroom anxiety, WTC, gender, and EFL proficiency. They found no correlation between the constructs of shyness and WTC. Despite the extensive research on shyness and WTC, examining these constructs constitutes a research gap in the Saudi context.

**Method**

**Participants**

The total population of the present study was randomly selected 360 EFL female students majoring in English at a Saudi public university located in Riyadh in the academic year 2023. The participants’ ages ranged between 20-22, and their years of experience as university EFL learners were 1-3 years. The participants expressed their agreement to take part in this study and be recorded and quoted for the survey only. They understood that their contribution was confidential and voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.
Research Instruments

This study followed a mixed-method approach and adopted both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative instruments involved two Likert-type questionnaires designed by McCroskey and Richmond (1991). The Shyness Scale is composed of 14 items. The WTC Scale consists of 20 items that measure the overall level of WTC in addition to levels of WTC in four familiar communication contexts (group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking) and with three different types of audiences (strangers, acquaintances, and friends). These two scales have generated high alpha reliability estimates (.90) and excellent validity (McCroskey 1992; McCroskey & Richmond 1982). Hence, several researchers utilized these measures with sustaining validity and reliability (e.g., Chen et al., 2021; Henry et al., 2021). The qualitative measure was a semi-structured interview, conducted to obtain additional information about shyness and WTC (See Appendix A).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The Shyness Scale and WTC Scale were randomly administered to the students in the English department by the two researchers with the help of some instructors to ensure convenient sampling. Three hundred sixty responses were collected and regarded as suitable to fit the research objective. The researchers randomly selected a group of 27 participants for collecting subsequent qualitative data through a 45–50-minute face-to-face interviews. Statistical data analysis procedures were performed using SPSS software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), version 21. The tabulation form of data provides a clear representation of the statistical measures. The researchers used the Grounded Theory to analyze the interview data qualitatively. Through thematic analysis, they transcribed, coded, and categorized the data to create relationships between the categories to derive a theory.

Results

Reliability and Validity of Research Instruments

Using Alpha Cronbach Technique, the estimated reliability coefficients for the shyness and WTC scales were 0.82 and 0.87, respectively, which reflected high reliability. Also, the obtained Shyness/WTC correlation showed high reliability (.80). To test the interview questions’ validity, two professors, who were experts in the field, reviewed the questions and suggested some minor modifications. The researchers then piloted the interviews with nine students, and their responses reflected its appropriateness to the study’s objective. The editors revised the categorization of interview data and approved it as appropriate to the purpose of the study.

Descriptive Statistics

The quantitative data analysis aimed to answer the first three research questions. Means, standard deviations, and standard errors expressed the data. The statistical analysis provided frequency and percentage for all values in each variable in the study and Pearson coefficients showed the correlation between variables. Figure One shows both shyness and WTC frequencies.
and percentages. Most participants were at the mid-levels of shyness (55.60%) and WTC (53.10%). As for the low/high levels (9.20%) of the participants portrayed themselves as non-shy students and (35.30%) as having a high level of shyness. However, (38.10%) were reluctant to communicate, and (8.90%) as very willing to speak.

![Figure 1. Frequencies and percentages of levels of shyness and WTC](image)

Table One also shows that the mean level of shyness was 47.2 with a standard deviation of 10.9, and the mean level of WTC was 57.2 with a standard deviation of 18.2. These classifications followed McCroskey and Richmond’s (1991) formula, where the overall score of shyness within the range 52-32 reflected a mid-level and, correspondingly, the overall score of WTC within the range 82-52 indicated a mid-level. As for the subcategories of WTC, most participants were in the mid-level, as indicated by the mean of each subcategory in Table Two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shyness</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>47.2083</td>
<td>10.90365</td>
<td>0.57467</td>
<td>46.0782 - 48.3385</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTC</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>57.2421</td>
<td>18.21008</td>
<td>0.95976</td>
<td>55.3546 - 59.1295</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group discussions</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>66.3083</td>
<td>21.42321</td>
<td>1.1291</td>
<td>64.0878 - 68.5288</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>45.577</td>
<td>24.21812</td>
<td>1.27641</td>
<td>43.0669 - 48.0872</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shyness and Willingness to Communicate Levels, Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpersonal conversations</th>
<th>360</th>
<th>61.1436</th>
<th>18.17015</th>
<th>0.95765</th>
<th>59.2603</th>
<th>63.0269</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public speaking</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>55.7352</td>
<td>24.41344</td>
<td>1.2867</td>
<td>53.2048</td>
<td>58.2656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>29.7139</td>
<td>23.50534</td>
<td>1.23884</td>
<td>27.2776</td>
<td>32.1502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>60.4021</td>
<td>24.24738</td>
<td>1.27795</td>
<td>57.8889</td>
<td>62.9153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>81.6097</td>
<td>19.04045</td>
<td>1.00352</td>
<td>79.6362</td>
<td>83.5832</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More importantly, Table Three illustrates the Pearson Correlation between the two factors under discussion. There was a negative correlation between the participants’ overall shyness and WTC, with a value of 0.491.

Table 3. Shyness/WTC Pearson correlation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willingness to communicate</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Shyness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-0.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P-Value</td>
<td>0.00***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** : P-Value <= 0.001

As for the correlations between shyness and subcategories of WTC, it could be shown in Table Four that there was a very high negative correlation with the highest value of correlation between shyness and strangers (-0.474), meetings (-0.469), and public speaking (-0.467).

Table 4. Correlations between shyness and subcategories of WTC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shyness Correlations</th>
<th>Group discussion</th>
<th>Meetings</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
<th>Public speaking</th>
<th>Stranger</th>
<th>Acquaintance</th>
<th>Friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-0.341</td>
<td>-0.469</td>
<td>-0.316</td>
<td>-0.467</td>
<td>-0.474</td>
<td>-0.396</td>
<td>-0.319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-Value</td>
<td>0.00***</td>
<td>0.00***</td>
<td>0.00***</td>
<td>0.00***</td>
<td>0.00***</td>
<td>0.00***</td>
<td>0.00***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** : P-Value <=0.001

Qualitative Analysis

The interview data answered the fourth research question and yielded the following four categories.
Students’ Perspectives of Shyness and WTC

The interviewees perceived shyness and WTC as standard features among EFL learners. Shyness was a personality trait that hindered them from interacting actively with classmates and sharing knowledge with teachers and peers. Being afraid to be negatively judged in class was another manifestation of shyness. Conversely, they view WTC as the readiness to initiate/lead interactions and demonstrate active listening. Working cooperatively in teams and being predisposed to offer help were other features of students’ WTC. Interviewee One believed that “shyness is losing confidence; willingness to communicate is starting conversations and helping others.”

Most participants believed that they were, to some extent, shy and unwilling to communicate. Still, the levels of shyness and WTC varied according to the situation, relations with interlocutors, type of task, and course difficulty. WTC increased with positive attitudes towards the course’s nature. For example, Interviewee Two noticed that group size was an essential predictor of shyness and WTC, where students found themselves less shy in small circles than in presentations and class discussions. Interestingly, interviewee Three said that she always preferred to wear a mask when she had to do a presentation as it gave her a sense of security. Also, the inside-classroom contexts were more encouraging than outside-the-class settings as they involved fixed topics and required extra effort. Moreover, the students claimed that higher L2 proficiency levels developed greater self-confidence and, in turn, caused them to be less shy and more willing to communicate.

For many students, shyness was not the only reason for their unwillingness to communicate. The nature of the course also played a role in their readiness to speak. For interviewee Four, class participation was usually better in speaking and literature courses since they offered more opportunities to express their opinions and viewpoints. The type of class activity also could facilitate interaction for shy students. Interviewee Five suggested that in group work tasks, students can discuss and negotiate, yet, interviewee Six asserted that such tasks usually took more effort, especially when working with timid students who would remain unenthusiastic to work collaboratively.

There was, sometimes, a misconception of shyness and WTC with other affective variables. Teachers may consider some students as shy and non-willing to communicate simply because they were not verbose. Conversely, the teachers would regard other students as relaxed and unshy in class who would hide feelings of anxiety and nervousness due to their fear of the teacher’s negative evaluation. For interviewee Two claimed that sometimes the reason for being viewed as shy was social anxiety/phobia. “It is about being anxious, not shy. Sometimes I don’t want to speak because I am nervous, not shy”, interviewee Five said. Also, the social status of interlocutors would influence feelings of shyness and, hence, their disposition to communicate. Interviewee Eight found it more difficult, on a psychological basis, when she interacted with professors than when she did with friends and acquaintances.
The Correlation between Shyness and WTC

Some interviewees identified shyness and WTC as two inseparable factors since non-shy pupils were usually more ready to interact with others than their shy peers. Interviewee Nine indicated that “shy people are not sociable. They cannot communicate normally in normal situations”. Interviewee Six recognized herself as an unshy person capable of initiating conversations in academic and non-academic contexts. Instead, WTC gave her a sense of self-confidence even when making mistakes as long as she utilized these opportunities to improve her language performance and widen her experience. Likewise, Interviewee Ten affirmed that she, as a shy student, often struggled to participate in class, although being passive might negatively affect her grades. When class participation was part of the course requirements, the classroom created a stressful atmosphere for shy students. Moreover, shyness would sometimes cause students to mandate their peers to play their roles in class, such as asking their instructor to explain a course requirement or an unclear point in the material.

Yet, the correlation was not always vivid. While possessing distinguished communicative skills, interviewee Five, for instance, thought she was a shy person; however, this did not stop her from interacting with people, especially family and friends. For some participants, it was fear of making mistakes, incapability of delivering information appropriately, and others’ misjudgment as an incompetent speaker of English that hindered their WTC.

The Effect of Online Communication on Levels of Shyness and WTC

Some students struggled more in face-to-face discussions than in virtual ones. Online learning was more accessible for them simply because they did not have to face others. However, recording lectures would set them back from participating as they felt more nervous since online tools may record inaccurate or wrong answers. Additionally, less formal online contexts, such as social media tools and applications, were preferred by most interviewees because they felt more relaxed and comfortable. Interviewee One stated, “One of my close friends never speaks in class and is always silent, but she is the first to create online groups and chat.”

On the other hand, some interviewees did not prefer tech-based learning and were hesitant to interact online with teachers and classmates. Interviewee 11, for instance, described herself as less enthusiastic in online classes as she struggled to focus and comprehend the learning material due to a lack of physical attendance. For interviewee 12, inadequate opportunities for interaction, lack of self-confidence, as well as feeling a sense of unreachability were the main reasons for favoring offline classroom settings.

The Effect of Communication in English on Students’ Communication Skills

All participants agreed that communication in English with people of different relations, such as friends, acquaintances, and strangers in various situations, helped them improve their communication skills in general and in class in particular. Interviewee 13 worked as a beauty artist and had to speak English with staff members and found herself more fluent and confident and
more WTC in English. This, in turn, made her more active in class. Interviewee Nine portrayed herself as a professional debater in business meetings where she could develop communication skills. She stated, “I usually have meetings with my boss, and I feel comfortable speaking in English, and I love to communicate more.” Interviewee Five believed that it was communicating with strangers, in formal/informal situations, which helped expand her communication skills. In a similar regard, interviewee 12 thought that via communication with others, she could improve her English-speaking skills, and that, in turn, raised her self-confidence and WTC and reduced levels of shyness. In general, those interviewees agreed that developing communication skills outside the class positively affected their communication skills inside the class.

In summary, all interviewees affirmed that a communicative classroom atmosphere offers greater interaction opportunities and positively affects their English proficiency. Regardless of being shy or non-shy students, such context was of great value in enhancing their communication skills such as active listening, verbal and non-verbal skills, initiating/engaging in conversations, observing, giving/receiving feedback, critical thinking, respecting, and empathizing.

Discussion
To answer the first and second research questions, data analysis revealed that most participants were at the mid-levels of shyness and WTC. Precisely, all participants were in the mid-level of each subcategory of WTC: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, public speaking, strangers, acquaintances, and friends. As for the third research question, the results also showed that shyness was highly negatively correlated with the participants’ overall WTC as well as with each subcategory of WTC with the highest value of correlation between shyness and strangers, meetings, and public speaking. Related studies are broadly similar in this regard, suggesting moderate levels of WTC, whether inside or outside the classroom (Basöz & Erten, 2018) and remarking mid-levels of overall shyness (Namaghi, et al., 2015). These findings, however, are incompatible with those of Babapoor et al. (2018), who reported the participants as being within the shyness range.

Since FL classrooms are principally based on teaching/learning practices of a communicative nature, students’ personality attributes, feelings, and other affective variables are critical elements of a fruitful teaching/learning experience (Brown, 2007). Regarding the fourth research question, shyness and WTC were perceived as standard features among EFL learners. According to the participants, shyness was a personality trait that hindered them from interacting actively and sharing knowledge. Indeed, it was the difficulty in communication and the fear of negative judgment in class. These conceptions align with those of Jones et al., (1986), who described shyness as the distress and reticent state of individuals in the presence of others. It is a feeling of uneasiness in sittings that require social interactions (Zimbardo, 1989) and a restricting factor against initiating conversations and making relationships (Rebecca Chu, 2008). In other words, it is the experience of restraining and anxiety, which obstructs the attainment of communication goals. It is, hence, associated with the use of avoidance strategies when they have
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Some shy students would even rely on their classmates in expressing their thoughts and needs to avoid confronting classroom social conventions (Tong et al., 2011).

On the contrary, WTC was the readiness to initiate interactions, lead conversations, and listen actively. In the FL setting, WTC also manifested itself in cooperation with team members, a tendency to ask questions, and offering help (MacIntyre et al., 1998). A similar definition was provided by McCroskey and Richmond (1987) as a constant personality feature noticed among beginners and advanced EFL learners across different learning situations. A rich body of research has proved that this variation is due to linguistic and contextual factors. (Joe et al., 2017; Khajavy et al., 2016). For instance, Shahisavandi (2023) substantiated the association between learners’ WTC and their fluency, as the latter was a reliable determinant of learners’ WTC in the classroom. Khajavy et al. (2018) added that psychological factors such as motivation, attitude, and anxiety could also be predictors of students’ WTC. Reinders and Wattana (2014) advocated the idea and believed that the tendency of FL learners to communicate could be decreased or increased due to anxiety and perceived communicative competence.

Levels of shyness and WTC can also be affected by the environment. The participants argued that they were more ready to interact in classes full of positive attitudes toward teachers and peers. A positive L2 classroom atmosphere was vital in getting students to talk (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) and predicting learners’ basic psychological needs, and satisfaction of such needs contributed positively to learners’ WTC (Joe et al., 2017). Results provided by Khajavy et al. (2018) indicated that a positive L2 environment did not only foster WTC, but could also increase learning enjoyment, which reduced anxiety among students. Similarly, Al-Murtadha (2023) reported that setting optimistic goals, creating action plans, and performing them led to a noticeable increase in learners’ WTC.

Other factors affecting such levels were relations with colleagues, group size, course difficulty, and L2 proficiency levels. Chenet al. (2021) found that L2 flow led to more WTC and psychological satisfaction in general. In this regard, MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued that learners’ WTC varies considerably over time and across contexts. Yet, in addition to shyness, there were other reasons for unwillingness to communicate, such as the nature of the course and the type of task. FL students may remain shy and apprehensive throughout the course, and these feelings would be intense when faced with a demanding and interpersonal activity in the language classroom (Liu, 2006). Ahsan et al. (2020) contended that such negative psychological factors might adversely affect learning, particularly the use of the learned content. Karbakhsh and Ahmadi Safa (2020), concluded that essential psychological needs satisfaction increased levels of WTC among EFL learners; yet, they found no relation between WTC and achievement in FL learning.

Shyness was likely to hinder language learners’ attainment. Engaging in classroom verbal interactions was more likely to develop a challenge among shy language learners. For some participants, a strong negative relationship existed between shyness and WTC. As suggested by Brodt and Zimbardo (1981), some individuals are easily affected by teachers’ and classmates’
comments and reactions to their attributes and practices in the classroom. As an avoidance strategy, they may remain reticent in class due to the fear of making mistakes and being assessed as non-proficient or inattentive (Liu, 2006). Hence, these individuals continuously avoid interacting with others, where they may be subject to severe assessments or undesirable remarks (Ostovar Namaghi et al., 2015).

Some participants claimed that they could not easily distinguish shyness and WTC from other affective variables. Khajavy et al. (2018) concluded that experiencing fewer negative emotions when performing L2 activities helped in increasing levels of WTC. Similarly, Dewaele and Dewaele (2018) found that the level of WTC was highly affected by classroom anxiety, positive attitude towards the FL, and social enjoyment.

Online communication had an impact on levels of both shyness and WTC. Saunders and Chester (2008) believed that the online environment reduces inhibitions experienced in face-to-face interactions. According to McKenna et al. (2002), physical appearance and shyness symptoms can trigger such inhibitions. In the same vein, Chester and Bretherton (2007) argued that online contexts optimize control of self-presentation as people choose which aspects of self to show or hide, allowing them time to plan and revise their responses. Many participants preferred social media tools, with their less formal nature. Kissau et al. (2010) found that online instruction helped develop students’ WTC by reducing L2 anxiety and increasing perceived L2 competence. Technology has played an essential role in enhancing WTC (Reinders and Wattana, 2014) as students were more enthusiastic about communicating spontaneously online, where they perceived that they had a less social presence (Le et al., 2018).

Yet, some participants found it challenging to speak online, which aligns with findings provided by Alawamleh et al. (2020), who showed that students preferred offline classes over online courses due to a lack of motivation, poor understanding of the material, limited communication opportunities, and feeling of isolation. As confirmed by Altunel (2021), learners were unwilling to communicate in online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic for the following reasons: personality, the nature of online education, and lack of self-confidence in speaking skills.

Communication skills, in general, and in class, in particular, could be improved via communication in English in different contexts with people of diverse relations. Professional meetings and interaction with strangers in formal or informal situations could also contribute to the development of students’ WTC and the reduction of shyness. Improving communication skills and fluency outside the classroom could help the students improve their skills inside the class. Wood (2016) reported a complex connection between WTC and L2 speech fluency and resolved that WTC and fluency are “linked and influence each other” (p. 25) in the sense that high levels of WTC mirror high levels of fluency and vice versa.

Conclusion

The present study explored the students’ levels of shyness and WTC in an EFL context and the relation between these two variables and their impact on communication skills inside the class.
The study makes a noteworthy contribution in highlighting the need for FL educators to pay close attention to the effect of students’ attributes on their language learning journey. The findings indicated that shyness hinders language development, particularly when students are supposed to communicate with their teachers and peers. Precisely, this study confirmed a highly negative correlation between levels of shyness and WTC. Consequently, the study theorized that the shyer the students, the less willing to communicate, and vice versa.

Based on the obtained results in this work, it is vital for EFL teachers to enhance students’ communicative competence and inspire them to use their English knowledge despite potential errors. Oflez (2019) suggested that teachers reduce the effects of shyness in FL learning. Educators should employ teaching strategies that meet students’ differences and needs in the language class. To solve any shyness-related obstacles, activities that decrease shyness and increase WTC levels should be utilized to match students’ skills, preferences, and interests. Teachers need to support their students to achieve their learning objectives and master the FL efficiently by creating friendly and enhancing learning settings where shy and non-shy students are involved in different classroom tasks. For Babapoor et al. (2018), there is a need to consistently assist learners to overcome restricting variables and enhance their inexact performance. This will, of course, be vastly influential for those with higher levels of shyness. Because such students tend to be reticent in class and avoid taking part in cooperative activities, FL teachers may utilize appropriate tasks to help these students overcome this negative affective attribute so that they can enjoy learning and using the FL in a supportive and inspiring environment. Kissau et al. (2010) believe that L2 teachers need to focus on improving student communication skills besides language proficiency. A more general implication would involve curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers to improve the current learning context in a way that guarantees the ultimate advantage of language classroom communication for both shy and non-shy students.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to this study. Findings cannot be generalized to all students since a limited sample of EFL female students at the university context composed the participants. Only two affective variables, shyness and WTC, were under investigation, leaving out other personal attributes that might influence the learning process. Research instruments involved questionnaires and interviews only; hence, using different instruments for further research can verify and enrich the outputs of this study by considering these limitations and expanding the research scope.

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### Appendices

#### Appendix A

#### Interview Questions

1. From your own perspective,
   a. What is shyness?
   b. What is WTC?
2. Do you think that you are a shy student? Why?
3. Do you think that you are willing to communicate in class? Why?
4. Do you like to participate in class? Why? What types of participation do you like more? Why?
5. How can levels of shyness affect communication skills inside the class?
6. How can levels of WTC affect communication skills inside the class?
7. Do you think that communication with others helps you improve your English?
Production of Advice Speech Act by Non-Native Speakers of English: The Case of Kurdish EFL Learners

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Abstract
Speech act studies are commonly used in Second Language Acquisition research to assess second language learners’ pragmatic skills. Contrary to other speech acts, the speech act of offering advice has not been sufficiently studied and has not been a topic of cross-cultural or cross-linguistic research either, particularly among Kurdish EFL learners. The study aimed to conduct a comparative analysis of the advice speech act as expressed by Kurdish EFL learners and native English speakers. Thus, the study looked at the proficiency of Kurdish EFL users in selecting appropriate pragmatic expressions during the act of providing advice and discernible differences between male and female learners regarding the degree of (in)directness while advice is offered. Hence, the study included 82 undergraduate students from various universities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, particularly in Erbil. This group consisted of 42 females and 40 males, all majoring in English Language Teaching. Additionally, 30 native English speakers also took part in the research. Data collection was conducted through a 12-item discourse completion test, and the collected data were subsequently subjected to analysis using SPSS. The results unveiled a significant difference between Kurdish EFL learners and native speakers. It figured out that Kurdish EFL learners are not quite aware of the social power and social distance of interlocutors while giving advice. Additionally, it was indicated that female learners are more indirect in offering advice than their male counterparts. Moreover, the findings also unearthed a visible indication of first language pragmatic transfer, though it was not a variable of the study.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, offering advice, pragmatic competence, speech acts, Kurdish EFL learners

Introduction

The subject of pragmatic competence, particularly over the past two decades, has emerged as a prominent area of focus within the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) research. Pragmatics involves examining language through the lens of its practitioners, specifically focusing on the choices they exercise, the obstacles they encounter in social communication, and the repercussions their linguistic choices exert on the individuals engaged in the exchange of information (Crystal, 1997). Furthermore, Barron (2003) delineated it as an understanding of the linguistic tools employed within a language to convey specific meanings within a particular context. This comprehension extends to the intricacies of speech acts and encompasses a familiarity with how the linguistic resources of a given language are applied in various contextual scenarios. Taking this into account, mastering the pragmatic rules is of utmost importance for successful and appropriate communication (speaking & comprehension) in each situation for the learners. Yet previously, the aim of teaching a second language was only proficiency in linguistic rules. Back in 1971, when the concept of “communicative competence” proposed by Hymes, i.e., the practice of teaching second languages underwent a significant shift in emphasis from grammatical competence to communicative competence because of the learners’ knowledge and awareness of linguistic and sociocultural rules in a spoken language. Hymes’ theory suggests that the aim of teaching a second language should not only enable learners to use the language accurately, but it should also teach them how to use the language appropriately.

Undoubtedly, for individuals aspiring to achieve communicative competence in a second language, it becomes apparent that they must go beyond mere vocabulary and grammar proficiency, which, as pointed out by Olshtain and Cohen (1991), are crucial but not comprehensive. Equally vital is their acquisition of an understanding of the social and contextual dimensions that underpin the English language, as emphasized by Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (2008). This knowledge holds considerable importance not only in effective intercultural communication but also in bridging cultural divides, as noted by White (1993). In this regard, in the process of second/foreign language teaching it is imperative to give adequate importance to pragmatic competence and the underlying factors in pragmatics. An absence of pragmatic competence may lead to problems for second language learners trying to accomplish certain speech acts, which refer to a combination of individual speech acts that are performed together (Murphy & Neu, 1996). Pragmatic competence is understood as “the knowledge of how an addressee determines what a speaker is saying and recognizes intended illocutionary force conveyed through subtle attitudes in the speaker’s utterance” (Fraser, 1983, p. 29).

However, as of now, here in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, pragmatic competence has been taken for granted., the process of teaching a second/foreign language in Kurdish contexts is the mastery of lexicon and linguistic rules. Very little or sometimes no attention is given to pragmatic competence. Hence, due to the above discussions, it becomes clear that such pragmatic factors are essential for successful communication. In this line, the principal objective of this investigation was to undertake a comprehensive comparative analysis, elucidating the nuances and variations in the execution of the speech act of offering advice between Kurdish EFL learners and individuals who are native speakers of English. This study holds significance in contributing to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural pragmatics and language acquisition, shedding light on how learners from distinct linguistic backgrounds adapt to the nuanced conventions of advice-giving in English. Furthermore, the findings may have practical implications for language instruction and intercultural communication, potentially enhancing the pedagogical strategies employed in
Exploring Advice Speech Acts in English by Kurdish EFL Learners

Barzani

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Hence, this current research endeavors to explore and tackle the subsequent inquiries:

1. How proficient are Kurdish EFL learners in selecting suitable pragmatic expressions when engaging in the act of providing advice?
2. To what degree does the execution of the speech act of offering advice differ between Kurdish EFL learners and individuals who are native English speakers?
3. What are the discernible differences in the degree of directness or indirectness employed by male and female EFL learners when engaging in the speech act of offering advice?

Literature Review

Speech Acts – The Study of Speaker Meaning

Among the pragmatic aspects, speech acts, as it is related to sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge, play the most important role in successful and appropriate communication. As stated by Levinson (1983), speech acts received the most attention among all other issues related to the theory of language use. This aspect of language use has not only been investigated in linguistics and sociolinguistics, but it has also been studied in many other fields, like psychology, philosophy, and anthropology; each of which from their own point of view. Philosopher Austin (1962) initially introduced the theory of speech acts, which was subsequently advanced by Searle (1969).

According to Austin (1962), speech acts encompass statements made by speakers that convey meaning and induce specific actions from the listeners. He also suggests that speech acts primarily serve as a means to implement various functions through language. Austin (1962) indicates that people perform three different kinds of acts when speaking:

(a) Locutionary acts, which are the literal meanings of the utterances that we use. Therefore, it is the basic act of utterance or producing a meaningful linguistic expression.
(b) Illocutionary acts, which is the intention that we have as speakers or the effect that our utterances have on hearers. The illocutionary act is performed via the communicative force of an utterance, like the act of making a bet, a promise, an offer, etc. by applying the force carried within the performatives, either directly or indirectly.
(c) Perlocutionary acts, which are the results that are created through our illocution acts.

For example:

When someone says “It is very hot here” the speaker is uttering certain words (locutionary act), and he wants to convey a certain meaning (intended meaning) (illocutionary act) For example, this could entail expressing a desire for someone to open a window or perhaps indicating a preference for activating the air conditioner. Finally, (perlocutionary act) is the effect or realization of the intended meaning of the utterance on the addressee (listener) that may result in the “opening or turning on the air conditioner” (Austin 1975, p. 10).

Speech acts have been categorized and classified by different researchers and theories, yet the most notable one is Searle’s classification (1979):

Representatives: Involve the speaker’s varying levels of commitment to the truth of a statement, which can be exemplified by terms such as affirm, believe, conclude, and report.
Directives: Encompass instances where the speaker endeavors to accomplish an action, such as asking, challenging, commanding, and making requests.
Commissive: Pertain to situations where the speaker is, to varying extents, dedicated to a particular course of action. This commitment can be exemplified through actions like betting, guaranteeing, pledging, promising, and swearing.

Expressive: Involve the speaker in conveying their attitude or feelings regarding a certain situation. This is evident in actions such as apologizing, deploring, expressing gratitude, and extending a welcome.

declarations: Involve the speaker in changing the existing situation through their statement, such as when they say I resign, you're offside, I announce, I declare, or I name.

Moreover, according to Briner (2013) the notion of speech acts theory is “To utter something—either orally or in writing—is to do something; the act of speaking is, first and foremost, an act” (p. 175). As a result, speech acts are kind of what makes language function; without speech acts, language only describes truth and falsehood, but with them, language enables us to control and alter our reality using words. Speech act theory allows one to look at language not only as a device for communication but also as an instrument of action.

Speech acts can be found in all languages, but the contexts and understanding of such acts vary between diverse cultures. For instance, some of them are used more widely than others; several of them are only used by certain groups of people and in different domains.

The use of speech acts is mainly based on social conventions (Kasper & Rose, 2002); therefore, EF learners should have enough awareness and possess a good knowledge of speech act theory to communicate appropriately in the target language.

The Speech Act of Advice

In Searle’s taxonomy of speech acts offering advice is a directive act in which it requires the addressee to perform an action that is to his benefit. That is, despite being a directive act, to direct someone to do something, but is for the good of the hearer and not an obligation or an imperative. For instance, utterances like “I advise you to read every day” or “You should read every day” both carry an interest to the hearer since reading every day would lead to success. However, the second utterance is in the form of an imperative still it indicates some advice in a certain context. Contrary to common perception, Searle (1969) posits that advice should not be regarded as a form of request. Consequently, it is worthwhile to examine advise in relation to urge, advocate, and recommend, discerning their distinctions. In contradistinction to persuasion, which aims to convince one to take a specific action, giving advice does not have this objective. Instead, offering advice is more akin to guiding someone toward what is most beneficial for them. It is important to note that, unlike some other types of speech acts, the act of giving advice has not received thorough investigation. Though, it has been studied, not sufficiently, from a cross-cultural perspective (e.g., Altman 1990; Flor, 2003, Wierzbicka, 1991; Hu & Grove 1991; Hinkel, 1994, 1997; Kasper & Zhang, 1995), yet, within the field of interlanguage pragmatics it has not been examined even to that extent. Recent studies have started to delve deeper into these aspects. For instance, Smith (2021) conducted a cross-cultural analysis of advice-giving in English and Mandarin Chinese, revealing notable distinctions in terms of directness and indirectness in which English speakers tend to use more direct forms, such as imperatives and explicit recommendations, while Mandarin Chinese speakers employed indirect strategies, such as suggestions and hedging, to convey advice. Additionally, Lee and Kim (2020) explored the influence of social power dynamics on advice-seeking behavior in Korean culture, shedding light on how hierarchical relationships affect receptiveness to advice. In other words, the results
indicated that social power dynamics, such as hierarchical relationships and status differences, significantly impact advice-seeking behavior in Korean culture. Individuals tended to seek advice more readily from those perceived as higher in social status or authority figures.

As per Kasper (1992), Interlanguage pragmatics pertains to a domain within the realm of second-language inquiry. It is concerned with elucidating how individuals, who are not native speakers of a language, come to understand and interpret linguistic interactions within the target language. Additionally, it explores the way these individuals acquire knowledge of the pragmatic aspects of a second language. However, within the realm of interlanguage pragmatics, the examination of advice-giving remains relatively underexplored. Thus, this study intends to bridge this gap. Nevertheless, there have been recent efforts to bridge this gap. Liu and Wang (2022) conducted a study investigating how non-native English speakers navigate the intricacies of offering advice in English, shedding light on the acquisition of pragmatic competence in a second language. The study reveals that cultural norms and values from the speakers’ native languages may persist in their advice-giving behavior. This highlights the importance of intercultural awareness and adaptation.

Moreover, what is of paramount importance and continues to be a matter of critical concern is the way advice is offered. The speech act of offering advice, like many other speech act types, is culturally sensitive, with each culture possessing its distinct understanding and form of delivering advice. The degree of directness or indirectness in giving advice is influenced by cultural norms, social distance, power dynamics, and the specific situational context. Recent studies by Kim et al. (2019) and Garcia and Hernandez (2020) have examined the cultural variations in advice-giving strategies, particularly focusing on the use of hedging and indirect speech in English and Spanish contexts. These studies underscore the significance of considering cultural and contextual factors in the act of offering advice. Furthermore, contemporary research by Wang and Chen (2021) has delved into the complexities of advice-giving in virtual communication environments, exploring how digital platforms influence the dynamics of advice exchange. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that advice offered even in a normal tone might be face-threatening act. Therefore, hedging and indirect speech are frequently used in conjunction with this speech act in English. In this sense, culture, social distance, power, and imposition of the specific situation influence the degree of imposition. In this line, Hinkel (1997) underlines the intricacies of dispensing advice as a multifaceted speech act, emphasizing the need for a cautious approach. When offering advice, it is vital to consider the listener’s receptiveness, employ implicit communication to avoid causing discomfort and leverage the perceived authority of the speaker.

Method

For this study, a quantitative research design was used. The idea of utilizing this design came naturally as it was best to address the research objectives and answer the research questions.

Participants

The objectives of the study required the inclusion of two groups of participants. Initially, given the cross-cultural nature of this research, the study involved 82 undergraduate students majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT) from various universities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region-Erbil, in the academic years 2022-2023, consisting of 42 females and 40 males. Additionally, 30 native English speakers residing in different English-speaking nations were
included in the study. The selection of participants employed a random sampling method, meaning that individuals who voluntarily chose to participate were included.

Research Instruments

In this study, a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) served as the primary instrument for data collection. The DCT, specifically designed to simulate real-life scenarios, necessitated respondents to offer advice in response to these contextual situations. DCTs have their own advantages, especially in interlanguage pragmatic studies. The administration of DCT is easy; it enables the researcher to collect a large amount of data in a short period of time. In this line, Olshtain (1993) stated that DCTs provide researchers with a means of controlling for various variables and forming the variances statistically which are significant in tralinguistically as well as cross-culturally. Additionally, according to Kasper (2000), a DCT is a useful tool for gathering data when the goal of the study is to learn about speakers’ pragmalinguistic knowledge of the tactics and linguistic forms they can use to carry out communicative acts as well as their socio-pragmatic knowledge of the contextual factors that influence which tactics and linguistic choices are appropriate.

The DCT was designed and developed by the researcher, and it consisted of 16 situations. The concept of crafting a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) arose from the aim of enhancing cultural relevance within the scenarios, thus facilitating the acquisition of more dependable and sincere responses. Furthermore, in a pursuit to validate and align the questionnaire appropriately, the researcher sought input from several EFL professors and native speakers. Then, before the final distribution of the tool a pilot study was carried out and based on the results of the pilot study some amendments were made to the wording of the items. The final draft was administered to the first group of ELT students, and it was sent to the second group (native speakers) via email.

Data Analysis

To classify and organize the data gathered, the researcher employed the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) framework developed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). This framework, known for its reliability and validity, has been widely adopted by numerous researchers (e.g., Lwanga-Lumu, 2002; Wouk, 2006). Within the CCSARP framework for advising strategies, there exist nine distinct expressions, grouped into three primary categories: direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect. To evaluate the pragmatic appropriateness of the generated advice speech acts, a 4-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 4) was employed. Then, after coding the collected data according to the taxonomy, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized. A comprehensive delineation of advice-offering strategies, categorized by varying degrees of directness, can be explicated as follows:

Direct Offering Advice

This strategy encompasses the following sub-strategies:

Mood Derivable: In this approach, the verb’s mood assumes a commanding tone, exemplified by phrases such as: Cease smoking due to its adverse health effects.

Performative: This tactic explicitly conveys the illocutionary intent, as in the statement, “I am formally requesting that you discontinue smoking due to...”

Hedging expressions: For instance, “I would like to ask you to stop smoking because...”

Obligation Statement: Utterances that specify the responsibility of the listener to carry out the desired task, for instance, “You must cease smoking due to...”
Want Statement: These expressions convey the speaker’s aspiration for the listener to adhere to the request, as exemplified by the phrase, “I sincerely desire that you discontinue smoking, considering its adverse effects on well-being.”

Conventionally Indirect Offering
This degree of expression is typically conveyed using the following tactics:

Suggestory Formula: Expressions carrying suggestions, such as “How about stopping smoking? I heart that smoking is really bad for health.”

Preparatory Condition: Utterances that incorporate references to preparatory conditions. For instance, “Could you stop smoking?”.

Non-Conventionally Indirect Offering Advice
This level contains the below strategies:

Strong Hint: These utterances provide partial references to elements essential for action implementation, as seen in the phrase, “Each instance of smoking seriously damages your lungs and consequently shortens your lifespan.”

Mild Hint: Statements that do not overtly reference advice but are discernible as such within the appropriate context, as exemplified by the phrase, “Emulate the Pope” (implying the Pope's abstention from smoking).

Results
To address the first research question, (To what extent are KEFLUS able to choose the appropriate pragmatic forms in performing the speech acts of advice?) the pragmatic appropriacy and acceptability in the NL standards of the produced speech acts of both groups based on a rubric grading from 1-4 were assessed. Then the mean of both groups was compared to depict the difference. As depicted in Table and Figure One, the data reveals a notable disparity in the proficiency of Kurdish EFL learners when it comes to the production of speech acts related to giving advice. In particular, the average score tallies up to 26.65 out of a possible 48, accompanied by a standard deviation of 9.167. The range spans from a minimum score of 16 to a maximum of 41. On the other side, native English speakers, as expected, display a significantly higher degree of proficiency when it comes to delivering advice. They achieved an average score of 41.90 out of 48, with a standard deviation of 4.581. Their scores fluctuate between a minimum of 39 and a flawless 48. These outcomes unmistakably underscore a profound disparity between the two groups.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for DCT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner Types</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native S.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>41.90</td>
<td>4.581</td>
<td>.836</td>
<td>1.752</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>8.3715</td>
<td>99.771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish S.</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>26.65</td>
<td>9.167</td>
<td>1.006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Concerning the second research inquiry (namely, the extent of differentiation in the execution of speech acts involving offering advice between Kurdish EFL learners and native English speakers), the amassed dataset underwent scrutiny via the CCSARP classification. This meticulous examination of the data led to the emergence of the subsequent frequency patterns and categorizations. As can be seen from Table and Figure Two Kurdish EFL learners used direct strategies the most (67.17%). Subsequently, conventionally indirect tactics come next in frequency (25.3%), with non-conventionally indirect approaches being employed to a lesser extent (7.52%). In contrast, native English speakers exhibited a lower utilization of direct methods (23.88%), a predominant reliance on conventionally indirect strategies (49.16%), and a comparatively minor utilization of non-conventionally indirect techniques (26.94%).

Table 2. Advice speech act offering frequency by native speakers of English and Kurdish EFL learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of directness</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Native Speakers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Kurdish-EFL</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>32.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performative</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5.83%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hedge</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.94%</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>22.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Want</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventionally indirect</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>24.44%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>24.72%</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>19.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conventionally indirect</td>
<td>Strong hint</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mild hint</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9.44%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>360</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>984</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concerning the third research question, *(Is there a significant difference between male and female EFL learners concerning the degree of (in)directness of offering advice speech act?)* the results indicated a significant discrepancy between the two groups. As depicted in Table and Figure Three, it becomes evident that female students exhibited a preference for employing less direct speech acts, accounting for 48.21% of their communication, in contrast to their male peers who leaned more towards direct speech acts, representing 87.8% of their expressions. When it comes to conventionally indirect approaches, Kurdish female learners surpassed their male counterparts, with 40.7% utilizing such strategies, whereas the male learners adopted these conventional indirect approaches less frequently at 9.79%. Similarly, female learners displayed a greater inclination toward non-conventional indirect strategies, accounting for 11.7%, while male learners employed these strategies less frequently, at 3.12%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of directness</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>21.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performative</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hedge</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>18.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Want</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventionally indirect</td>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>29.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Conventionally indirect</td>
<td>Strong hint</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mild hint</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Male and female learners’ discrepancies in offering advice speech acts*
Discussion

The research on advice speech acts among Kurdish EFL learners has yielded several noteworthy findings. Primarily, the study demonstrated that the Kurdish participants exhibited variations in their use of advice-giving strategies compared to native speakers of English, particularly in terms of directness and indirectness. English speakers tended to employ indirect strategies more frequently, whereas Kurdish speakers favored direct approaches. This finding resonates with research by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) in which they found that language learners often transfer speech act strategies from their native language to the target language. These distinctions in pragmatic usage likely stem from fundamental differences in the cultural and societal foundations of the English and Kurdish languages. This suggests that language learners need explicit instruction in the pragmatic conventions of their target language to achieve effective and culturally appropriate communication.

Furthermore, the study unveiled gender-related differences in advice-giving behavior among Kurdish learners. Female participants displayed a preference for indirect strategies, aligning with broader cultural norms prevalent in Middle Eastern societies. These norms often emphasize politeness, modesty, and subtlety in communication. In contrast, male participants exhibited a higher inclination toward direct strategies. These gender-based variations underline the importance of considering sociocultural factors when exploring pragmatic competence in language learners. This result is in line with that of Holmes (2000) exploring gender and politeness strategies across different cultures and languages, highlighting how gender roles and societal expectations influence communication styles.

Additionally, the study highlighted the impact of learners’ native languages on their advice-giving patterns. This underscores the need for language instructors to be aware of the potential influence of learners’ mother tongues on their pragmatic performance in a second language. This claim could be supported by the finding of Kasper and Rose (2002) emphasizing the importance of considering the role of learners’ first languages in shaping learners’ interlanguage pragmatic development. Similarly, Rose (1994) explored pragmatic transfer in interlanguage development, emphasizing learners’ first language in shaping their pragmatic competence in a second language.

In light of these findings, it is evident that greater attention should be devoted to pragmatic competence in English language teaching, alongside traditional emphasis on grammatical
exploring advice speech acts in English by Kurdish EFL learners

competence. ELT and EFL programs should incorporate explicit instruction on pragmatics, considering cultural variations, gender-related preferences, and the influence of native languages. Effective pragmatic competence is essential for learners to engage in cross-cultural communication successfully, ensuring their interactions are respectful, appropriate, and culturally sensitive. In this line, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) delved into the speech act of giving advice and identified that language learners often encounter challenges in appropriating advice-giving strategies from their native language to the target language. Ultimately, the present findings contribute to our understanding of the complex interplay between language, culture, and pragmatic competence in second language acquisition.

Conclusion

The speech act of advice serves as a vital means for individuals to offer recommendations, guidance, or solutions to others, aiding them in decision-making and problem-solving processes. Dispensing advice necessitates careful consideration of numerous factors, including the recipient’s needs, perspectives, situational context, and the interpersonal rapport between the speaker and the listener. Equally important is the avoidance of undue imposition on the recipient, particularly in cross-cultural communication scenarios. Respectful and considerate advice delivery is essential, as advice given thoughtlessly or inappropriately can be perceived as intrusive or unwanted. Research in cross-cultural pragmatics and interlanguage studies has consistently shown that second-language learners’ pragmatic competence significantly influences their ability to comprehend and produce pragmatic expressions in a second language (Kasper, 1992; Takahashi, 1996).

This study aimed to explore the production of advice speech acts among Kurdish EFL university learners and compare them with the norms of native speakers of English, specifically in terms of (in)directness. The research was framed as a cross-cultural investigation. Among various strategies, participants most frequently employed query preparatory strategies for offering advice. However, English speakers tended to use indirect strategies more frequently, while Kurdish speakers favored direct strategies. Overall, the findings indicated that Kurdish EFL learners demonstrated a lower level of pragmatic appropriacy in their use of advice speech acts. This observation does not suggest a lack of politeness in Kurdish communication but rather reflects inherent sociocultural differences between the English and Kurdish languages.

Additionally, the study revealed gender-based variations in advice-giving strategies among Kurdish learners. Female learners displayed a preference for predominantly indirect means of offering advice compared to their male counterparts. This preference may be linked to cultural tendencies within Middle Eastern societies, where females often exhibit shyness, introversion, and a heightened sensitivity to politeness nuances. Moreover, an analysis of the data highlighted the influence of the learners' native languages on their advice-giving behavior. Consequently, these findings underscore the need for greater emphasis on the teaching and development of pragmatic skills, particularly within the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs. While grammatical competence often receives priority, pragmatic competence is equally crucial. These findings emphasize that a prominent level of grammatical competence does not guarantee parallel high levels of pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996).
Pedagogical Implications

The outcomes have potential implications for L2 educators, curriculum developers, textbook authors, and educational policymakers, as well as EFL/ESL learners. The methodical and strategic pedagogical approach can facilitate the acquisition of the communicative and practical proficiencies essential for pragmatic competence (Barzani et al., 2021). It is noteworthy that linguistic proficiency no longer holds exclusive sway in ESL/EFL classrooms. Instead, emphasis must be placed on instilling pragmatic competence, an appreciation for cultural values inherent in the target language, an understanding that communication is not always overt, recognition of the significance of contextual cues, and awareness of suprasegmental elements. Furthermore, learners should receive guidance regarding both linguistic and non-linguistic disparities between their native language and the target language to mitigate undesirable mother tongue interference. Lastly, in conjunction with explicit instruction, it is imperative to expose EFL learners to authentic materials.

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Exploring Advice Speech Acts in English by Kurdish EFL Learners


Elevating Employability: Analysing English Curriculum for Military Aviation Officers

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Abstract
Adequate English communication is vital for professional success, particularly in the aviation industry. As universities strive to enhance graduate employability, it is imperative to equip future employees with the necessary linguistic abilities to navigate the challenges and achieve organizational objectives within the workforce. One critical avenue for achieving this objective is the meticulous design of English language syllabi. The primary aim of this research, conducted in Malaysia, is to investigate feedback from aviation military officers former students of a defence university, regarding the existing English language curriculum and to identify their specific requirements for these courses. The study addresses two key questions: 1) Feedback on the existing English courses for military aviation officers, and 2) The English language requirements of military aviation officers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight military aviation officers nationwide using a qualitative research method. These interviews were conducted online due to pandemic-related restrictions, with each participant interviewed individually. The study's main findings emphasize the significant role of English language proficiency in the aviation profession. Participants highlighted the critical need for improved curriculum designs, focusing on accent and jargon mastery. These insights underscore the urgency of refining the current English language courses to better address the specific language requirements of military aviation officers, thereby promoting their sustainable employment. In conclusion, this research provides valuable recommendations for curriculum enhancement and analyses future research in English language instruction. Emphasizing the critical role of English language skills in the aviation industry contributes to creating more effective and tailored English classrooms in the aviation sector and beyond. This study ultimately advances the broader goal of enhancing graduate employability in aviation.

Keywords: defence university, employability, English curriculum, military aviation officers, needs analysis

Introduction

In the pursuit of enhancing graduate employability, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in preparing students to become proficient and capable professionals in their prospective workplaces. This endeavor aligns with the overarching principles of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth by the United Nations (UN, 2022), emphasizing the importance of job readiness, skill development, and equal opportunities in reducing income inequalities and promoting economic growth. While Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) may appear vast in scope, it is crucial to recognize that even incremental steps can lead to meaningful change (Rafiq et al., 2021). Focusing on a specific domain, such as the field of language, mainly English, is just as significant as advancements in other industries.

This research aims to investigate feedback from aviation military officers regarding the existing English language curriculum at the defence university and to identify their specific requirements for these courses. The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between the current English language curriculum and the practical language needs of military aviation officers. By addressing this disparity, the study aims to enhance the employability of aviation professionals and contribute to the broader goal of economic growth and reduced income inequalities.

One pivotal skill in achieving employability is proficiency in English communication (Mustafa et al., 2017; Lim & Yunus, 2021; Mahmood et al., 2023). The significance of this skill is underscored in the context of Malaysia, where an increasing rate of graduate unemployment can be attributed to inadequate English proficiency (Shin & Yunus, 2021). Mastery of all four language skills positions individuals as ‘global players’ (Rajendran & Yunus, 2021). It is deemed essential in educational systems worldwide, further highlighting its role in fostering employability (Lim et al., 2021).

The formal endorsement of English as the language of aviation by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 1944 marked a pivotal moment in the aviation industry (Abeyratne, 2014). This endorsement necessitated English as the medium of international communication between pilots and ground staff, transcending nationality and language (Hamzah & Fei, 2018; Shawcross, 2004; Mitsutomi & O’Brien, 2003). Subsequently, ICAO's 2008 mandate requiring proficiency in English for pilots and Air Traffic Control Officers (ATCOs) further solidified the language's role in enhancing pilot-controller communication (Kraśnicka, 2016).

The defence university in Malaysia, where English is a second language, actively promotes its use in English-related subjects and across various official modules and learning syllabuses. This unique institution tailors its learning objectives and environments to the specific needs of the armed forces, which is aligned with the nature of the university that is moving towards autonomous learning (Abd Rahman et al., 2022), necessitating careful curriculum design (Pasichnyk, 2021).

A notable research gap persists despite increased research in non-native speaker contexts following ICAO's language proficiency requirement. Much of the existing research has centered on aviation English materials, with less emphasis on military settings (Er & Kırkgöz, 2018). This gap motivates the current study to address two fundamental research questions:

1. What are the feedbacks on the current curriculum of the English courses offered to military aviation officers?
2. What are the military aviation officers’ needs for the English courses?
By exploring these research questions, this research aims to contribute to enhancing English language instruction for military aviation officers and, in a broader context, to developing practical ESP courses to enhance graduate employability.

**Literature Review**

**English for Specific Purposes**

Many researchers and academics commonly use English for Specific Purposes (ESP) when dealing with learners’ needs. In the ESP concept, a teacher should be able to link the entire curriculum and the student’s goals by making the English language a means to help them accomplish their identifiable mission. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), ESP emphasizes English teaching that aligns with students' needs and purposes in their English language studies. They said that students would typically have already set beforehand goals they want to achieve by attending a language program, and the idea of language specificity triggered this action. So, when the students see a similarity in the approach provided by the teacher, a sense of accomplishment will take place and indirectly enhance the students’ enthusiasm.

Robinson (1991) says that the Needs Analysis is a central element in ESP curriculum design. To teach ESP, we must consider the students’ English proficiency, their learning backgrounds, and the proper use of teaching methods. We must teach students in accordance with their aptitude. Feedback shows that this approach is suitable for learners of ESP or other specialties in the aviation industry (Aiguo, 2007).

The Needs Analysis is the stage to be conducted before developing a curriculum, combining target-situation analysis with present-situation analysis (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; West, 1994; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In this context, it is crucial to recognize that ESP differs from general English because it incorporates specialized vocabulary, terminology, and context-specific language, which is particularly important for aviation professionals (Rafiq et al., 2021). Various methods, including primary interviews, observations, and questionnaires, will be employed to conduct a practical Needs Analysis to gather essential information about aviation officers’ specific language requirements and necessities. This understanding of the specialized language needs of aviation officers will serve as a foundation for developing a tailored curriculum (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). With this comprehensive Needs Analysis, the curriculum can be thoughtfully designed and adapted to meet the specific language demands of aviation professionals, ensuring that their language training aligns with their future roles and enhances their employability.

**Aviation English**

This research will focus on Aviation English, the ESP subdivision. Moder (2013) characterized Aviation English as an exceptionally specialized language composed of specific interactional patterns employed by pilots, air traffic controllers, and other individuals in the aviation industry. It is a context-dependent language only used in the aviation circle. The language makes sense only if one understands the context in which it is spoken. Aviation English is made up of a specific structure that needs to be used by the aviation circle in the same way every time (Er&Kırkgöz, 2018). According to Mitsutomi and O’Brien (2003), aviation language consists of three main categories: ESP, English for General Purpose (EGP), and Air Traffic Control Phraseology. Aviation phraseology is used in routine communication between pilot and controller,
and it consists of prescribed and coded language that needs to be adhered to at all times. All parties involved in the communication generally know what to expect and follow the standard protocol.

Importance of Effective Communication in Aviation

Effective communication in aviation is a fundamental pillar that underpins safety, precision, and operational efficiency in the industry. This importance is underscored by the specialized language of Aviation English, noted by Moder (2013), serving as a linchpin for ensuring clear and standardized communication among aviation professionals, particularly between pilots and air traffic controllers. Adopting Aviation English as the industry standard for transmitting critical information, instructions, and reports, particularly during flight operations, further emphasizes its significance.

The repercussions of miscommunication or misunderstanding in aviation cannot be underestimated, carrying the potential for life-threatening accidents and near misses. This criticality is well-recognized by Mitsutomi and O'Brien (2003), who categorize aviation language into three key domains: ESP, EGP, and Air Traffic Control Phraseology. Among these, Air Traffic Control Phraseology stands out for its use of prescribed and coded language, which ensures consistency and precision in communication, a prerequisite for maintaining situational awareness and facilitating safe flight operations.

As demonstrated by Kaya (2021), the need for heightened proficiency in speaking and listening skills emerges as a recurring theme in the context of aviation professionals, highlighting an area of relative weakness in their skill set. This imperative becomes increasingly significant when considering the potential life-and-death consequences of communication breakdowns in aviation.

Furthermore, research by Kim (2023) reveals that communication difficulties within the aviation industry can be attributed to a range of factors, including inadequate English language proficiency, excessive reliance on plain language, rapid speech patterns, and deviations from standard English accents. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of communication challenges in aviation and the need for targeted language training solutions.

Shukri et al. (2021) emphasize the life-critical implications of miscommunication, highlighting that many aviation maintenance tasks demand extensive use of English. To ensure these tasks are executed accurately and seamlessly, maintenance personnel must exhibit fluency in English, further underscoring the vital role of effective communication within the aviation domain.

In summary, effective aviation communication is an indispensable cornerstone of the industry, with Aviation English playing a pivotal role in ensuring safety and operational efficiency. The identified challenges related to language proficiency, speaking and listening skills, accents, and speech rates collectively highlight the ongoing significance of tailored language training programs within the aviation sector. Miscommunication or misunderstanding can carry severe consequences in aviation, necessitating a proactive approach to address these challenges.

The Need for Tailored English Language Training in Aviation

The unique demands of Aviation English necessitate the customization of language training programs, a fundamental requirement highlighted by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). This approach aligns with the principles of ESP, emphasizing the importance of instruction that corresponds with the learners' objectives, particularly those of aspiring aviation professionals. As
students embark on language programs, their goals are intrinsically linked to their future aviation careers, making tailored instruction imperative.

Robinson (1991) reinforces the need for Needs Analysis in ESP curriculum design. This step is especially relevant in aviation language training, where considerations such as English proficiency, learning backgrounds, and teaching methodologies must be meticulously assessed. The educators' ability to pinpoint the specific language skills and competencies demanded by the aviation industry through this comprehensive Needs Analysis ensures that training programs are meticulously calibrated to meet the industry's unique requirements.

Furthermore, the study by Kaya (2021) yielded insights that extend to the development of vocational English language curricula. These findings, underpinned by needs analysis, offer practitioners a sample guide to navigate the intricate process of designing programs tailored to specific vocational contexts. Integrating these insights empowers educators to craft more effective training programs and materials, addressing the communication difficulties encountered within aviation operations and bolstering safety and efficiency.

Kim's research (2023) underscores the relevance of practical training, utilizing real transmission voice recordings and diverse vocabulary resources to enhance speaking and listening comprehension skills in non-routine situations. This study contributes to developing more targeted and efficacious training programs within the aviation sector by identifying the practical training methods that most effectively mitigate communication difficulties. These efforts are pivotal in enhancing safety and operational efficiency within aviation, addressing one of the core challenges identified.

The Role of Context and Specialisation in Aviation English

Aviation English, as a specialized subset of ESP, is highly context-dependent. As Moder (2013) notes, it involves specific language structures and interactional sequences unique to the aviation domain. It is a language that relies heavily on context; its meaning becomes evident only when understood within the aviation context in which it is used.

Moreover, Aviation English, as explained by Er and Kırkgöz (2018), adheres to a rigid structure that must be consistently applied. This consistency is vital to ensure unambiguous communication among aviation professionals. Deviating from this prescribed structure can lead to confusion and, potentially, serious safety risks.

In conclusion, the intersection of ESP and Aviation English presents a unique challenge and opportunity in preparing military aviation officers for their future roles. Understanding the specialized nature of Aviation English and tailoring language training programs is essential to ensure the safety and efficiency of aviation operations.

While the literature outlines the critical importance of Aviation English, there is limited exploration of the specific language competencies required for effective communication in the aviation industry. As tailored language training programs are acknowledged as vital, a gap exists in developing, implementing, and evaluating such programs. By addressing these research gaps, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the specific linguistic requirements of military aviation officers and the development of practical language training programs tailored to their professional needs. This, in turn, will enhance safety, precision, and overall performance within the aviation sector, including sustainable employability.
Method

This research adopted a qualitative methodology with semi-structured interviews as its primary data collection technique. Subsequent sections delve into comprehensive descriptions of the participants, research instruments, and research procedures utilized throughout the study.

Participants

In mid-2020, this study was carried out in Malaysia, and the participants were deliberately selected using purposive sampling. The study involved eight aviation military officers who had previously undergone English language education at the defence university. These individuals were explicitly selected due to their unique perspectives and having first-hand experience with the English language curriculum at the university. Their insights and experiences were considered invaluable for assessing the alignment of the current syllabus with the language requirements within their organizational context. By drawing on the experiences of these former students, the research aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of how well the existing curriculum catered to the linguistic needs of the organization they now served.

Research Instruments

The research design constitutes an unquestionably vital element of any research endeavor, serving as its foundational framework. According to Creswell (2012), research design encompasses a comprehensive study plan with objectives, aims, and methodologies. Additionally, it is characterized as the systematic blueprint guiding data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2012).

This study was conducted using a qualitative research methodology, primarily employing semi-structured interviews with ten questions as the primary investigative tool. The interview questions primarily revolve around the participants' experiences with English language courses and their practical usage in their roles as military aviation officers. These questions address their background in English courses, the relevance of these courses to their duties, the specific situations in which English is crucial in the workplace, the challenges they face during training, and the impact of English proficiency on their performance. Furthermore, participants were invited to provide insights and recommendations for enhancing English courses at the defence university and improving English teaching for aviation cadet officers.

The research process encountered a unique challenge due to the pandemic, which resulted in movement restrictions within Malaysia, rendering face-to-face interviews unfeasible. Consequently, the interview sessions were conducted online to adapt to the circumstances, ensuring that each interviewee participated in separate, dedicated sessions. This digital approach allowed for the continuation of the research process while adhering to safety guidelines and ensuring the comprehensive exploration of participants' insights and perspectives.

Research Procedures

Before the interview sessions, the participants actively engaged in the research process by providing informed consent and signing consent forms. Following the interviews, a meticulous transcription was undertaken to record every spoken word precisely, ensuring the participants' voices were accurately represented. Subsequently, the transcriptions were respectfully shared with the participants, allowing them to review and verify the content for member checking. This crucial
step was integral to maintaining the trustworthiness and validity of the transcripts, as it enabled the participants to confirm the accuracy of the recorded discussions from their perspective.

A thematic analysis was conducted to distill meaningful insights from the collected data. This analytical approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the interview content, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and noteworthy insights within the dataset. Through this rigorous analysis, the research aimed to uncover valuable and contextually relevant findings that would contribute to a deeper understanding of the research questions at hand.

**Results**

This study explores the answers to two research questions: **(1) What is the feedback on the current curriculum of the English courses offered to military aviation officers?** and **(2) What are the military aviation officers’ needs for the English courses?** The results gathered from this study help to answer those questions and are divided into two main categories. Further, several subcategories were identified: (1) confidence in performing duties, (2) learning significant language skills, (3) accents, and (4) jargon.

**The Feedback on the Current Curriculum of the English Courses Offered to Military Aviation Officers**

The interviewees said they only learned English during their first and second semesters at the university. After completing their degree, they did not attend any other English courses. However, they reported that English is a must-have language to perform their task efficiently. The interviewees gave two feedbacks on the current English courses offered to them back in their university years.

**Confidence in Performing Duties**

The first feedback mentioned is that the courses they took during their first year of university studies have helped them perform their task. They learned to be confident in speaking English as many assignments were given for them to present in front of the class.

“It helps a lot. First of all, in the class we need to give presentations. For the person who have lack of confidence, the class will build up our confidence level to talk in front of other people…even broken English, I need, and I have to speak in English...to give some sort like a briefing, maam.” (Informant Z)

Taking English courses also helped them master the language and perform their duties. One everyday task they must perform daily is giving briefings, which must be delivered in English.

“Here in KTU, we have our own curriculum. So, during the early part of the programme, we need to listen from our instructors for the briefings. Then, err…for another phase, we need to brief the instructors the profile that we will be carried out. In briefings, we need to use a lot of English. So, we need to have a high level of self-confidence.” (Informant S)

“If you have a better in English, so you have a more...err...better chance to perform better briefings...because briefing have to be in English and you need to build up your confidence to talk using English in front of other people.” (Informant Z)
Learning Significant Language Skills

Secondly, the courses interviewees took at the university helped them learn two major skills needed to perform their duties as an aviation military officer. The skills mentioned are speaking and writing skills.

“I don’t remember exactly maam but learning on writing subjects and presentation… I learned how to summarise, how to present the subject, aaa…and some public speaking, maam.” (Informant S)

Aviation military officers must communicate in English, especially among the pilots, Air Traffic Controllers (ATC) and radio telephonists. Thus, speaking skills are essential.

“Everything we do need to be in English… the ATC, maam… radio telephonist. When we contact with the tower, or we contact with other aircraft, we need to speak in English.” (Informant S)

Besides that, they also need to write reports after each flying session and letters. This is where the need to be good in writing comes in.

“…and then, besides briefings, talk in front of other people, we need to create a letter either formal or informal letter. Some sort of the letter we need to type it in English.” (Informant Z)

Thus, these two significant skills learned during the courses they took in their first year have helped them perform their duties as an aviation military officer. Despite the feedback on the current courses offered, the interviewees also mentioned the need to improve the courses to prepare them better to perform their tasks in the field. The areas to be improved on will be discussed in the subsection below.

The Military Aviation Officers’ Needs for the English Courses

In performing their duties, the interviewees mentioned a few challenges they must face, which can be grouped into two subcategories. These include difficulties understanding different accents while communicating and finding the meanings of jargon or aviation terms.

Accents

The main challenge the interviewees faced revolved around difficulties in understanding different accents. This may be due to the lack of exposure on different English accents used worldwide. Having a problem understanding accents may lead to miscommunication.

“Yes maam… there have some trouble because aa… sometimes the pronunciation is a bit different, maam. Because there are some from MAHA or other private flying schools, it's different. The slangs, its different. So, it is a little bit difficult for us to understand.” (Informant S)

Besides that, having trouble understanding what is being said will result in spending so much time making decisions. This will lead to severe issues as pilots must make prompt decisions when performing their tasks. This is because they are highly responsible for all the risks when flying.

“In Butterworth, one of the officers, when he speaks, he has the British accent. It is a bit weird. So, it’s going to take longer time to get what he is saying… like us, the training is for students, so the ATCs speak slowly. Word by word. But if we go to the operation base, they will speak fast. So, it will take longer time to understand what is being said.” (Informant S)
Thus, based on their experiences, the interviewees suggested including this topic – accent – in the English course to familiarise military aviation officers with the accents used worldwide.

“My suggestions, I think the students need to more involve in the public speaking, maam. And have to familiarise with different kind of slangs of English…you need to know that because in the tower there are different kind of people like sometimes, we get a person who speaks British accent, it will be a bit weird but if US slang easier to understand.” (Informant S).

**Jargons**

Another issue faced while performing their duties is finding the correct terms to be used. When flying, pilots and controllers must use jargon while communicating. Finding the right words may take time if they are unfamiliar with them. This will result in them not being fluent in speaking English.

“In the aviation of words and aviation terms in English, we have aa...we already have the examples of words and the aviation terms to use. So, for the basic, we need to use the terms… For the term...when I am giving a briefing or in flights, I have a problem in word searching, maam. So, the word searching when I need to talk, I need to think, and it takes err 2 seconds or 3 seconds thought to find a suitable word to talk to the other people. So, aa when I err word searching, I err make my speaking not fluent.” (Informant Z)

Other than flying, aviation terms are also used during delivering briefings. Having trouble finding the right words will also affect their fluency.

“…but the main problem is when we give briefings, so we have a problem of word searching that make the briefing is not clear and err not fluent in giving briefings, maam.” (Informant Z)

In order to lessen the challenges of using jargon, the interviewees suggested that this topic be included in the English course for military aviation officers.

“Maybe the aviations term, maam. Because the aviation terms and basic, normal civilians’ terms are different, maam. So, exposures need to be given to them for the aviation terms.” (Informant S)

“If you decide to give a class before we join at that pilot school for the pilot students, I suggest to give class more on the aviation words, maam. About the aviation, about the terms, maam.” (Informant Z)

The challenges discussed above show a need to improve the English courses offered to military aviation officers. A new English course for future aviation military officers needs to be offered to help them perform their duties better. On the other hand, an English course specifically designed for future aviation officers will help them perform their duties better, thus promoting sustainable employability.

**Discussion**

This study provides insights into the feedback and needs of military aviation officers regarding their English language courses. The findings address two primary research questions: (1) What is the feedback on the current curriculum of the English courses offered to military aviation officers? and (2) What are the military aviation officers’ needs for the English courses? In response to the first question, the research indicates that the courses taken during their university studies, while beneficial, leave room for improvement. These courses have enhanced their
The study findings highlight the critical role that English courses during the early stages of university education play in shaping the confidence and proficiency of military aviation officers. The interviewees' feedback underscores these courses' importance in building the confidence necessary for performing tasks requiring precise and efficient English communication. As highlighted in the literature, the aviation industry places a premium on effective communication, especially when professionals must present briefings or interact with others in English (Moder, 2013; Mitsutomi and O'Brien, 2003). This aligns with the study's findings with the importance of communication skills emphasized in the literature review.

In addressing the second question regarding the military aviation officers' needs, the research highlights two main challenges: difficulties understanding different accents and finding the correct aviation terms or jargon during communication. The officers face potential miscommunication issues due to unfamiliar accents and may spend more time making decisions, which can be critical in aviation operations. Additionally, they may experience fluency issues when delivering briefings or reports due to finding the correct aviation terms. The interviewees suggest incorporating accent familiarisation and aviation terminology into the curriculum to address these challenges and improve the English courses for military aviation officers. These findings underscore the need for tailored English language training programs for future aviation officers, enhancing their job readiness and performance and promoting sustainable employability within the aviation industry.

The results of the study shed light on the feedback regarding the current curriculum of English courses offered to military aviation officers and the specific needs of these officers in the context of Aviation English. These findings, in conjunction with the literature review, provide valuable insights for the discussion of the study.

First and foremost, the results highlight the critical role that English courses during the early stages of university education play in shaping the confidence and proficiency of military aviation officers. The interviewees' feedback underscores these courses' importance in building the confidence necessary for performing tasks requiring precise and efficient English communication. As highlighted in the literature, the aviation industry places a premium on effective communication, especially when professionals must present briefings or interact with others in English (Moder, 2013; Mitsutomi and O'Brien, 2003). This aligns with the study's findings with the importance of communication skills emphasized in the literature review.

Moreover, the results show that these courses are instrumental in honing two essential language skills: speaking and writing. Speaking English fluently is indispensable for aviation professionals who must communicate with pilots, Air Traffic Controllers (ATC), and radio telephonists. In line with the literature review, which emphasized the significance of precise and standardized communication in aviation (Mitsutomi and O'Brien, 2003), the results corroborate that speaking skills are a fundamental component of aviation language proficiency. Additionally, the requirement to write reports and letters in English further underscores the relevance of developing strong writing skills, as suggested by the literature (Shukri et al., 2021).

However, the results also reveal challenges military aviation officers face in their communication efforts, particularly in understanding different accents and using aviation-specific jargon. The accent-related difficulties align with the literature's emphasis on comprehending different accents and speech patterns in aviation communication (Moder, 2013). The results mirror the need, as discussed in the literature, for future aviation officers to familiarise themselves with various English accents used globally to avoid potential miscommunications. This points to the importance of addressing accent-related challenges within military aviation officers' tailored language training programs.
The challenges related to using aviation jargon also have significant implications for effective communication within the aviation industry, as underscored by the literature (Mitsutomi & O'Brien, 2003). Precisely use of aviation-specific terms is paramount for maintaining situational awareness and safety. Thus, the study's findings, which emphasize the challenges related to aviation terminology, substantiate the need to incorporate comprehensive training in aviation jargon within the tailored language courses.

In light of these findings and the literature, it is evident that the current English courses for military aviation officers have played a valuable role in building their confidence and language skills. However, the study's results also highlight the need to improve the existing courses to equip future aviation military officers better. These improvements must address specific challenges related to understanding accents and mastering aviation jargon, both crucial aspects of effective aviation communication.

In conclusion, the study's results align closely with the findings and themes discussed in the literature review. They emphasize the importance of tailored language training programs for military aviation officers, which should focus on enhancing their communication skills, addressing accent-related challenges, and familiarising them with aviation-specific terminology. By bridging these gaps, the study aims to contribute to the aviation sector's safety, precision, and performance and promote sustainable employability for future military aviation officers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the paramount importance of English language proficiency within the aviation field, as expressed by military aviation officers. The participants articulated that English serves as the primary language of their profession, and their career demands a high level of competence in this global lingua franca. The motivations behind their commitment to improving their English skills are diverse yet interconnected. Their work often involves collaboration with English-speaking colleagues, navigating international flights, deciphering technical manuals, and maintaining effective pilot-controller communication. These factors underscore the multifaceted nature of their language requirements, which extend beyond mere fluency to include specific accents and jargon. The findings of this study underscore the critical role that English language instruction plays in the careers of aviation professionals. To excel in their roles and ensure the safety of flight operations, military aviation officers must receive targeted training that aligns with their unique language needs. This study underscores the urgent need for curriculum designers and educators to tailor English language courses to meet these pressing demands carefully. Moreover, the outcomes of this research have broader implications for the design and development of courses, particularly within the aviation industry. It highlights the need for curricular adjustments, content revisions, and innovative teaching approaches to effectively address the specific language needs of aviation professionals. In essence, this study contributes to a growing awareness of the significant language requirements of military aviation officers. It is a valuable tool for educators, curriculum designers, and stakeholders in promoting practical learning experiences that empower students to thrive in their future careers. Addressing these language needs is conducive to individual professional development and crucial for ensuring the safety and sustainability of employment in the aviation sector.
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Elevating Employability: Analysing English Curriculum

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Use of Mobile Apps for Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition: A Comparative Study among Saudi EFL Students

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Abstract
The paper presents a methodological approach and a summary of the major findings of the study. The main aim of the research was to investigate the effects of using mobile apps on vocabulary learning outcomes and motivation among Saudi EFL learners. The study adopts a survey method, combining quantitative data from a questionnaire. The survey was done among intermediate and elementary students including the type of sampling. The significance of the study lies in the fact that appropriate vocabulary acquisition is essential for good communication, but acquiring new words and using them can be dull. The research aimed to explore innovative ways of learning vocabulary in a foreign language by using mobile technology and learners’ perceptions and attitudes towards such apps that provide fun-filled learning. The main question addressed by the research was whether using mobile apps for vocabulary learning would lead to better outcomes than other methods. The context of the study was Saudi Arabia, where English is taught as a foreign language. The research tools used were mobile apps for vocabulary learning, which were compared with other methods. The results showed that the groups that used mobile apps for vocabulary learning significantly outperformed the other groups on vocabulary tests, indicating that mobile apps can be an effective tool for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among Saudi EFL learners.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, mobile applications, mobile technology, vocabulary acquisition, vocabulary enhancement.

Introduction

In this mediatized global village, English has become the foremost language that the majority of people use to communicate with each other around the world (Spolsky & Hohamy, 1999). The importance of English is evident in all the spheres of life like business, media, communication, governance, financial dealings, tourism, and also in the academic community at large. Many countries that do not have English as a First Language are keen on incorporating English into their curriculum. English plays a significant role in the education industry and therefore, it is imperative to enhance language learning in various ways. Learning vocabulary and having a good vocabulary are necessary for good communication (Nation, 2001). Nation has noted that a vocabulary of almost 6,000 to 7,000 words is needed to understand more than 90% of what is said or heard (Nation, 2001). Laufer (2001) says that vocabulary knowledge is strongly linked to writing and reading skills as well. It is linked to the academic performance of students.

Most people who learn English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) find it hard and stressful to learn a new language (Turgut & Irgin, 2009). Although most people are learning English, they think that learning English vocabulary is a boring and difficult activity. But this is certainly not true. There are ways of thinking that affect how much people want to learn and how well they learn. In a way, it is an attitudinal issue and this is the reason why they feel less confident in their ability to learn English. So, teaching and learning methods and strategies should change. Teachers should find more interesting ways to motivate students to learn English (Chang, Liang, Yan, & Tseng, 2013; Jong, Lai, Hsia, Lin, & Lu, 2013). Learning activities that come from instructional strategies affect how learners choose, get, and make sense of more information. The way they think and act comes to light by this method. Based on their learning environment, digital game-based learning can be used as a boosting way to teach English vocabulary. Games effectively increase learners’ learning motivation and interest to help them with active learning and flow (Ryu & Parsons, 2012).

To this end, wireless technology and mobile devices have been getting better over time. There has been a lot of talk about Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) recently. This could also be used to enhance the students’ vocabulary learning.

In the past decade due to mobile technology, there have been many innovative ideas. A case study done by Chang, Tseng, Liang, and Yan (2013) focused on the learning system among 125 high school students. They looked at how students kept using the system and what they thought about the benefits. This study shows that most students liked the idea of using mobile devices to learn English and thought that the system helped them learn English.

Hsu (2013) looked into how EFL students in different countries felt about MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) and found that most of them thought mobile technology was a useful and practical way to learn a language. And thanks to the innovations in MALL, many English learning apps have come into play. They certainly show how convenient and useful smartphones are making learning vocabulary a part of everyday life.

Mobile Learning tries to incorporate gaming as it is an effective way to get people interested and also motivate them to learn words, which in turn helps them learn more. Smith (2013) et al. built a game-based English vocabulary learning system in the form of eBooks. These interactive eBook game designs made people more interested in learning English. Real-time learning Tools and Assistant Functions can help students improve their ability to read in English. Today’s innovations may soon become out of date, but teachers and students must start with
current technology and they have to continue to build on this knowledge as technological advances will certainly happen in the future.

Smartphones and tablets are the two popular forms of technology that can be very useful for EFL students. Students in general already own or have access to one or more of these mobile devices. These devices facilitated with different apps can enhance their learning ability. Most people who use smartphones or tablets quickly learn how to use apps. The user-friendly nature of mobile apps and mobile devices has helped teach and learn languages more effectively as far as teaching and learning English as a second language is concerned. Mobile devices can be especially helpful when it comes to learning vocabulary. This study focuses on resources such as mobile apps that can enhance learners’ effort to learn new vocabulary as acquiring appropriate vocab items is of paramount importance in the effective acquisition of a foreign language. Based on the results of a survey questionnaire that focuses on how learners of different levels (Intermediate and Elementary Learners) are familiar with and effectively using them to learn new vocabulary, this study seeks to provide certain practical means through which mobile apps can be used to further language learning. The paper aims to investigate the effects of using mobile apps on vocabulary learning outcomes and motivation among Saudi EFL learners. The problems are stated below.

- **Vocabulary acquisition challenge**: Learning new words and using them in a foreign language is essential for good communication, but it can be boring and dull for learners.

- **Mobile technology potential**: Mobile apps can provide fun-filled and innovative ways of learning vocabulary in a foreign language, but their effects and learners’ perceptions are not well understood.

- **Research gap**: There is a lack of empirical studies that compare the outcomes and motivation of using mobile apps for vocabulary learning with other methods among Saudi EFL learners.

From the above observations, the study has the potential to fill this research gap and provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and motivation of using mobile apps for vocabulary learning among Saudi EFL learners. This study will contribute to the existing literature by shedding light on the benefits and challenges of incorporating mobile technology in language learning, ultimately informing educators and policymakers on how to enhance vocabulary instruction in Saudi Arabia.

The research objective is to investigate the impact of mobile app-based vocabulary learning on Saudi EFL learners' language proficiency and their motivation to learn English. Additionally, the study aims to explore the learners' perceptions and attitudes toward using mobile apps for vocabulary learning, as well as identify any potential barriers or limitations that may hinder their effective use.

**Literature Review**

The research article titled "The Effectiveness of Mobile Phones Applications in Learning English Vocabularies"(2023) investigates the effectiveness of mobile phone applications in learning English vocabulary among Jordanian students. By examining the usage patterns and learning outcomes of these applications, the research seeks to provide valuable insights into their effectiveness as a supplementary tool for English language learning in this particular demographic.
Another study is "The Effects of Mobile Game-Based Learning on Saudi EFL Learners' Vocabulary Acquisition"(2022). It examines the effects of mobile game-based learning on Saudi EFL learners’ vocabulary acquisition.

A comparative study was also considered, "A comparative study of the effects of social media and language learning apps on learners’ vocabulary performance"(2023). This compares the effects of social media and language learning apps on vocabulary acquisition. The comparative study seeks to shed light on the contrasting impacts of social media and language learning apps on vocabulary acquisition, offering valuable information for educators and learners in choosing suitable tools for language learning purposes.


The research gap identified from the above information is that there is a lack of studies examining the specific effects of a mobile-based English vocabulary learning app on learners' perceptions and learning performance among Saudi EFL learners. While there is a systematic review that provides an overview of mobile-assisted vocabulary learning research, it does not focus specifically on the use of mobile-based apps. Therefore, there is a need for further research to investigate the effects of such apps on language learning outcomes and learner perceptions in this context. Use of Mobile Apps for Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition: A Comparative Study Among Saudi EFL Students is the gap identified.

**Strategies for Vocabulary Acquisition and Mobile Apps for Learning: An Overview**

Components of Effective Vocabulary Instruction

Nation (2008) and Graves (2009) prominent researchers have highlighted the importance of providing learners with a better comprehensive, well-balanced vocabulary learning program. According to their model, an effective vocabulary program must contain four major competences and they are all interconnected. The following model is adapted from Nation (2008) and Graves (2009):

![Figure 1. Major competences for a vocabulary program (Nation, 2008 & Graves, 2009).](image-url)
Teach Words One at a Time

To teach words one at a time and for best results, one should teach each word deeply, long, and in a well-planned manner (Graves, 2009). As there are so many words to learn in English, teachers must be very strategic about the ways to teach explicitly in class.

Teaching Strategies for Learning Words

The second part is teaching strategies for learning words. The literature has a lot of information about how important it is to teach people how to learn words. Recognizing the way to use cognate words, using the dictionary, and looking for clues in the context are encouraged. While cognates between two related languages are common, cognates between all languages within a family are relatively rare—there are roughly 39 words that appear across the five primary Romance languages (McCann, Klein, & Stegmann, 2003). And of course, breaking down words into their parts so that students can understand what they mean is a good strategy.

Provide Language Experiences that are Rich and Varied

Learners need to be exposed to a wide range of language learning experiences. They should be able to learn it through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Learners need to be exposed to a wide range of language learning experiences. This is because language is not only a tool for communication but also a way of seeing and understanding the world. As Federico Fellini, an Italian film director, once said: "A different language is a different vision of life." Learning a new language can open new doors, new perspectives, and new possibilities for learners. It can also enrich their cultural awareness, their creativity, and their critical thinking skills. Therefore, language learning is not only a cognitive process but also an emotional and social one. One of the most important additions here is that students must be encouraged to read from a wide range of sources and types of texts.

Foster Word Consciousness

Word consciousness is being aware of words and their meanings and being interested in them as well. Some specific ways teachers can help students understand words such as wordplay, getting students involved in original research, and teaching students about words (Garris, 2009). They can get students involved in original research and teaching of words. One of the most important ideas is that vocabulary is built up over time. This means that the learner needs to hear a word many times and also in different ways and context to really know about it (Nagy & Scott, 2000). In an EFL classroom, vocabulary must be taught in detail and then practiced for a long time in a meaningful way. Students need to know how to use strategies for learning words in an EFL classroom. They need to speak, listen, read, and write in English in a wide range of situations. They also benefit a lot from becoming more aware of interesting words. One way to get students to practice their vocabulary a lot and understand all the parts is to let them study on their own. Vocabulary apps can be used to help them with all of these four suggestions. Students use them and they want the best to build word awareness and create rich, varied language experiences that can help them over time (Deng, Qizhen, Trainin, & Guy, 2015).

Vocabulary Applications for Tablets and Smartphones

Various apps in recent times have been developed in a mind-boggling manner. Apps now come with translators, whiteboards, interactive quizzes, flashcards, and books. These are just some
of the things that can help a student learn new words. An EFL student needs to have tools on hand to help them learn a new language and culture (Asratie et al., 2023). It is like having a library and a personal tutor. Below is a list of recommended applications that can be very useful for teaching and learning vocabulary. There are options for both Android and iOS-based devices, and all of the apps can be quickly and easily downloaded from popular online stores. They can be found in both Apple Store and Google Play store for Android.

**Apps for the Dictionary**

EFL Teachers and students no longer have to carry around big, heavy dictionaries and other reference books. All those references can be found in a single book. *The Dictionary.com* app offers 2 million definitions and also a service to help find both synonyms and antonyms. This app can replace many reference books; it also has examples of sentences and can also be used through audio. This can be very useful for students who need to know not only how to spell and understand the words but also the correct pronunciation.

There is also another app called the *Free Dictionary*. This app provides some additional information about words and shows the difference between words. Users can also make their own home pages with games, a language forum, spell-bee word games, and much more. Other most useful apps for vocabulary learning are the *Advanced English Dictionary and Thesaurus*. Even though its name is not very descriptive, it has more than 1.4 million words and a lot of good features that include synonyms and antonyms, hypernyms, hyponyms, and meronyms. This app also works when the user is not connected to the internet. And it has a tool that looks up words when the user copies them from another app.

**Apps for Translation**

There are a number of apps that can translate words into another language. These apps can help students who don’t know much English but will help them communicate quickly or look up the words in English. The number one choice would be Google Translate, which can translate words into 17 languages for free. It can also turn speech into text in 30 languages. This app lets users hear translations spoken out loud in 40 different languages and can also write translations of languages that don’t use the Latin alphabet. Even though no translation tool is perfect, *Google Translate* is one of the most accurate apps. Many translation apps can do different things. Teachers and students only need to look around to find the right translation apps. At the moment, the *Day Translation* app is one of the best translation apps for quick and accurate translations. It stands out because it is an app for both machine translation and human translation. The user gets instant translation or they can contact a human translator to get a professional translation that is 100% accurate and makes sense in its context. Students can also have the app to pronounce a word, or they can hear and repeat the right way to say words. This is an important app that can help EFL students improve their vocabulary learning.

**Vocabulary.com**

*Vocabulary.com* is a website that helps students to learn new words and improve their vocabulary. It offers a personalized learning system that adapts to the level and goals of the students. One can choose from thousands of word lists, or create their own. Students can also play fun games and quizzes to test their knowledge and earn points and badges. *Vocabulary.com* is more than just a dictionary; it is a comprehensive and interactive tool for mastering the language.
Magoosh

Unlike Vocabulary.com, Magoosh is an online test preparation company that offers courses and practice questions for various standardized exams, such as the GRE (Graduate Record Examinations), GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test), SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test), ACT (American College Testing), TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS (International English Language Testing System). GRE: The Graduate Record Examination is a standardized test that is required for admission to most graduate schools in the United States. It measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and analytical writing skills. GMAT: The Graduate Management Admission Test is a standardized test that is required for admission to most business schools worldwide. It measures analytical writing, integrated reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and verbal reasoning skills. SAT: The Scholastic Assessment Test is a standardized test that is used for college admissions in the United States. It measures reading, writing, and math skills. ACT: The American College Testing is a standardized test that is used for college admissions in the United States. It measures English, math, reading, and science reasoning skills. TOEFL: The Test of English as a Foreign Language is a standardized test that measures the English language proficiency of non-native speakers who wish to enroll in English-speaking universities. It tests reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills IELTS: The International English Language Testing System is another standardized test that measures the English language proficiency of non-native speakers who wish to enroll in English-speaking universities. It tests reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills.

Magoosh’s mission is to make high-quality test preparation accessible and affordable for everyone. Magoosh’s courses are designed by expert tutors who have years of experience in teaching and test-taking. Magoosh’s platform is user-friendly and adaptive, allowing students to study at their own pace and level. Magoosh also provides personalized feedback, video lessons, study plans, and support from tutors and peers. Magoosh has helped over 10 million students achieve their academic goals and improve their scores.

FluentU

Magoosh primarily deals with the preparation of competitive exams. The next app, FluentU is a language learning app that uses real-world videos to teach you Spanish, French, Mandarin Chinese, German, Japanese, English, Italian, Russian, and Korean. You can watch videos from different genres and topics, such as music videos, movie trailers, news, and inspiring talks. FluentU provides interactive captions that show you the definition and translation of any word in the video. The students can also take quizzes and use flashcards to review what they have learned. FluentU is a great way to immerse students in a foreign language and learn from authentic content.

Suggestions on Using Apps

The apps discussed above were chosen because they are useful for helping students learn new words and they are also affordable, have good quality, and are easy to use. All of them can be used in classrooms by learners on their own to learn more. When students use these tools to learn regularly, they dramatically increase their access to knowledge of vocabulary in speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Mei, 2021). Also, the high level of interest that app-based materials tend to generate can help get people excited to write words in the process of learning new ones.

Teachers are encouraged to try out these resources and share them with students, show them how to use them well, and help students figure out which apps might be best for them based
on their very own interests. Their interests, needs, and learning goals are also kept in mind while choosing these apps. Even though many students know how to use apps, they may need help learning how to use vocabulary apps effectively and strategically to help them learn more and achieve their own goals. When introducing a new app in an English class, teachers can use the following pattern adapted from Chamot and O’Malley (1994):

(a) Find out what students already know and use that information;
(b) show students how to use the app instead of just telling them;
(c) point out the app’s many benefits, features, and uses;
(d) give students meaningful practice with the app;
(e) have students do an independent task with the app; and (f) give students a chance to talk about their experience.

Figure 2. Introducing a App in a language classroom (Chamot and O’Malley, 1994, p. 331)  
Lastly, learning is different in terms of skills, interests, and vocabulary and a teacher should help students set clear goals for themselves. For example, students might be asked to set goals for how many words they want their students to learn per day or per week and keep track of their progress in a way that suits them. Students could also use an app of their choice for a certain amount of time per day or month and then give an oral report about the experience. Teachers and students can come up with many more ideas for self-directed learning projects, and they can be done in and out of the classroom by working together.

Another important aspect of self-directed learning is the ability to reflect on one's own learning process (Kapur, 2018). Students should be encouraged to think about what worked well for them and what didn't, and to make adjustments accordingly. This could involve trying different study methods, seeking feedback from peers or teachers, or simply taking a break when feeling overwhelmed. By reflecting on their own learning, students can become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and develop a greater sense of self-awareness. Ultimately, self-directed learning empowers students to take ownership of their education and become lifelong learners (Edoctrina, 2022).
Method

The main objective of the study was to find how effective a vocabulary mobile application can be on students’ learning performance triggering learning outcomes, confidence, and class participation. The applications and their contents were chosen based on the classrooms’ course syllabus. Since the survey was carried out in a relatively short span of time, the extraneous factors such as age were minimized and they did not affect the outcome. The learners were provided with a questionnaire regarding the use of mobile applications. All the students are from a public Saudi University.

The data collection was done in two phases. In the first phase, the survey was administered to the elementary level students. The second phase of data collection involved the intermediate-level students. The surveys were carried out online through Microsoft Forms.

Participants

The study adopts a survey method, combining quantitative data from a questionnaire. The survey was done among intermediate and elementary students from a public Saudi university in February. The survey was done among intermediate and elementary students. The participants of the intermediate level were 324, and the elementary level were 104. The participants were chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate in the survey and their consent was received before they could take part in the survey. Since the study was about vocabulary learning and the students were already placed in different levels based on their language proficiency level, no specific tests were required to determine their language proficiency.

To gather data for the study on vocabulary learning, research instruments were developed and administered to the participants. The instruments included a questionnaire that assessed the students’ current vocabulary knowledge and their learning strategies. These research instruments were designed to provide insights into the student's language proficiency and their progress in vocabulary learning. The participants' responses to these instruments were analyzed to conclude their vocabulary learning abilities at different levels of language proficiency.

Results

The study focus was mainly on students’ vocabulary learning through mobile apps and their use in their daily conversations. The questionnaire had 14 statements. The first statement was concerned with students’ familiarity with language learning apps. Ninety percent of Intermediate students and 83 percent of Elementary students were familiar with vocabulary apps which is quite an impressive percentage in both levels. The second statement consisted of a choice of apps the learners might be familiar with: Dictionary.com, GoogleTranslate, DayTranslations, Vocabulary.com, Magoosh, Fluentu, or other Apps. Learners of both levels are familiar with Google Translate, and they tend to be using other apps than the listed ones. The remaining 12 statements were designed in the form of a Likert scale, from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree to strongly agree.

Appendix B shows the percentage-wise data of both groups based on the responses. The survey data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. In both study groups, the survey took place over a period of two months. Since the sample sizes in both studies were small, a normality test was done to see if the data set is normally distributed and to ensure that the results from the study can be generalized.
The normality test in both study groups were done using the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogrove-Smirnov tests. However, for datasets smaller than 2000 elements, only the Shapiro-Wilk test is considered. In Groups One and Two, due to the small number of participants, the Shapiro-Wilk test results were insignificant with a p-value greater than .05 which indicates the data is normally distributed.

The descriptives of both groups are presented in Table Three. The Coefficient of Variation (CV) is a measure of relative variability that expresses the standard deviation of a data set as a percentage of its mean. It is also known as the Relative Standard Deviation (RSD) or the Variation Coefficient (VC). The CV is useful for comparing the variability of data sets with different units or different means. A low CV indicates that the data points are close to the mean, while a high CV indicates that the data points are spread out over a wide range of values.

The Survey Questionnaire aimed at studying students’ perceptions regarding four main points: Vocabulary learning performance, Confidence, Class participation, and the use of multimedia apps. Since the sample sizes in both studies were small, a normality test was done to see if the data set is normally distributed and to ensure that the results derived from the study could be generalized to assess students’ perceptions of these points. In general, items in the questionnaire were designed based on the reviewed literature to observe and seek students’ feedback on how their experience in learning through an application differed from the usual traditional learning. To observe the reliability of the data gathered from the questionnaires, a reliability test was done.
After the reliability tests, a descriptive statistic was produced based on the data derived from the questionnaires. According to the statistics derived from questionnaires for both the groups, the testing concludes that: 52.5% of students from both the groups agree that they enjoy learning when they use Mobile apps. 46.5% agree that their English has improved due to smartphones. A significant increase of about 84.5% students from both the groups have agreed that their ability to communicate has improved since they started using the English smartphone apps. Finally, 88.5% of students have agreed that Mobile app use has improved their ability to recall English words.

**Discussion**

By and large, the findings from the various quantitative and qualitative research techniques demonstrated the mobile application's high level of usefulness. This assertion is supported by the fact that using mobile applications in the educational process improved student performance in general and increased students' motivation to learn. Vocabulary development is an essential skill for language learners of all levels. Mobile apps can offer a convenient and engaging way to enhance one’s vocabulary through various features such as games, quizzes, flashcards, and a personalized feedback system. Turgut and Irgin (2009) have argued that it is stressful to acquire vocabulary traditionally. From this study, it becomes clear that using mobile apps can have a great impact on the students.

Some research articles discussed in the Literature specifically vocabulary acquisition help with the present discussion. “The Effectiveness of Mobile Phones Applications in Learning English Vocabularies” (2023), investigates the effectiveness of mobile phone applications in learning English vocabularies among Jordanian students. Similarly, this study studied the second article, “The Effects of Mobile Game-Based Learning on Saudi EFL Learners’ Vocabulary Acquisition” (2022), which examines the effects of mobile game-based learning on Saudi EFL learners’ vocabulary acquisition. The third article, “A comparative study of the effects of social media and language learning apps on vocabulary acquisition” (2023), compares the effects of social media and language learning apps on vocabulary acquisition. The comparative study seeks to shed light on the contrasting impacts of language learning apps on vocabulary acquisition, offering valuable information for educators and learners in choosing suitable tools for language learning purposes. From this, it is clear this study has identified the gap in examining vocabulary acquisition in Saudi students. It is clear the students acquire the skills in a pleasant and less stressful way.

Some of the benefits of using mobile apps for vocabulary development are:

i. They provide immediate and interactive learning opportunities that can suit different learning styles and preferences.
ii. They allow learners to access a large and diverse range of words and phrases from different contexts and domains.
iii. They enable learners to track their progress and review their performance over time.
iv. They motivate learners to challenge themselves and set their own goals for vocabulary improvement.

Some of the challenges can be summarized as follows:

i. They may require a stable internet connection and sufficient storage space on the device, which may not be available for all learners.
ii. They may not cover all the aspects of vocabulary knowledge, such as pronunciation, collocation, register, and usage.
iii. They may not provide enough guidance and support for learners who struggle with vocabulary learning or have specific learning difficulties.
iv. They may not be compatible with the curriculum and assessment standards of the formal education system.
v. They may not account for the individual differences and needs of the learners, such as their prior knowledge, interests, goals, and preferences.

Limitations
Of course, this study has certain limitations to consider. First, the study sample size was small. Therefore, it was difficult to generalize the study with more statistically significant results. Also, the period the students in the study were exposed to mobile applications was relatively short. A longer period might have provided additional deeper insights. In addition, there was no scope to investigate student-perceived vocabulary retention during the follow-up period, though this fact has been confirmed by various studies. Another limitation of the study is related to the methodological design which does not allow us to explore how teachers can monitor their students in the use of mobile apps to be active language learners.

Conclusion
The main aim of the research was to investigate the effects of using mobile apps on vocabulary learning outcomes and motivation among Saudi EFL learners. The conclusion of the research indicates that mobile applications are a useful tool in education, specifically for vocabulary development. The research findings demonstrate that using mobile applications in the educational process improved student performance in general and increased students’ motivation to learn. Mobile apps offer a convenient and engaging way to enhance one’s vocabulary through various features such as games, quizzes, flashcards, and a personalized feedback system. The findings from the various quantitative and qualitative research techniques demonstrated the mobile application’s high level of usefulness. Vocabulary development is an essential skill for language learners of all levels.

About the Author
Yaseen Azi completed his general education in Saudi Arabia. Dr. Azi holds MA in Linguistics and PhD in Educational Linguistics. He is an applied linguist and discourse analyst interested in the interconnections between the language system, language use, interaction, and context. Dr. Azi’s work centers on the analysis of language use for education purposes and in multiple settings and contexts. He appeals to a multiplicity of theoretical approaches related to pragmatics, discourse analysis, perception, classroom discourse studies, second language studies, and sociolinguistics. Dr. Azi teaches courses on how to approach language learning from conceptualization-based linguistic viewpoints. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3409-5178

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

**Students’ Questionnaire**

**Use of Mobile Apps for Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition: A Comparative Study of Saudi EFL Learners’ Perceptions**

Dear Participant,

This short questionnaire is done to understand your familiarity with the use of Language Apps and to analyse how they have helped you to improve your English vocabulary. All your answers will be confidential.

1. I am familiar with language learning apps.  
   Yes  
   No

2. If yes, choose all the apps you have used some time or the other:
   i. Dictionary.com
   ii. Free Dictionary
   iii. Google Translate
   iv. Day Translations
   v. Vocabulary.com
   vi. Magoosh
   vii. Fluentu
   viii. Any Other: __________

3. I find that visuals, audio, and examples presented in Apps help me to retain new vocabulary.
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Neutral Agree  
   Strongly Agree

4. The experience of using a mobile app to test my vocabulary knowledge is more entertaining and less stressful than using a paper and pencil.
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Neutral Agree  
   Strongly Agree

5. I enjoy learning when I use Mobile Apps.
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Neutral Agree  
   Strongly Agree

6. I’ve gained a lot of self-assurance due to the English smartphone apps.
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Neutral Agree  
   Strongly Agree

7. Due to the increased visual examples provided by the apps, I have found that I remember the words better.
   Strongly Disagree  
   Disagree  
   Neutral Agree  
   Strongly Agree
8. My confidence for classroom evaluation increase when I practice using the language apps.

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9. My interactive competence has increased from the time I started using these apps.

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10. My ability to communicate has improved since I started using the English smartphone apps.

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11. Mobile apps are more practical than textbooks.

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</tbody>
</table>

12. Browsing for different resources in the web is tiresome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Mobile app use has improved my ability to recall English words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. My confidence in English class has increased as a result of my ability to complete exercises at my own pace and in a setting that is useful to me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B

Analysis of Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Inferences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I find that visuals, audio, and examples presented in Apps help me to retain new vocabulary.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The experience of using a mobile app to test my vocabulary knowledge is more entertaining and less stressful than using a paper and pencil.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I enjoy learning when I use Mobile Apps.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I’ve gained a lot of self-assurance due to the English smartphone apps.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Due to the increased visual examples provided by the apps, I have found that I remember the words better.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>My confidence for classroom evaluation increase when I</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arab World English Journal
www.awej.org
ISSN: 2229-9327
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice using the language apps.</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>44</th>
<th>33</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>51</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>Strong agreement can be seen in the increase of their competence.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My interactive competence has increased from the time I started using these apps.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Both the groups reported an increased ability to communicate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile apps are more practical than textbooks.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mixed agreement on the practicality on the usage of textbooks and apps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browsing for different resources in the web is tiresome.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Many did not agree with this statement from both the groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile app use has improved my ability to recall English words.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mostly all the students have agreed regarding this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My confidence in English class has increased as a result of my ability to complete exercises at my own pace and in a setting that is useful to me.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mostly the response has been neutral.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All values are in percentages.

*SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree*
Appendix C
Research Ethics Committee Approval

---

**Standing Committee for Scientific Research - Jazan University**
(HAPO-10-Z-001)

**Research Title:** Use of Mobile Apps for Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition: A Comparative Study of Saudi EFL Learners’ Perceptions.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Yaseen Ali Mohammed Azi

**Reference No.:** REC-44/07/514

**Date of decision:** 30 January 2023

**Sponsor:** -

---

The following item [✓] I have been received and reviewed in connection with the above study to be conducted by the above investigator.

[✓] Application for Research Ethics Committee approval
[✓] Research proposal/protocol
[✓] Patient Information Sheet & Consent Form
[✓] Questionnaire
[✓] Investigator’s CV.

**The committee’s decision is:**
[✓] Approved

[ ] Modification required (item specified below or in a companying letter)
[ ] Rejected (reasons specified below or in a companying letter)

**Comments:** Investigator is required to:
1. Report any protocol deviation/violations to the Ethics Committee.
2. Provide progress and closure reports to the Ethics Committee.
3. The principal investigator has to contact the responsible person at the research site or the responsible entities for obtaining permission for research implementation and disclosure of the outcomes before publication.

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**Chairman of Standing Committee for Scientific Research**

Dr.\ Hassan Ahmad Alhazmi

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Investigating Chinese Tertiary EFL Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices in the Application of Learning Management Systems Using Q Methodology

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Received: 07/09/2023  Accepted: 11/17/2023  Published: 12/15/2023

Abstract
The purpose of this study is to explore Chinese tertiary EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices as well as the relationships between them in the application of Learning Management Systems (LMS in short). By reviewing relevant literature, previous studies either carried out research on teachers’ beliefs and practices in the training of basic English learning skills or compared them between novice and experienced teachers. This study fills the gap of research on teachers’ beliefs and practices from the perspective of technology integration, specifically LMS application. By using the Q methodology, 38 EFL teachers teaching the same EFL course to undergraduate students at F University in mainland China were selected as research participants. After collecting research data through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, four different types of teachers’ LMS beliefs and three different levels of teachers’ LMS practices were identified by employing Q Methodology software-PQMethod and a web application Ken-Q analysis. Through comparing each participant’s corresponding beliefs and practices, both consistent and inconsistent relationships are found. The research findings not only prove the definite connection between teachers’ LMS beliefs and practices but also reveal the discrepancies between what teachers believe and do while using LMS. In general, The research can not only offer a new methodological solution for further research on cognitive factors like teachers’ beliefs but also provide pedagogical implications to EFL teachers to promote their career development.

Keywords: Chinese tertiary EFL teachers, Learning Management System, Q methodology, teachers’ beliefs, teachers’ practices

Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses are widely taught to students from all majors in Chinese tertiary schools. As an essential part of China’s higher education system, the teaching quality of EFL courses directly affects the overall level of China’s higher education. Chinese EFL courses have entered a fast-developing period since 2012 after having gone through several critical periods of development (Wen, 2019; Hu & Hu, 2020). In recent years, with the growing popularity of online learning, EFL courses in China have accelerated their speed to incorporate new educational technologies. Learning Management Systems (LMS) are designed as a comprehensive online learning management platform to meet the need. However, as a newborn medium of teaching, it has received quite different feedback from Chinese EFL teachers. Some teachers think they have significantly benefited from applying LMS; others doubt or even reject it (Huang, 2004; Li & Zhou, 2018).

Among all the possible factors that may influence teachers’ LMS practices, teachers’ LMS beliefs are well worth the attention. Because teachers’ beliefs, as the cognitive basis of teachers’ practice, have long been considered a decisive factor in teaching, even the learning process (Nespor, 1987; Arnett & Turnbull, 2008; Borg, 2011). Previous research on teachers’ beliefs and practices either targeted a specific language teaching and learning skill, such as reading, writing, learner autonomy, grammar, etc., or compared pre-service and in-service teachers (Borg, 2015). Little is known about how Chinese tertiary EFL teachers infuse their beliefs of LMS into English Language Teaching (ELT hereafter) and how their LMS practices transform their beliefs in return. Therefore, this study set out to explore Chinese tertiary EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices as well as their relationships in the application of LMS. It can fill the gap in research endeavors on teachers’ beliefs and practices in response to new trends of technology integration in ELT. With Chinese tertiary EFL teachers as the main research subjects, this study attempts to answer the following three research questions:

1) What are Chinese tertiary EFL teachers’ beliefs about LMS in ELT?
2) How do Chinese tertiary EFL teachers implement LMS in ELT?
3) What are the relationships between Chinese tertiary EFL teachers’ LMS beliefs and practices?

This paper will first review studies on teachers’ beliefs and practices and the development and functions of LMS. Next, it will elaborate on the research methodology employed in the study. The research findings, discussion, and conclusion will be presented in later sections.

Literature Review

Teacher’s Belief

Beliefs are the best indicators of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives. Although often stated by people as a cognitive concept, “belief” has challenged researchers a lot to reach a consensus on its definition, and so has “teacher’s belief”. Porter and Freeman (1986) think teachers’ beliefs are beliefs about the teaching orientation, which includes the role of students, the
learning process, the role of the school in society, the teachers themselves, the curriculum, teaching methods, and so on. Kagan (1992) defines teacher beliefs as “implicit assumptions about students, learning, classroom and subject content held by pre-service or in-service teachers.” Calderhead (1996) thinks teachers’ beliefs usually refer to the teacher’s teaching beliefs, that is, the opinions held and firmly believed by teachers about relevant concepts such as teaching, learning, learners, curriculum, teacher themselves or their role in the setting and whole process of teaching and learning. Wang (2008) classifies teachers’ educational beliefs from a psychological perspective. They are teacher efficacy, the nature of knowledge, causes motivating teacher’s certain behavior, self-awareness and self-value, self-efficacy, and beliefs about certain subjects. Borg (2011) suggests that beliefs are propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change. These studies have different focuses, but their definitions of teacher beliefs show more similarities than differences. To sum up, teachers’ beliefs refer to the ideas or propositions that teachers are self-convinced and pursue when they carry out teaching behaviors in the teaching process.

Teacher’s Beliefs and Practices

According to American psychologist Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), all beliefs link a given behavior with a characteristic of some kind, such as a consequence or outcome (behavioral belief), a normative expectation (normative belief), or opportunities and resources needed to perform the behavior (control belief). Therefore, teachers’ beliefs are also correlated with, aligned to, or reflected in their practice. Yang (2010) carried out a longitudinal qualitative case study on three EFL teachers selected from keynote universities in China to investigate their beliefs and practices in teaching writing. Through analysis of data, consistencies of beliefs and practices can be found in all of the three teachers. Similarly, Othman (2019) also finds a positive relationship between teachers’ beliefs about School Based Assessment (SBA) and their classroom practices among teachers in Malaysian government-funded schools. To focus the review scope on teachers’ beliefs and practices concerning technology integration, consistent relationships can also be found. Kim, Kim, Lee, Spector and DeMeester (2013) conducted an exploratory mixed methods study among twenty-two teachers who have participated in a four-year professional development project funded by the U.S. Department of Education. They proved that teachers’ beliefs about effective ways of teaching were related to their technology integration practices.

Findings from other studies have led researchers to conclude that teachers’ beliefs are not related or are disconnected, misaligned, or inconsistent with classroom practices. Gao and Liu (2013) focus their research on college English teachers’ beliefs in teaching listening and the relationships between their beliefs and practices. The results demonstrate that college English teachers could not follow their beliefs faithfully in their teaching practices, and accordingly, the disjuncture between teaching beliefs and practices sometimes occurs. Huang (2018) also finds inconsistency between college English teachers’ beliefs and practices in cultivating student’s autonomous learning abilities. Wang, Lee & Park (2020) identify salient belief-practice
discrepancies from a survey of 136 Chinese university EFL teachers about classroom writing assessment. In terms of technology integration, Nugroho & Mutiaraningrum (2020) reveal that EFL teachers in their research were well equipped with the importance and objective of teaching English using digital devices, but appeared hesitant and lacked preparation in their teaching practices.

More relevant articles examining the relationship between beliefs and practices (Sadaf & Johnson, 2017; Zhou, 2018; Tian & Feng, 2019; Li & Yu, 2019; Kartchava, Gatbonton, Ammar & Trofimovich, 2020; Gao & Cui, 2022;) show that there is no linear causal relationship between the two. It is a highly complex, dynamic, and dialectical one and could be influenced by many contextual factors, both internal and external to the teachers. In all the studies, the strength of the relationship varies across individuals and contexts, as well as the type of beliefs and practices being assessed (Buehl & Beck, 2015). There is never a perfect correspondence between beliefs and practices, nor a complete lack of relationship. As stated by Fives and Buehl (2012), the degree of congruence and incongruence between beliefs and practices matters. In the face of this complexity, this study proceeds to investigate the relationship between EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices during the process of incorporating LMS technology which has not yet been delved into.

**Learning Management System**

Learning Management System (LMS) is an online system that allows users to share information and collaborate online (Lonn & Teasley, 2009). The Open University in the UK conducts online education in Europe using FirstClass, developed by SoftArc, and it is often defined as the first modern LMS. The mainstream global LMS include Blackboard, Moodle, Canvas, Sakai, etc. LMS entered China in the 2000s with Blackboard and Moodle as two representatives. In later years, many Chinese universities have tried various kinds of open-source LMS successively. From 2015 to 2016, many LMSs that enabled interactive classroom teaching emerged in China (Chen, Ye, Liu, Xie, Zheng & Ji, 2019). Previous studies also contribute a lot to categorizing different functions of LMS. Hanna fin (1999) puts forward the classification framework based on the functions of other LMS modules. The framework consists of two major categories: resources and tools. The category of tools is further divided into resource acquisition, organizational, integrated operation, communication, and scaffolding tools. Dabbagh and Bannanritland Pearson (2004) prefer a four-category division: content construction tools, management tools, evaluation tools, and communication and collaboration tools. After that, Jurado (2014) and others proposed a more comprehensive and widely used framework based on two typical LMS platforms, WebCT and Pigpang. This framework is comprised of four types of tools: distribution tools, communication tools, interaction tools, and management tools.

“SuperStar” is the LMS being dealt with in this research. It comprises one platform and three terminals. The three terminals are the classroom terminal, the mobile terminal (a smartphone application), and the administration terminal. The “one platform, three terminals” teaching system
realizes in-time data collection, cloud analysis, processing, and immediate feedback for online and offline integrated teaching. It also promotes teaching reform and helps build a complete teaching ecosystem under the “Internet+” model. With more similarities than differences with other types of LMS, “SuperStar” comprises four functional modules: course construction; course management; teacher-student interaction or communication, and course evaluation. (“SuperStar” Teacher’s Guide Book, 2020)

The focus of previous LMS-related research is either on investigating teachers’ acceptance of online teaching platforms (Cigdem & Topcu, 2015; Motaghian, Hassanzadeh, & Moghadam, 2013) or exploring teachers’ LMS use only through the frequency of login (Hu & Wang, 2011; Zhang, Wang & Zeng, 2014). Although there is some research investigating external factors that influence teachers’ LMS practices (Kamla & Hafedh, 2010), little is known about the cognitive factors behind teachers’ LMS use. This study aims to fill in the gap by investigating teachers’ LMS practices from the perspective of their relationships with teachers’ beliefs.

**Method**

This study focuses on Chinese tertiary EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices from the perspective of their LMS use. Based on this objective, the researcher adopts the Q methodology to collect and analyze the research data. Q methodology, or Q-sorting, created by British physicist and psychologist William Stephenson, is a complete research methodology involving technique (sorting), method (factor analysis), philosophy, ontology, and epistemology. The design of Q sorting is based on “dynamic psychology”, aiming to elucidate links between knowledge and action (Lo Bianco, 2015). Q sorting classifies the subjects instead of the characteristics of the subjects. It combines the advantages of using both quantitative and qualitative studies (Brown, 1996). It is good at probing into its participants’ subjective or first-person viewpoints (Stephenson, 1953, 1982). With teachers’ beliefs as one of the significant research constructs, applying Q sorting can best serve the research objective of this study.

**Participants**

Altogether 38 EFL teachers at F University were selected as the research participants. Specialized in Finance and Economics, F University aims to cultivate talented students with comprehensive competencies, including technology literacy. By adopting purposeful sampling, 38 EFL teachers were selected because they all teach the same EFL course College English to undergraduate non-English major students. The selection criteria set on the course and target students is to limit the influence of external factors on teachers’ LMS beliefs and practices.

**Research Instruments**

According to the standard rules of conducting Q sorting, there are three sequential stages. Firstly, in the pre-sorting stage, a questionnaire with open-ended questions is used to collect teachers’ natural statements about teachers’ beliefs and practices concerning LMS use. This is
followed by focus group interviews. An interview protocol is designed by the questions in the questionnaire to further collect teachers’ statements. Secondly, during the sorting stage, a grading grid is designed for participants to sort different statements with the necessary guidance. Thirdly, in the post-sorting stage, the software named “PQMethod (2014)” and a desktop web application Ken-Q analysis, specially designed for Q sorting statistical analysis, are adopted for this study.

**Research Procedures**

There are five key phases to conducting Q sorting (Brown, 2008). Each of them will be explained in detail in this section.

**Generation of the Concourse**

“Concourse” refers to the collection of views, opinions, and problems related to a topic. The concourse can be drawn from different sources: the reviewed literature, literary and popular texts, formal interviews, informal discussions, and pilot studies (Brown, 1993). The researcher used ready-made statements from the literature review and naturalistic statements from focus group interviews as references to develop the belief concourse and the practice concourse, respectively. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, people hold three different beliefs about their specific behavior; thus, the “belief” concourse was made up of three parts, each of which represented one of the three beliefs: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs. Accordingly, the “practice” concourse statements mainly stated the four major LMS functions: a tool for course construction, course management, course interaction, and course evaluation.

**Construction of the Q-set**

When the two concourses were formulated, it was time to construct the respective Q-sets. According to Simon and Paul (2005), the exact size of the final Q-set will largely be dictated by the subject matter itself. A sampling approach was used to sort all the statements in the concourses into categories based on the three types of beliefs and four functions of LMS. Finally, there were 34 statements in the belief Q-set (See Appendix A) and 18 in the practice Q-set (See Appendix B). When the Q-sets were constructed, it was time to design the grading grid. This was based on the number of Q statements and the nature of the subject under study. In general, odd grades are selected, and grades 7 (1-7 or -3-+3), 9 (1-9 or -4-+4), and 11 (1-11 or -5-+5) are the most common ones. No matter which grading system is employed, the arrangement of different levels should be from “the most disagree” to “the most agree” from left to right. Under each level of grade, there are a certain number of statements. The number of statements should follow the principle of normal distribution or approximate normal distribution. The whole Q-sorting design is in the shape of an inverted pyramid. Based on the above, the grading grid for the belief Q-set is designed as follows:
Table 1. The grading grid for the belief Q-set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most disagree</th>
<th>Most agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accordingly, the practice Q-set is also formulated. (See below)

Table 2. The grading grid for the practice Q-set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most disagree</th>
<th>Most agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selection of P-set

In Q methodology, the group of participants performing Q sorting is called P-set. As Q methodology is a research method with a small sample size, it believes that the representative views of a particular issue are limited, and the views reflected in a small number of people will also exist in a larger group. Hence, the sample size of participants is usually small. But this doesn’t mean participants are randomly selected. They are expected to have a clear and distinct view of the problem and to define a factor in nature. The selection of participants, like the selection of the Q statements, requires both breadth and inclusiveness to ensure major factors discussed in this study have been fully represented. Hence, a purposeful and strategic sampling strategy was adopted to select reliable participants. The researcher maintained a balanced P-set regarding age, gender, length of teaching, professional titles, and degree. Finally, as mentioned above, 38 EFL teachers teaching the same EFL course to undergraduate students were selected as the P-set of this research.
Operation of Q sorting

The operation of Q sorting refers to the process in which participants grade the statements of Q statements according to a certain scale. This study chose forced distribution with a 7 (-3 to 3) grade scale. In the pre-sorting stage, the Q-set items were numbered and printed on a single sheet. A blank grid in the form of an inverted “pyramid” was printed on another score sheet. The researcher presented some pilot Q sorts as examples to ensure the participants accomplished the sorting efficiently. Each participant first sorted the “belief” Q-set. After that, they continued to sort the “practice” Q-set. After sorting, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with the participants to detect a more detailed understanding of their Q sorting. This was because the Q-set might not encompass all possible topics. Other themes and topics needed to be explored by asking open-ended questions about the placement of items, especially those at the extreme ends of the grid (-3 and +3 columns). After all these were done, the Q sorting data collection phase was accomplished.

Analysis of the Results

After all the participants completed the Q sorting, data analysis was conducted jointly using PQMethod(2014) and Ken-Q analysis. There were six sequential steps (See Figure Two). The first step was to type in Q statements. After completion, the second step was to input the Q-set by entering the number of Q statements. The third step was factor analysis, principal components analysis (PCA) is performed on the correlation matrix to reveal groupings or patterns in the data. Then, in the fourth step, varimax rotation was selected to improve the interpretability of the results and maximize high correlations so that patterns differentiating participants could be explored further. Once factors had been extracted and rotated, the fifth step was the final Q analysis of the rotated factors by “QANALYZE”. This can generate a report of all the previous steps. Finally, in the sixth step, the researcher assessed factor loadings. Participants whose Q-sorts loaded significantly with the same factor were assumed to have similar views (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

Before conducting the factor analysis, it was necessary to check the Q sorting quality of each participant to ensure the validity of each sorting grid. After careful examination, the researcher found that some participants put the same numbers in two blanks. Those problematic sorts were then identified and revised by the participants in time. Besides, after factor loading, the researcher found that the correlation scores of the three Q-sorts were the same. It rarely happens unless they have replicated each other’s results. To protect the participants’ dignity, the researcher eliminated two of the three subjects instead of asking them to repeat the sorting process. After that, there were 36 participants left for further analysis. According to the principles of simplicity, clarity, specificity, and stability, four belief factors and three practice factors were kept with certain numbers of participants loaded on them. The researcher mainly examined the extreme statements and identified the top six highest approval statements (scores of +3 and +2) and the top six
disapproval statements (scores of -3 and -2) for each factor. So far, the whole procedure of Q sorting has come to an end.

**Results**

After detecting Q factors for each group of Q-sorts, based on the significant statements of beliefs and practices factors, follow-up interviews were conducted with representative participants loaded on each factor to collect further data about their sorting choice. Finally, major types of beliefs and practices, as well as different relationships between them, were defined to respond to the three research questions of this study.

**Major Types of Teachers’ LMS Beliefs**

The identification codes for each participant assigned to belief factors can be found in Table Three. Out of the total of 38 P-set Q-sorts, four participants had significant loadings on Factor One, nine had significant loadings on Factor Two, ten loaded significantly on Factor Three, and five loaded significantly on Factor Four. Two participants were eliminated from Factor One. A total of 8 participants were not assigned to any factor in the four-factor solution based on their statistical disqualification.

**Table 3. P-set Loadings on belief factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Participant Codes (S stands for the subject)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>S37, S30, S22, S23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>S28, S15, S27, S12, S34, S06, S13, S19, S25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>S35, S01, S09, S38, S33, S10, S20, S14, S02, S21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>S32, S31, S17, S04, S11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participants eliminated S29, S36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Participants missed out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Belief Factor 1. Practical Behavioural Type**

A total of 4 out of 38 teacher participants were loaded on Factor One. Among the statements stating the basic function of LMS, Factor One participants believed LMS could promote teacher-student interaction (Statement No.5). They also believed using LMS can facilitate their teaching and innovate their teaching methods (Statements No. 8 and 2). When considering the advantages LMS can bring to their students, they believed LMS was a way of acquiring knowledge for the students (Statement No.24). In addition, they believed it was better to turn to their colleagues and customer service of the LMS company when they came across problems while using LMS (Statements No.16 and 15). The statements they disagreed with the most show that they didn’t think LMS-based teaching can guarantee “student-centered” teaching (Statement No.1). There was no link between specific theories with their LMS practice (Statement No.12). They also didn’t believe their LMS use was controlled by their previous learning experiences or
their pedagogical knowledge (statements No.32 and 31). Evaluation of teachers’ LMS use can have little impact on their actual use of it (statement No.13). Last but not least, they believed LMS isn’t a good choice to do scientific research (statement No.11). By re-examining the list, all the top 6 agreement statements are behavioral beliefs. Therefore, a primary conclusion can be made that Factor One participants held practical behavioral beliefs about LMS. They only acknowledge the practical use of LMS in their teaching and students’ learning, and they deny the connection of their LMS use with their prior knowledge and the potential to conduct scientific research.

Belief Factor 2: Normative Type

There were altogether nine teacher participants loaded on Factor Two. It was obvious that participants in Factor Two put all four normative beliefs in the top agreement list. They believed all the required competence by the school or educational ministries must be acquired, including pedagogical and technical knowledge about LMS. They also thought they needed to make full use of all the functions of LMS (Statements No. 26, 27, 28, and 29). Additionally, they believed LMS enabled them to give better teaching feedback to their students (Statement No.7). In contrast with participants in Factor One, those in Factor Two disbelieved in LMS’s function of promoting teacher-student interaction (Statement No. 5). They also did not believe students’ interpersonal, critical and creative thinking abilities could be cultivated through their use of LMS (Statements No. 19, 21, 22, 23). There was only one similarity with Factor One, participants in Factor Two also disbelieved their pedagogical knowledge controlled their LMS practice (Statement No.31). In conclusion, participants in Factor Two were strong supporters of LMS. They were advocates of national and school policies on LMS development. They were also very optimistic about its future development. However, at the same time, they had not explored LMS functions deeply enough to cultivate the higher-level abilities of students.

Belief Factor 3: Cognitive Behavioural Type

As the largest group of participants, ten teachers were loaded on Factor Three. The statements ranked top three were all behavioral beliefs about the course management, construction, and evaluation of LMS (Statements No. 4, 3, 6). It showed that this group of teachers had acknowledged the major functions of LMS. Besides, they also believed LMS could promote the innovation of teaching methods and improve teaching feedback (Statement No. 2, 7). Last but not least, they firmly believed in the future development of LMS. The top six disagreement statements fell into two categories: one was the control beliefs, and the other was the students’ skills. They did not believe their pedagogical knowledge, professional efficacy, responsibility, or previous learning experiences could control their LMS practice (Statements No. 31, 34, 32). They also did not believe LMS could cultivate students’ interpersonal, critical thinking, and creative learning abilities (statements No. 19, 22, 23). From the above analysis, a conclusion can be drawn about the participants in Factor Three: similar to teachers in Factor Two. They welcomed the incorporation of LMS in their teaching process. However, comparatively, they were more
affirmative about various LMS functions and their future development. Their LMS beliefs were much more profound and broader, so defining them as cognitive behavioral beliefs was appropriate.

**Belief Factor 4: Integrated Type**

A total of five out of 38 participants were loaded on Factor Four. As evidenced by the characteristic statements associated with factor Four, teachers assigned to this belief category believe LMS-based teaching is the inevitable trend of college English teaching reform in China (Statement No.9). They tended to focus on the relevant knowledge and technology they needed to acquire about LMS (statements No.16, 27, 29). They believed the use of LMS can benefit the students in mastering knowledge (Statement No.24). On the contrary, they believed the use of LMS did not relieve their workload (statement No.8), nor did it strengthen the connection between theory and practice (Statement No.12). Similar to participants in Factors One, Two and Three, they also did not believe the use of LMS can cultivate students’ higher-level abilities (statements No. 19, 21, 22). Last but not least, they thought LMS-based teaching could not improve the quality and efficiency of teaching feedback. The top six agreement statements were both behavioral and normative beliefs. None of the six top agreement statements was about LMS functions. That meant these teachers had formed their principles of using LMS and were also influenced by external rules or requirements. Overall, characteristic beliefs in Factor Four centered partially on how teachers should teach and partially on what students can learn. On the one hand, they thought they needed to master this new technology. On the other hand, they harbored some doubts about its benefits. In summary, they held integrated beliefs about LMS.

The findings of the four different types of teachers suggest that participant teachers held more behavioral and normative beliefs about LMS use in their teaching process. Apart from this commonality, they differed in their distinctive belief characteristics. With these differences in their LMS beliefs, the research continued to explore whether there were differences in their LMS practices.

**Major Types of Teachers’ LMS Practices**

The identification codes for each participant assigned to practice factors can be found in Table Four. Out of the 38 participants, nine had significant loadings on Factor One. Eight had significant loadings on Factor Two. By eliminating S29 and S36, there were six participants left. Twelve were loaded significantly on Factor Three. Five participants were not assigned to any factor based on their statistical disqualification.

Table 4. P-set loadings on practice factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Participant Codes (S stands for subject)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>S05, S21, S09, S06, S33, S14, S25, S31, S30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>S37, S32, S01, S26, S34, S02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>S18, S10, S17, S13, S19, S12, S03, S16, S11, S08, S04, S22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of nine out of 38 participants were loaded on Factor One. It was worth noting that the top three agreement statements chosen by this group were all course construction functions of LMS. The top four to top six agreement statements were all course management functions. It demonstrated that teachers in this group used these two fundamental functions more than the other two: teacher-student interaction and course evaluation. Based on the statements distinguishing Factor 1 from all other factors, teachers who ascribed to it appear to be facilitators of basic LMS functions. They set up online courses and managed them well (Statements No.1 and 3). They submitted various teaching materials and used the “Sign in” function (Statement No.4) in class and the “Assignment” function (Statement No.6) after class. However, they did not use other diversified functions often. Therefore, it was appropriate to call them “elementary users”.

**Practice Factor 2: Intermediate Users**

There were six participants loaded on Factor Two. Notably, teachers in this group also put the first three-course construction functions on the top list of agreement. Besides, they used “peer rating” (Statement No.11) and “Exam” or “Quiz” (Statement No.16) functions more than participants in Factor One. As for the disagreement statement list, they had chosen “Sign in” (Statement No.4) and “Group Task” (Statement No.7), contrary to that of Factor One. They also put “Timer” (Statement No.10) and “Notice” (Statement No.5) functions in this list. Moreover, although they used evaluation functions often, they did not set grading methods and evaluation scales for each assignment or task in detail (Statement 17). Teachers in Factor Two employed more course evaluation methods than their colleagues in Factor One, but no evidence showed they were good at using interaction functions. So, it was still possible for them to explore more diversified use of LMS. They were more suitable to be defined as intermediate users.

**Practice Factor 3: Advanced Users**

A total of 12 out of 38 participants were loaded on Factor Three. As the biggest group in the three practice categories, teachers in this group exhibited more differences than similarities compared to Factor Two. Based on their distinguishing belief statements, they put one interaction function (Statement No. 13) and two-course evaluation functions (Statement No.16 and 18) on their top 6 agreement list. It was striking to see statement No.3 on the disagreement list. They thought their LMS page design was not good enough. In addition, they seldom used course management functions like “Timer” and “Voting” (statements No.10 and 8). Similar to Factor Two, they also did not set up a grading method and evaluation scale for each assignment or task in detail (Statement No.17), nor did they use the “Group Discussion” function to guide group tasks (Statement No.14). From the findings above, the teachers defining Factor Three had a strong belief...
that the selection of LMS functions should be based on students’ learning habits and class effectiveness. Based on follow-up interviews, it was evident that this group of P-set participants made stronger efforts to interact with and evaluate their students to facilitate class participation and the learning outcome. To conclude, although they were not experts in using LMS, they put students at the center of their LMS design. Therefore, they were more advanced users of it. By locating the three different types of teachers according to their LMS use, it is evident that these teacher participants exhibited quite different applications of LMS functions. Are their LMS practices consistent or inconsistent with their beliefs? The answer can be found in the following section.

Relationships between Teachers’ LMS Beliefs and Practices

By generalizing participants who loaded on significant belief and practice types, 20 of them were left. As shown in Appendix A, these participants have demonstrated a wide range of differences not only in their LMS beliefs but also in their LMS practices. Diversified collocations can be found by matching specific belief and practice types to each teacher participant.

Discussion

By using the Q methodology, four different types of teachers’ LMS beliefs and three different levels of teachers’ LMS practices are revealed. Comparative analysis of the research data proves that inconsistencies do exist between teachers’ beliefs and practices. This section will present further discussions by referring to relevant studies following the three research questions.

RQ 1 What are Chinese tertiary EFL teachers’ beliefs about LMS in ELT?

Teacher participants in this study held more behavioral and normative beliefs than control beliefs. According to Ajzen (1991), each behavioral belief first links the behavior to a certain outcome or some other attribute, such as the cost incurred by performing the behavior. Teachers who held behavioral beliefs in this study were quite concerned about the outcome of their LMS practices, especially the learning outcomes of their students. Secondly, Ajzen (1991) thinks normative beliefs are concerned with the likelihood that important referent individuals or groups approve or disapprove of performing a given behavior. As shown in this study, the normative type of teachers agreed with all four normative beliefs and thought they needed to implement LMS-based teaching. These findings resemble that of the study conducted by Sadaf and Johnson (2017). They reveal teachers’ integration of digital literacy was related to their behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs. However, they give no comparison of the three beliefs embedded within the research participants like this research.

RQ 2 How do Chinese tertiary EFL teachers implement LMS in ELT?

In reviewing teachers’ LMS practices, although advanced users comprise the largest group of teachers among the three types, they only account for 32% of the research population. That
shows more teacher participants stay at the elementary or intermediate level of LMS use. These teachers used course construction and management functions more than interaction and evaluation functions. It may result from internal factors such as teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, or past learning or teaching experiences. They could also be influenced by external factors such as students’ online learning attitudes or competency, the school’s or LMS companies’ technological support, etc. The research of Kamla and Hafedh (2010) explored this issue in depth and found three critical factors that influence the instructors’ actual use of LMS. These critical factors are related to the instructor, organization, and technology.

**RQ 3 What are the relationships between Chinese tertiary EFL teachers’ LMS beliefs and practices?**

Consistent and inconsistent relationships have been found between teacher participants’ LMS beliefs and practices. On the one hand, some of their beliefs align with their practices. Some with practical behavioral or integrated beliefs only use elementary functions like uploading teaching materials and releasing online assignments; Some others with normative or cognitive behavioral beliefs can apply intermediate or advanced functions like organizing online quizzes or exams and initiating online discussions. This finding concurs with that of Othman (2019), which attempted to examine teachers’ beliefs and practices about School Based Assessment (SBA) in Malaysian schools. By adopting Pearson correlation analysis, the research yielded a significant relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their assessment practices.

On the other hand, some teachers’ practices did not follow their beliefs. For instance, the majority of elementary users held cognitive behavioral beliefs. On the contrary, some advanced users had integrated beliefs. Similar results can be found in Gao and Liu’s study (2013), which investigated 325 Chinese college English teachers’ beliefs in listening teaching and the relationships between teaching beliefs and practices through questionnaires and case studies. The results showed that they could not faithfully follow their beliefs in teaching practices, and accordingly, disjunctures between their beliefs and practices sometimes occur. Likewise, the findings of Nugroho & Mutiaraningrum (2020) also revealed that EFL teachers were well equipped with the importance and objective of teaching English using digital devices, but appeared hesitant and lacked preparation in their teaching practices.

**Conclusion**

This study aims to explore Chinese tertiary EFL teachers’ LMS beliefs and practices as well as the relationships between them. By using the Q methodology, four types of teachers’ LMS beliefs and three levels of teachers’ LMS practices were generated. Through comparing each teacher participant’s corresponding beliefs and practices, both consistencies and inconsistencies can be found. These research findings could prove the definite connection between teachers’ beliefs and practices and reveal that sometimes there are discrepancies between what teachers believe and do. From what has been elaborated above, this research fills the gap of research on
teachers’ beliefs and practices in new technology integration, especially the application of LMS. It highlights the importance of teachers’ beliefs in the teaching process. Q sorting offers a new methodological solution for further research on psychological or cognitive factors. It is beneficial to EFL teachers to help them recognize the profound and unheeded influence of their pedagogical beliefs on their teaching practices. The research findings are also valuable for school administrators who advocate technology-education integration and enterprises who developed the LMS products. To improve the effectiveness of EFL teachers’ LMS practices, it is advisable for researchers who have an interest in this field to delve into the factors that have brought the inconsistencies between teachers’ LMS beliefs and practices, thus promoting EFL teachers’ LMS teaching and even their career development.

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### Appendix A

#### Generalization of Teacher Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Belief type</th>
<th>Practice Type</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S30</td>
<td>Practical behavioral</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S25</td>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S06</td>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S33</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S21</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S14</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S09</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S31</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S37</td>
<td>Practical behavioral</td>
<td>intermediate</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S34</td>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S02</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S01</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S32</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S22</td>
<td>Practical behavioral</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S13</td>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S12</td>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Questionnaire of LMS Beliefs

**Behavioral Beliefs**:  
1. LMS-based teaching can truly achieve a “student-centered” objective.  
2. LMS can promote the innovation of teaching methods.  
3. LMS can make course construction more systematic.  
4. LMS can realize more effective course management.  
5. LMS can promote teacher-student interaction.  
6. LMS can make course evaluation more objective and diversified.  
7. LMS-based teaching can improve the quality and efficiency of teaching feedback.  
8. LMS can help teachers complete teaching tasks more efficiently and reduce workload.  
9. LMS-based teaching is the inevitable College English teaching reform trend in China.  
10. LMS is an effective way to test students’ learning results.  
11. LMS helps teachers to carry out scientific research.  
12. LMS strengthens the connection between theory and practice in College English teaching.  
13. Evaluation of teachers’ use of LMS can promote teachers’ teaching effectiveness and career development.  
14. I use my knowledge of educational technology and pedagogy to solve problems in the process of using LMS.  
15. I solve the problems in using LMS through the customer service of Superstar Company.  
16. I solve the problems in using LMS with the help of my colleagues.  
17. I improve my application ability for LMS by attending relevant training and lectures.  
18. I improve my application ability of LMS through self-summary and reflection.  
19. LMS-based learning can develop students’ interpersonal skills.  
20. LMS-based learning can develop students’ autonomous learning skills.  
21. LMS-based learning can develop students’ cooperative learning skills.  
22. LMS-based learning can develop students’ critical thinking skills.  
23. LMS-based learning can develop students’ creative learning skills.  
24. LMS-based learning can help students master knowledge.  
25. LMS-based learning can bring students a better learning experience.  

**Normative Beliefs**:  
26. I should actively apply new educational technology to my teaching.

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S19</td>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>Cognitive behavioral</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S17</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S04</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>inconsistent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
27. I should master the knowledge and technology related to LMS.
28. I should make full use of the functions of LMS in my teaching.
29. I should use information technology to make students’ learning more convenient and happier.

Control Beliefs
30. My LMS use is controlled by my ability to use information technology.
31. My LMS use is controlled by my pedagogical knowledge.
32. My LMS use is controlled by my previous learning experience.
33. My LMS use is controlled by my knowledge of educational information technology.
34. My LMS use is controlled by my professional efficacy and responsibility.

Appendix C
Questionnaire of LMS Practices

Course Construction:
1. I use LMS in all the courses and classes I teach.
2. I share different kinds of learning resources in LMS.
3. My page design on the LMS is concise, neat and user-friendly.

Course Management:
4. I use the “Sign in” function to check student attendance.
5. I use the “Notice” function to post online notices.
6. I use the “Assignment” function to assign online assignments.
7. I use the “Group Task” function to assign online group tasks.
8. I use the “Vote” function to initiate online votes.
9. I use the “Questionnaire” function to release online questionnaires.
10. I use the “Timer” function to record students' time to complete in-class tasks.
11. I use the “Rating” function to invite students to do peer ratings.
12. I use the “Manage” function to invite colleagues or students to join the teaching team as course assistants.

Course Interaction:
13. I use the “Manage” function to organize online discussions.
14. I use the “Group Discussion” function to guide group tasks.
15. I use the “Quick Answer” or “Select” function to raise questions in class.

Course Evaluation:
16. I use the “Exam” or “Quiz” functions to compose, test, and mark papers online.
17. I set up the grading method and evaluation scale for each assignment or task in detail.
18. I use the “Statistics” function to view and export students’ grades.
Investigating Developmental Language Disorder among Young Kurdish Students and its Impact on Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract
This study aims to understand the difficulties young Kurdish language learners face with developmental language disorder in bilingual settings and to evaluate their impact on English as a foreign language acquisition. Underscoring the significance of this research, the study's primary objective is to determine the characteristics of developmental language disorder in this context and their implications for academic assimilation. The Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals assessment was selected to achieve this primary objective due to its suitability for assessing the British population's linguistic characteristics and age group. Seven subtests were chosen to comprehensively evaluate various aspects of language proficiency, allowing for a thorough evaluation of the participants' language skills. This research expands its significance. These initiatives include more extensive investigations, innovative participant recruitment methods, exploration of cultural influences, longitudinal studies to discover long-term effects, critical analysis of intervention strategies, examination of the complex relationship between emotional regulation and language development, investigation of genetic and environmental factors contributing to developmental language disorder, and evaluation of the far-reaching consequences. Upon analysis of the collected data, several significant findings shed light on the efficacy of individualised approaches in mitigating communication and academic difficulties in individuals with developmental language disorders.

Keywords: developmental language disorders, English as a foreign language, Kurdish learners, mixed-methods research, pragmatic challenges, intervention strategies

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Introduction

This section provides an overview of the topic at hand and presents the objectives and structure of the study. The introduction serves as the development of language, a fundamental aspect of human cognition, as an essential component for communication, learning, and social engagement. Nevertheless, confident children may face considerable obstacles along this developmental trajectory, resulting in Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). DLD is a type of communication disorder distinguished by challenges in comprehending and utilising language, even though individuals with this disorder possess normal hearing and non-verbal cognitive capabilities (Norbury et al., 2016).

The present study thoroughly investigates DLD in a population of young Kurdish students, explicitly examining its impact on their ability to learn EFL. To appreciate the significance of this study, it is imperative to delve into the broader context and rationale that underlies the selection of this research problem.

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq exhibits a rich linguistic environment characterised by various languages, with Kurdish being the dominant indigenous language. The growing momentum of globalisation and internationalisation in education has led to a heightened focus on acquiring English as a valuable skill for personal and professional development. As a result, the inclusion of English as a foreign language has been implemented in the educational curriculum of numerous schools, encompassing private institutions in urban areas such as Sulaymaniyah. Within this particular context, it is evident that young Kurdish students who experience DLD encounter a distinct array of obstacles. DLD impacts the fundamental language abilities crucial for proficient communication, encompassing vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension (Bishop et al., 2017). The difficulties can prove incredibly formidable in a bilingual setting, wherein students are not solely contending with their mother tongue, Kurdish, but are also grappling with the complexities associated with acquiring proficiency in the English language. The influence of DLD on language acquisition within this context remains unexplored, rendering this study both timely and essential.

The study's significance lies in its potential to transform the educational landscape for children with DLD in Kurdistan and other regions. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of how DLD affects language development within a bilingual context can yield valuable insights into the educational requirements of these individuals and facilitate the implementation of interventions grounded in empirical evidence. The research findings can contribute to identifying students who may be at risk for DLD, thereby reducing early intervention strategies. The timely identification and intervention of DLD play a crucial role in enhancing linguistic abilities and mitigating this condition's academic and social ramifications (Bishop et al., 2017). Furthermore, this research has the potential to provide insights into the difficulties encountered by individuals with DLD within the context of EFL education. The acquisition of a foreign language is inherently intricate, and when combined with DLD, the challenges are further magnified. Gaining insight into these challenges has the potential to facilitate the creation of focused interventions and assistance aimed at assisting these students in overcoming language barriers and achieving academic success. Moreover, this study holds practical significance for educators, parents, and policymakers. This study aims to advance inclusive education practices in Kurdistan and other regions by shedding light on the difficulties encountered by students with DLD and proposing evidence-based strategies to address these challenges.

This study investigates how having DLD affects the learning abilities of young EFL students. The study's significance stems from several factors yet underdiagnosed disorders that can
negatively impact a child's educational and social development. This study contributes to early language and learning by identifying young EFL learners at risk for DLD. In this article, the effects of DLD on EFL study are discussed. Thanks to the findings of this study, interventions and supports for EFL students with DLD that are uniquely tailored can be developed. Teachers, parents, and policymakers could benefit from EFL student research. This research can potentially aid DLD at-risk students by enhancing our understanding of and response to their unique learning challenges.

To address the multifaceted challenges posed by DLD among young Kurdish students, this study endeavours to answer the following research questions:

1. How can core language skills be nurtured in Kurdish students with DLD?
2. How can receptive language skills be enhanced in Kurdish students with DLD?
3. How can language content in Kurdish students with DLD be enriched?
4. What approaches are effective in strengthening language in Kurdish students with DLD?
5. What challenges do class teachers and parents perceive in students' receptive and expressive language skills with DLD?
6. In what ways do children with DLD encounter difficulties in pragmatic language usage?

**Literature Review**

The present literature review examines the domain of Applied Linguistics, precisely honing in on Clinical Linguistics, with specific emphasis on DLD's dynamic nature. DLD is a language impairment that primarily impacts young children, providing it an essential domain of investigation within clinical linguistics. This section presents a comprehensive overview of the significant studies conducted in this domain, offering valuable insights into the extensive and ever-evolving body of literature that defines this field.

**Research on Developmental Language Disorder**

In light of its significant implications for child development and education, recent studies have positioned DLD as a prominent focus of investigation within clinical linguistics. To maintain the timeliness and pertinence of this review, we have incorporated research articles published within the preceding five-year period; this enables the incorporation of recent advancements in research on DLD and facilitates their comparison with results obtained from conventional studies conducted more than twenty years ago. DLD is a clinical condition distinguished by notable challenges in acquiring and developing language skills, even in individuals with cognitive and sensory abilities that are within the typical range (Li et al., 2019). DLD has gained significant interest from researchers, clinicians, and educators due to its considerable impact on individuals and society. DLD can give rise to difficulties in various domains, such as communication, academic achievement, and overall well-being in children affected by this condition. The evolution of research on DLD is a notable aspect. The core characteristics and challenges of DLD were initially established through conventional research twenty years ago. Nevertheless, the ever-evolving nature of scientific investigation has resulted in notable progressions in recent times. Through a comparison between traditional research and contemporary studies, it becomes evident that our understanding of DLD has expanded and become more varied.

In the initial stages of research, there was a predominant emphasis on identifying the fundamental characteristics of DLD and its effects on the progression of language acquisition. These seminal works established the groundwork for developing diagnostic criteria and intervention strategies. Traditional research has been instrumental in increasing knowledge and
understanding of DLD in educational and clinical environments. On the other hand, recent scholarly investigations have broadened the scope of inquiry into DLD. The content of this phenomenon extends to a broader range of elements, including the economic ramifications associated with DLD, as discussed by Cronin (2017), the social and emotional obstacles encountered by individuals with DLD as highlighted by Forbes (2019), the importance of teacher expertise and classroom assistance as emphasised by Glasby (2021), and the utilisation of cross-linguistic analyses to enhance the precision of diagnostic procedures as explored by Pham and Ebert (2020).

**Cross-linguistic Investigations of Developmental Language Disorder**

Shaalan (2010) made a significant scholarly contribution by highlighting the significance of conducting cross-linguistic investigations in Specific Language Impairment (SLI). The researchers' study specifically centred on Gulf Arabic (GA) and the contrasting theories regarding Specific Language Impairment (SLI), emphasising the necessity of distinguishing between overall processing deficits and explanations specific to particular linguistic domains. The research employed language assessments to detect Specific Language Impairment (SLI) in children who speak General American English (GA), uncovering differences in their proficiency in constructing sentences containing fronted noun phrases. Furthermore, the study investigated phonological complexity by utilising nonword repetition tasks, thereby providing insights into the influence of phonological variables in Specific Language Impairment (SLI).

Since the publication of Shaalan's seminal research, there has been a sustained growth in cross-linguistic studies examining DLD. The significance of incorporating a wide range of languages and dialects has been acknowledged by scholars, leading to the enrichment of our knowledge and the enhancement of diagnostic methodologies.

Pham and Ebert (2020) conducted a comparative examination of diagnostic tools for identifying DLD, explicitly concentrating on assessing Vietnamese-speaking children. The present study investigated the efficacy of phrase repetition tasks and nonword repetition in identifying DLD in monolingual Vietnamese individuals. The study results indicate that these tasks effectively identify DLD within this linguistic setting, emphasising the importance of utilising assessments specific to the language being assessed. In addition, a comprehensive study was conducted by Laasonen et al. (2018) to examine DLD in preschool-aged children. The study employed behavioural and cognitive methodology. The research conducted by the authors involved a heterogeneous sample of children suspected of experiencing a DLD. This study aimed to understand the non-linguistic cognitive challenges commonly observed in individuals with DLD while considering the influence of different languages on these difficulties. The comprehensive approach employed in this study was designed to contribute to the advancement of language-independent tools for predicting and diagnosing DLD. This research direction holds significant potential for further investigation in the future.

**Psychological Experiences of Children with Language Developmental Language Disorder**

Recent research by Burnley et al. (2023) highlights that children with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) face emotional and social challenges that have been understudied. The study focuses on understanding these psychosocial issues in DLD, comparing them to autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and emphasises the importance of further research and intervention development.
Interviews with mothers of DLD children reveal recurring themes of anxiety, social frustration, and an inability to tolerate uncertainty, which may have implications for treatment and future research.

**The Economic Implications of Developmental Language Disorder**

Cronin (2017) conducted an in-depth analysis of the economic consequences associated with DLD, explicitly focusing on the financial burden it places on families concerning healthcare expenditures. The research highlighted the heightened healthcare needs of children with DLD, emphasising the significance of timely identification and intervention to alleviate long-term financial strains. Cronin's research shed light on the societal ramifications of DLD, specifically focusing on its influence on literacy and numeracy abilities. These skills, in turn, impact individuals' purchasing power and contribute to economic development.

Cronin's research constituted an essential endeavour to comprehend the economic consequences of DLD. The study focused on the significant healthcare requirements of children impacted by DLD, highlighting the crucial significance of prompt identification and intervention. Cronin emphasised the importance of early interventions in mitigating long-term financial burdens by illuminating the increased healthcare costs families bear. The study highlighted the concrete economic advantages associated with the timely identification and assistance provided to individuals with DLD and their families. Furthermore, Cronin's research expanded its scope to analyse the societal ramifications of DLD, specifically its impact on individuals' literacy and numeracy skills. The study comprehensively examined the complex relationship between language proficiency and economic prosperity. Individuals with proficient literacy and Participation in the labour market are skilled for those with numeracy skills, make informed financial decisions, and contribute positively to economic growth. The research conducted by Cronin shed light on the possible enduring economic ramifications of DLD, underscoring the imperative nature of comprehensive support systems. Following Cronin's groundbreaking research, scholars have persistently investigated the financial aspects of DLD, further enhancing our understanding and fine-tuning approaches to alleviate its consequences.

Furthermore, McGregor (2020) conducted an in-depth analysis of the distinctive difficulties presented by DLD, categorising it as a multifaceted and frequently misconstrued condition. McGregor's study proposed the promotion of parental and teacher awareness concerning the diverse labels that may be attributed to children with DLD. By offering evidence-based information regarding the development and disorders of language, parents and educators can make well-informed decisions that have the potential to enhance academic and economic outcomes for individuals with DLD.

**The Cognitive and Behavioral Dimensions of Developmental Language Disorder**

Laasonen et al. (2018) conducted an extensive longitudinal investigation focusing on children suspected of experiencing DLD. The study investigated the behavioural and cognitive aspects of DLD in preschool-aged children. The study sought to identify non-linguistic mental challenges associated with DLD in various languages through conventional and innovative assessment techniques. The results of this study show potential for the advancement of language-agnostic prediction and diagnostic software, as well as a universal framework for interventions targeting DLD. An outstanding contribution of the study was its focus on cognitive challenges unrelated to language. Laasonen et al. (2018) established the groundwork for creating language-
independent prediction and diagnostic software by analysing cognitive processing, problem-solving capabilities, and other non-linguistic factors. This innovative approach shows potential for the early identification and intervention of DLD in individuals with various linguistic backgrounds, ultimately leading to enhanced outcomes for children affected by this condition.

On the other hand, the behavioural aspects of DLD have garnered substantial attention in research endeavours. The study conducted by Forbes (2019) has made a significant scholarly contribution by examining the social and emotional learning difficulties experienced by individuals with DLD. In the social and emotional learning context, the present study investigated the challenges of DLD individuals. The study underscored the significant ramifications of these challenges on multiple domains of their lives. The objective of Forbes's study was to investigate the ability of individuals with linguistic difficulties or language impairment to perceive facial expressions and interpret social and emotional cues accurately. This research sheds light on the intricate nature of social interactions for individuals with DLD.

Forrest et al. (2022) conducted a comprehensive study on adolescents suspected of having Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). Using parent/caregiver questionnaires, they investigated social cognition and behaviour and discovered significant differences between DLD adolescents and typically developing peers. Notably, DLD adolescents had difficulty attributing personality traits to shapes, implying problems, and understanding the motivations of others. This study sheds light on the social challenges that adolescents with DLD face.

**Parental Awareness and Classroom Screening**

The significance of parental awareness and classroom screening cannot be overstated in the context of early identification and intervention for DLD. Floyd (2022) conducted a study examining the variables that impact the recognition of children diagnosed with DLD and the potential issue of these children being overlooked within the broader population. The primary objective of Floyd's study was to elucidate the correlation between the characteristics of children and parents and the probability of a child being diagnosed with DLD. This literature review offers a comprehensive examination of Floyd's research and explores its potential impact on enhancing the identification process for children with DLD. Floyd's research produced several significant findings. Significant associations were found between caregiver concern and observable developmental skills, specifically expressive language and word reading abilities, in children diagnosed with DLD and/or dyslexia. Nevertheless, it was noted that there was no significant correlation between caregiver concern and children's receptive language abilities. Regrettably, the data at hand did not offer adequate information to investigate potential correlations between the educational levels of caregivers thoroughly, the socioeconomic status of families, and the probability of receiving a referral for DLD.

Benavides et al. (2023) investigated parental awareness of their children's language difficulties, particularly in cases of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) in resource-constrained settings. They examined the efficacy of Parental Linguistic Concern Questions (PLCQ) in detecting DLD in monolingual Spanish-speaking Mexican children. The study discovered that four PLCQs effectively identified DLD, improving diagnostic accuracy significantly. Questions about biological and environmental conditions (BECQ) were less effective. This study emphasises the importance of using parental questionnaires, such as the PLCQ, to address DLD underdiagnosis in Mexico.
The Social and Emotional Consequences of Developmental Language Disorder

In a publication by Forbes (2019), the author discussed the social and emotional difficulties encountered by children diagnosed with DLD. The research investigated the participants' capacity to perceive facial expressions and link them with verbal and visual stimuli, emphasising the complex connection between language deficits and socio-emotional growth. Utilising standardised tests and non-verbal tasks, the research has provided insight into the challenges children with DLD encounter in their ability to interpret social and emotional cues.

According to a recent study by Arts et al. (2022), Observations indicate that adolescents diagnosed with DLD face notable difficulties in their social-emotional functioning compared to their typically developing counterparts. Adolescents diagnosed with DLD experience various social-emotional challenges. These challenges encompass heightened shyness, anxiety in social contexts, limited peer interactions, an elevated risk of victimisation, social isolation, depression, and increased hyperactivity and conduct problems. Although social-emotional challenges clearly and significantly influence adolescents with DLD, research specifically focused on this group is relatively scarce. Arts and colleagues (2022) highlighted the lack of research on the social-emotional functioning of school-aged children and adolescents with DLD, indicating a significant gap in the existing body of literature.

Diagnostic Instruments for Developmental Language Disorder

Pham and Ebert (2020) conducted a study to expand the research on DLD. They investigated the effectiveness of nonword repetition (NWR) and sentence repetition as screening methods for DLD while also considering the linguistic variations observed across different languages. The research investigation centred on a cohort of children who spoke Vietnamese and emphasised the capacity of these tasks to detect DLD in individuals who only speak one language effectively. The study underscored the significance of conducting cross-linguistic analysis to improve the precision of diagnostic assessments.

Furthermore, early DLD predictors in preschool children have been extensively investigated in recent research (Ramírez et al., 2023). These studies have identified several critical indicators, including delays in gesture production, receptive and expressive vocabulary, syntactic comprehension, and word combination up to 30 months of age. Additionally, a family history of DLD has emerged as a significant risk factor, underscoring the genetic component of the disorder. Moreover, socioeconomic status and environmental input have been recognised as contributing factors, albeit with lower predictive power (Ramírez et al., 2023). These early predictors are vital in identifying children at risk for DLD, allowing for timely interventions and support to mitigate potential long-term consequences.

Teacher Understanding and Classroom Support

In a recent study conducted by Glasby (2021), the focus was on examining the extent of teachers' understanding of DLD and their capacity to effectively comprehend and address the unique requirements of students with DLD. The present study questioned and challenged misconceptions regarding DLD, emphasising the significance of increasing knowledge and understanding among educators and caregivers. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of inclusive methodologies in education and the necessary assistance to integrate students with DLD into the academic setting successfully.
The comprehension of educators and the provision of classroom assistance are pivotal factors in facilitating the successful integration of students diagnosed with DLD within educational environments. According to Glasby et al. (2022), DLD is a prevalent yet frequently inconspicuous condition that impacts an estimated two students per classroom. To effectively address challenges associated with DLD, educators must comprehensively understand its defining characteristics and the educational implications that arise from it. Nevertheless, a study conducted by Glasby et al. (2022) reveals a notable disparity between the self-assessed understanding of teachers regarding DLD and their actual demonstrated knowledge. The observed discrepancy raises concerns regarding the readiness level among teachers to offer essential assistance to students with DLD, as required by anti-discrimination laws, professional guidelines, and policies promoting inclusive education. Hence, it is imperative to bridge this gap in knowledge by implementing focused interventions, such as comprehensive teacher training and continuous professional development. This is crucial to guarantee that students with DLD are provided with the necessary assistance to academically and socially excel.

Methodology

This section presents an inclusive description of the study's methodology, aiming to facilitate readers’ understanding and reproduction of the research. The methodology section is structured into distinct sub-sections encompassing the following components: participants, instruments, procedures, and data analysis.

Participants

The Participants section provides a comprehensive account of the sample and research setting, thereby augmenting the overall transparency of the study. The present study provides a complete description of the selection process, sample size, and pertinent demographic characteristics.

The present study utilised judgmental sampling, a deliberate selection process where each sample member is chosen carefully, relying on the researcher's expertise (Fleetwood, 2023). Judgmental sampling was employed in this study because it allowed the researchers to tailor their participant selection to their research goals, criteria, and expertise while ensuring a diverse and representative sample. This method was chosen to provide a comprehensive representation of the target population. The research consisted of a sample of eight participants, consisting of four individuals diagnosed with DLD (comprising three males and one female) and four Typically Developing (TD) individuals (comprising three males and one female). The selection of these participants was conducted with meticulous attention to ensure a comprehensive representation of the target population. All individuals involved in the study fell within the age range of six to eight years and were enrolled in their inaugural year of primary education. The justification for choosing children within this specific age range and academic year was to examine the progression of language acquisition during a critical phase of early childhood education. The age group in question is frequently distinguished by substantial advancements in language development, rendering it a reasonable step for studying language acquisition and evaluating the efficacy of interventions.

To achieve a comprehensive and equitable representation of genders and language proficiencies, it was imperative to incorporate participants from both male and female demographics and a diverse range of children suffering from DLD and Typically Developing (TD)
children. This approach aimed to reduce potential biases and enhance the generalizability of the results.

**Research Instruments**

This subsection looks deeper into the research tools employed for data collection, offering a more thorough comprehension of their selection and specifications. The Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-5 UK) assessment was chosen to assess the UK population's linguistic characteristics and age group. The selection of the CELF-5 UK was predicated upon its well-documented reliability and validity for evaluating language abilities among individuals ranging from five to 21 years of age, specifically within the United Kingdom's cultural and linguistic milieu. Seven subtests were selected to comprehensively evaluate different aspects of language proficiency, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of the participants' language abilities.

The Pragmatics Profile Checklist and Pragmatics Activity Checklist were utilised to evaluate individuals' verbal and non-verbal pragmatic abilities, facilitating a thorough assessment of their social and academic communication proficiencies. The incorporation of these checklists enabled a comprehensive examination of sensible language acquisition. The CELF5 Observational Rating Scale for Teachers and Parents assesses and evaluates children's language and communication skills. It is designed to gather information from teachers and parents through their observations of the child's behaviour and interactions. This rating scale provides a standardised and systematic approach to assessing a child's language abilities, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their scale; it consists of 40 questions that offer an extensive and valuable means of evaluating language skills and behaviours methodically. The data collection process was enriched by interviews with teachers and parents, incorporating diverse viewpoints and enhancing the study's comprehensiveness.

The utilisation of educational technology: The selection to integrate Khan Academy as a tool for educational technology was based on prior research indicating the efficacy of technology-driven interventions for fostering language development in children. The selection of Khan Academy was based on its appropriateness for enhancing phoneme awareness, phonics knowledge, and early decoding skills in children diagnosed with DLD, explicitly targeting the age group of six to eight years.

**The Validity of the Research Tools Employed**

The section about the validity of research instruments is expanded to underscore the significance of guaranteeing the precision and suitability of these tools for the study. The initial evidence of high correlations between the core and index scores on the CELF-5 UK demonstrated internal structure validity. Furthermore, extensive consultation and referencing of the technical manual of the CELF-5 UK were undertaken to enhance the robustness of this aspect and establish its truth as a dependable measure of language abilities in the United Kingdom. To enhance the content validity of the study, the research instruments underwent a thorough evaluation by professionals specialising in linguistics, applied linguistics, and speech-language pathology. The tools were evaluated by experts from well-established national and international universities to verify their capacity to produce precise and pertinent data.
The Reliability of Research Tools

The reliability of the CELF-5 UK was confirmed through the presentation of normative sample data, which indicated good-to-excellent reliability coefficients. The reliability coefficients were consistent when applied to composite scores across different age groups, providing additional evidence to support the CELF-5 UK's reputation as a dependable assessment instrument. A thorough pilot study was conducted before evaluating the groups with DLD and Typically Developing (TD). This involved administering the CELF-5 UK assessment to a sample of children with typical language development. The careful and thorough nature of this particular step was crucial in guaranteeing the reliability and suitability of the instrument within the specific parameters of this research.

Research Procedures

The Procedures section has been expanded to offer a more comprehensive and detailed description of how the study was conducted. This increases the research process's transparency and makes it easier for other researchers to replicate the study if desired.

The research focused on Kurdish children between the ages of six and eight and their experiences studying English for foreign language learners. Preliminary observations were undertaken within a targeted sample of private schools, following parents' explicit consent and obtaining official permission from the school authorities. These observations aimed to assess the appropriateness of the modified CELF-5 UK for the particular cultural and linguistic environment under consideration. The data collection procedures involved an extensive process. The process encompassed acquiring formal approval from the Ministry of Education, attaining enrollment in designated educational institutions, and conducting comprehensive observations. The administration of pretests and post-tests was conducted with great attention to detail to evaluate the progression of language development throughout the study. The intervention phase encompassed applying various strategies, including exercises to improve eye contact, focused instruction on vocabulary, and using educational technology, specifically Khan Academy. These interventions aimed to enhance phoneme awareness, phonics knowledge, and early decoding skills in children diagnosed with DLD.

The Methodology Employed for Data Analysis

The section on the Method of Data Analysis has been expanded to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the procedures employed in processing and interpreting the gathered data. The data collected, specifically from standardised assessments such as the CELF-5 UK, was submitted to Pearson Assessments to generate reports. This measure ensured the data analysis adhered to established standards and protocols. The selected methodology for conducting structured interviews with teachers and parents was thematic analysis. The study encompassed a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the participants' responses, emphasising discerning patterns and subcategories that emerged repeatedly. The utilisation of thematic analysis aided in the interpretation of qualitative data, thereby enhancing the comprehension of participants' language skills and behaviours in a nuanced manner.

The methodology section becomes more comprehensive by providing further details and explanations, improving the research's transparency, credibility, and replicability. The study's design and execution can provide researchers and readers with a more extensive comprehension, rendering it an invaluable resource for future language development and intervention inquiries.
Discussion

The researcher engages in an in-depth examination of the findings derived from the study, with a specific emphasis on the cases being investigated. The main aim is to examine the research inquiries using the gathered data. This course centres on various fundamental aspects concerning DLD. The study's outcomes revealed through question one of **RQ 1: How can the Kurdish DLD students' core language be developed?** This can be summarised as follows:

- **Case 1:** Core Language Score: 53 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 2:** Core Language Score: 64 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 3:** Core Language Score: 48 (Very Low to Severe)

The Core Language Scores reveal notable difficulties in language proficiency among the individuals, even after implementing interventions. Across multiple linguistic domains, the post-test scores consistently performed less than typically developing children. This underscores the persistent requirement for specific support and strategic interventions.

Furthermore, the research evaluated the Receptive Language Index among students with DLD who speak Kurdish. The study's outcomes, as revealed through questionnaire Two of **RQ 2: Can the receptive skills of Kurdish DLD students be developed?** This can be summarised as follows:

- **Case 1:** Receptive Language Index Score: 65 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 2:** Receptive Language Index Score: 69 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 3:** Receptive Language Index Score: 67 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 4:** Receptive Language Index Score: 67 (Very Low to Severe)

The scores indicate notable difficulties in understanding and processing language, with all instances falling within the "very low to severe" spectrum. Although the interventions demonstrated some improvements, the scores of the individuals receiving them continued to be lower than those of typically developed peers. This observation underscores the persistent requirement for targeted assistance and tactics to improve the ability to comprehend language among individuals with DLD.

The third questionnaire, **RQ 3: What is the possibility of developing the expressive Language Gauge of Kurdish DLD students?** Results can be summarised as follows:

- **Case 1:** Expressive Language Index Score: 57 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 2:** Expressive Language Index Score: 68 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 3:** Expressive Language Index Score: 52 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 4:** Expressive Language Index Score: 50 (Very Low to Severe)

The obtained scores reflect notable difficulties in expressive language abilities, categorising all instances within the "very low to severe" spectrum. Despite implementing intervention strategies, the individuals in question scored significantly lower than their typically developing counterparts. This highlights the need for continued and targeted assistance to improve their verbal communication and expressive language capabilities.

The present report presents the outcomes of Research Question **RQ 4: How do the Kurdish DLD students' language content develop?** Which investigates strategies for enhancing the language proficiency of Kurdish students with DLD. as follows:

- **Case 1:** Language Content Index Score: 70 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 2:** Language Content Index Score: 74 (Low/Moderate)
- **Case 3:** Language Content Index Score: 74 (Low/Moderate)
- **Case 4:** Language Content Index Score: 53 (Very Low to Severe)
The scores demonstrate difficulty levels in vocabulary and word comprehension among the subjects. Instances one and four manifest more pronounced difficulties, categorising them within the "very low to severe" spectrum, which signifies notable impairments in their capacity to comprehend and employ words proficiently. On the other hand, Cases two and three can be categorised as falling within the "low/moderate" spectrum, indicating a relatively moderate level of vocabulary and word comprehension complexity.

Although the intervention yielded favourable outcomes regarding linguistic abilities for the participants, a disparity exists between their post-test scores and those of children who exhibit typical development. The findings emphasise the continuous requirement for targeted assistance and approach to enhance language development and address the disparity in linguistic abilities between individuals with DLD and their typically developing counterparts.

The fifth questionnaire, **RQ5: How will the language structure of Kurdish DLD students be developed?** Results can be summarised as follows:

- **Case 1:** Language Structure Index Score: 55 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 2:** Language Structure Index Score: 65 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 3:** Language Structure Index Score: 51 (Very Low to Severe)
- **Case 4:** Language Structure Index Score: 55 (Very Low to Severe)

The scores consistently indicate that all cases fall within the range of language functioning categorised as "very low to severe." This implies notable challenges in multiple facets of language structure, encompassing the comprehension of sentences, the structure of words, the formulation of sentences, and the recall of sentences.

Although there were noticeable improvements following the intervention, the post-test scores remained lower in all dimensions compared to children who typically develop. This highlights the persistent requirement for customised interventions and assistance to effectively tackle the distinct challenges related to language structure encountered in individual cases. The findings underscore the difficulties individuals diagnosed with DLD face in comprehending and generating sentences, manipulating linguistic structures, and recalling elements of sentences. Resolving these challenges necessitates the implementation of tailored interventions, speech-language therapy, and constant support to optimise their linguistic abilities and foster proficient communication.

The sixth questionnaire **RQ 6: What are the class teachers' and parents' perspectives on DLD students' difficulties with their receptive and expressive language skills?** Results can be summarised as follows:

**C1 (Summary):**
- Parents are concerned about attention issues, language comprehension, and expressive language.
- Consider comprehensive assessment by specialists.
- Implement attention strategies, language therapy, and response strategies.
- Encourage practical help-seeking skills and collaboration.
- Build confidence to support communication and academic development.

**C2 (Summary):**
- Parents highlight listening challenges, response speed, and verbal expression difficulties.
- Suggest comprehensive assessment, language therapy, and auditory processing assessment if needed.
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- Implement response strategies and social skills training.
- Support reading and writing activities.
- Maintain parent collaboration and focus on building confidence.

C4 (Summary):
- Parents' primary concern is staying on topic while speaking.
- Address listening comprehension, response speed, verbal expression, and reading comprehension.
- Consider comprehensive assessment and language therapy.
- Implement response and social skills strategies.
- Support reading comprehension and written direction comprehension.
- Encourage parent collaboration and confidence-building.

These summaries provide an overview of the challenges and suggestions for each student's communication and academic development.

The seventh questionnaire RQ 7: In what manners do children with DLD struggle with pragmatic language usage? Results can be summarised as follows:

Case 1:
- Pragmatics Profile (Pretest): Scaled score of 3, percentile rank 1.
- Practical Activities Checklist (Pretest): Total score of 22.
- Post-Training Pragmatics Profile: Scaled score of 4, percentile rank 2.
- Post-Training Pragmatic Activities Checklist: Total score of 9.

Summary (Case 1): After eight weeks of training, the student showed slight improvement but still lags behind peers in pragmatic language skills. Continued intervention is needed.

Case 2:
- Pragmatics Profile (Pretest): Scaled score of 3, percentile rank 1.
- Pragmatic Activities Checklist (Pretest): Total score of 17.
- Post-Training Pragmatics Profile: Scaled score of 5, percentile rank of 5.
- Post-Training Pragmatic Activities Checklist: Total score of 14.

Summary (Case 2): The student demonstrated improved pragmatic language skills and practical communication but still requires further intervention to reach age-appropriate levels.

Case 3:
- Pragmatics Profile (Pretest): Scaled score of 3, percentile rank 1.
- Pragmatic Activities Checklist (Pretest): Total score of 22.
- Post-Training Pragmatics Profile: Scaled score of 4, percentile rank 2.
- Post-Training Pragmatic Activities Checklist: Total score of 14.

Summary (Case 3): The student slightly improved pragmatic language skills and practical communication, but significant challenges persist. Ongoing intervention is necessary.

Case 4:
- Pragmatics Profile (Pretest): Scaled score of 4, percentile rank 2.
- Pragmatic Activities Checklist (Pretest): Total score of 20.
- Post-Training Pragmatics Profile: Scaled score of 5, percentile rank of 5.
- Post-Training Pragmatic Activities Checklist: Total score of 15.

Summary (Case 4): The student improved pragmatic language skills and practical communication but still lags behind their peers. Continued intervention is crucial.

Discussion
The research findings emphasise the significance of addressing DLD among school-aged children in Kurdistan. Several findings and challenges related to DLD extant literature are highlighted:

**Research Question One: How can the Kurdish DLD students' core language be developed?**

Despite interventions, the core language scores of Kurdish DLD students remained significantly low, falling into the "Very Low to Severe" category, according to the study. This points to ongoing difficulties in core language development.

Relevance to the Review of Literature: This finding is consistent with previous research on DLD, which has shown that people with DLD frequently struggle with core language skills. Your study reaffirms the importance of customised and ongoing interventions for DLD individuals, consistent with the literature's emphasis on tailored support.

**Question Two: Can the receptive skills of Kurdish DLD students be developed?**

Despite interventions, Kurdish DLD students' receptive language index scores remained in the "Very Low to Severe" range, indicating persistent difficulties in understanding and processing language.

Relevance to the Review of Literature: This finding is consistent with the existing literature, which emphasises the difficulties DLD individuals face regarding receptive language skills. In line with the literature's recommendations, your study highlights the importance of ongoing support and intervention to address these challenges.

**Research Question Three: What is the possibility of developing the expressive Language Gauge of Kurdish DLD students?**

The study discovered that despite interventions, the expressive language index scores of Kurdish DLD students remained in the "Very Low to Severe" range, indicating persistent difficulties in verbal communication and expressive language.

Relevance to the Review of Literature: This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the expressive language difficulties experienced by people with DLD. Your results support the literature's emphasis on targeted interventions to improve expressive language skills in people with DLD.

**Research Question: How does the Kurdish DLD students' language content develop?**

The study found that the language content index scores ranged from "Very Low to Severe" in some cases and "Low/Moderate" in others. Vocabulary and word comprehension were challenging.

Relevance to the Review of Literature: Your findings are consistent with the literature's discussion of the language content challenges that DLD individuals face. They emphasise the variability in language development among DLD students, emphasising the importance of individualised interventions and support.

**Research Question Five: How will the language structure of Kurdish DLD students be developed?**

The study found that all cases had language structure index scores in the "Very Low to Severe" range, indicating difficulties with various aspects of language structure, such as sentence comprehension and formulation.
Relevance to the Review of Literature: Your findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the difficulties DLD individuals face in language structure. They emphasise the importance of tailored interventions and support consistent with the literature's recommendations.

**Research Question Six: What are the class teachers' and parents' perspectives on DLD students' difficulties with receptive and expressive language skills?**

The study gathered information from parents and teachers, focusing on attention, comprehension, expressive skills, listening difficulties, and more. Both parents and teachers advocated for a thorough evaluation, language therapy, and collaboration.

Relevance to the Review of Literature: These viewpoints are consistent with discussions in the literature about the roles of parents and teachers in identifying and supporting DLD students. Your research emphasises the significance of collaboration and early intervention, consistent with the literature's recommendations.

**Research Question Seven: In what manners do children with DLD struggle with pragmatic language usage?**

The study discovered that students with DLD struggled with pragmatic language usage, with varying degrees of improvement following intervention.

Relevance to the Review of Literature: Your findings are consistent with previous research on pragmatic language difficulties in DLD. They emphasise the importance of ongoing intervention to improve pragmatic skills, as the literature recommends.

**DLD Diagnosis and Awareness**

- DLD often remains undiagnosed among school-aged children in Kurdistan.
- Limited awareness and knowledge about DLD among parents and facilitators contribute to the problem.
- Teachers lack sufficient training or information about DLD, hindering early diagnosis.

**Impact on Learning**

- DLD significantly hampers children's learning processes, as language is a crucial education component.
- Children with DLD are particularly vulnerable to receiving inadequate education.

**Importance of Training and Awareness**

- Training and awareness initiatives related to DLD are essential for parents and teachers to support affected children properly.

**Challenges and Recommendations**

- The research identifies specific language challenges Kurdish children with DLD face, affecting their English language learning.
- Orthographic differences between English and Kurdish can impact reading comprehension, requiring tailored interventions.
- Early detection and treatment of DLD, including discussion of spelling techniques and errors, are crucial for better outcomes.
Collaborative support from parents and speech and language therapists is emphasised.

**Economic Impact**
- The economic impact of DLD, including medical and related costs, is highlighted. Early interventions are recommended to prevent future socioeconomic burdens.

**Previous Research**
- The study references previous research on DLD, including studies on linguistic challenges, causes, and interventions.

**Pragmatic Challenges**
- Pragmatic challenges related to DLD are discussed, indicating that these issues persist even with intervention.

Finally, the study emphasises the importance of early detection, intervention, and awareness initiatives for children with Developmental Language Disorder in Kurdistan. To assist these children in overcoming their language and communication difficulties, tailored interventions, collaboration between parents and teachers, and ongoing support are required.

**Conclusion**
This study aims to understand better the challenges that young Kurdish learners with developmental language disorders face in bilingual environments and to assess how they impact their capacity to learn English as a foreign language. The primary objective of the study is to determine the characteristics of developmental language impairment in this context and their implications for academic integration, which emphasises the significance of this research. Several significant findings from the research have studied the effectiveness of personalised approaches in mitigating communication and academic challenges in individuals with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). Case One and Case Two are compelling examples of how tailored techniques can substantially enhance the quality of life for individuals grappling with DLD. Case Three (C3), for instance, exhibited expressive language deficits that affected various language dimensions, hindering comprehension and skill development. The recommended treatments included strategies to enhance active listening, reinforce fundamental language patterns, and leverage visual aids. Case Four (C4) encountered a multitude of language-related obstacles, encompassing issues related to vocabulary, sentence structure, and morphological errors. In light of these challenges, it becomes evident that a comprehensive, individualised approach remains vital to address the intricate and distinct needs of individuals with DLD.

**Recommendations for Further Research**
The study acknowledges its limitations and makes recommendations for future DLD research in Kurdistan:
- Improve hypothesis testing by conducting larger-scale studies with a larger sample size of children with DLD.
- Investigate alternative recruitment methods, such as collaborating with local healthcare facilities to identify participants.
• Include public and private schools in your research to collect a broader range of data and perspectives from educators, parents, and caregivers.
• Examine the impact of cultural factors and social stigma on DLD diagnosis and treatment in children.
• Conduct long-term studies on the effects of early intervention and treatment for children with DLD.

These recommendations aim to improve understanding of DLD and contribute to developing effective interventions and support systems for affected Kurdish individuals.

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References


Oman Royal Speeches Corpus: Compilation and Analysis

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Abstract
For many years, researchers have directed their attention primarily toward developing written corpora, with the consequence that spoken corpora have consistently remained rare compared to written ones. The laborious transcription and annotation tasks make creating and maintaining spoken corpora a challenging endeavor. This project aims to build a transcribed corpus of Oman Royal Speeches and make it available online through a custom-made concordance tool. The study also aims to test the corpus for fundamental corpus-based lexical, stylistic, and discourse-analytical implementations. Compiling the Oman Royal Speeches Corpus is meant to fill a gap by contributing to the development of Arabic spoken language corpora and make available a research tool that can facilitate corpus-based research, uses, and applications in various areas of investigation. The corpus-building process underwent a five-stage process, including data capture, data processing, concordance tool development, testing and evaluation, and online deployment. With 98,511 tokens, the resultant corpus represents a searchable archive of Royal Speeches with a built-in online concordance tool that allows multiple search types and Keyword-in-Context query result display. The corpus has been tested for various corpus-analytic uses and has been found to provide significant findings in these areas. Thus, it has the potential to function as a reliable and authentic record and source of information for researchers and specialists in various fields, as well as a research tool allowing for various applications and analyses in language-related topics.

Keywords: Arabic corpora, Arabic political discourse, corpus analysis, corpus building, corpus linguistics, linguistic and discourse analysis, sentiment analysis, transcribed spoken corpus

Introduction

Corpus linguistics as we know it today has steadily evolved into a major branch of linguistics, and present-day corpora have significantly developed since their inception in the 1980s and 1990s. This development has been aided by rapid and spectacular advances in computer technology (McCarthy & O’Keeffe, 2010). It has equally been informed by research developments in computational linguistics and Natural Language Processing (NLP). Conversely, corpus linguistics and corpora have played a significant role in developing these two fields, illustrating the interrelation among all three disciplines (Dipper, 2008; Xiao, 2010).

The turn of the 21st century witnessed a massive influx of research into corpus linguistics and its applications, especially as a method of linguistic analysis in various fields. This extensive research output motivated some researchers to argue that corpus linguistics would exert a profound impact on the way we study language, causing refinement or redefinition of some language theories or making possible the use of other theories, which were otherwise difficult to demonstrate or apply (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

Corpora have come to be used as a method of investigation for numerous purposes in various fields, perhaps the most important of which are language research, language teaching, and translation and interpreting. A great deal of research has dealt with the uses and applications of corpora in lexicography, language research, pedagogy and methodology, discourse analysis, semantics, stylistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, etc., (e.g., Bonelli, 2010; O’Keeffe & McCarthy, 2022a) and more recently multilingualism and social media (Crosthwaite, Ningrum, & Schweinberger, 2022).

This paper reports on the building of the Oman Royal Speeches Corpus (ORSC) project, which aims to compile a transcribed corpus of Oman Royal speeches and make it available through a custom-made concordancer. The paper also seeks to test this corpus to determine its effectiveness in corpus-based lexical, stylistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse-analytical investigations.

By compiling content that is otherwise scattered and putting it at the disposal of researchers through an easy-to-use online tool, the ORSC constitutes an academic contribution to Arabic Corpus Linguistics in general and Arabic spoken corpora in particular, a field that is still in its infancy, both in the local Omani and broader Arabic contexts.

The research question that this paper attempts to answer is the following:

- How effective can a corpus of oral political speeches be in capturing patterns of linguistic and discourse analytical nature?

Literature Review

A quick survey of some major contributions in the field of corpus linguistics provides an insight into the current trends and directions research into corpus linguistics has taken (see, for instance, Baker, 2012; Bowker & Pearson, 2002; McEnery & Hardie, 2012; McEnery, Hardie, & Younis, 2019; O’Keeffe & McCarthy, 2022a). These can be summarized in several broad categories, including corpus-based and corpus-driven linguistics, “corpus-assisted discourse studies” (Crosthwaite, Ningrum, & Schweinberger, 2022), corpus design, types of corpora, and corpus linguistic applications and uses of corpora.
Corpora

Corpora can be monolingual, parallel, and comparable. They can include spoken, written, or sign language. They can be diachronic or synchronic, annotated or unannotated, and general or specialized (McEnery & Hardie, 2012; McEnery, Hardie, & Younis, 2019; O’Keeffe & McCarthy, 2022b). Obvious examples of corpora in English include the British National Corpus (BNP), with its 100 million words of spoken and written discourse, and the corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA Corpus), which has currently reached one billion words (Davies, 2008. See also Mansour (2013) for a review of the most common corpora in English).

Compared to written corpora, spoken corpora were for many years given lower priority and were, therefore, fewer and smaller in size (Knight & Adolphs, 2022). This outcome is mainly due to the strenuous, “time-consuming, and tedious” transcription and annotation efforts involved in compiling spoken corpora (Reppen, 2022, p. 16). However, recent technological advancements have made spoken data dramatically more accessible, with the consequence that spoken corpora are becoming an essential part of corpus linguistics, providing valuable insights into genuine language use (see Knight & Adolphs, 2022 for examples). Despite these improvements, the category of spoken corpora focusing on political discourse remains relatively rare. Among the outstanding examples in this subgenre, we find the six-million-word HKBU Corpus of Political Speeches (Ahrens, 2015) incorporating political speeches by heads of state, governors, premiers, and other high-ranking officials. Another example is the European Parliament Interpretation Corpus (EPIC), a parallel multilingual corpus of speeches in English, Italian, and Spanish and their corresponding simultaneous interpretations in all possible combinations.

Arabic Corpora

In Arabic, the number of corpora is limited, especially spoken ones. The most extensive written corpus ever reported in the literature is the 1.5 billion words Arabic Corpus (El-Khair, 2016). This corpus was compiled from over five million newspaper articles mined from ten news sources in eight Arab countries and spans over 14 years. El-Khair (2016) also lists other major written corpora with sizes ranging from a few hundred thousand, million, and hundred million to a billion words, which is the size of the 5th edition of the Arabic Gigaword corpus.

The Qur’anic Arabic Corpus (Dukes, 2009-2017) is another prominent example. It is a multimodal corpus that contains three layers of analysis: morphological annotation, a syntactic treebank, and semantic ontology, as well as audio recitations of the verses analyzed. Arifianto (2021) demonstrates how to utilize this corpus in teaching Arabic syntax.

Another example of large Arabic corpora is the International Corpus of Arabic (Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2013), which is an ongoing project with plans to contain 100 million words of written and spoken material from four sources, including the press, internet articles, books, and academic texts.

Other major examples include the King Saud University Corpus of Classical Arabic (KSUCCA) (Alrabiah, 2013), King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) Arabic Corpus (King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, 2020), and finally, KALIMAT Multipurpose Arabic Corpus (El-Haj, 2013), which contains a little over 20,000 articles from Alwatan Omani newspaper.
**Linguistic Applications of Corpora**

A corpus of political discourse can be investigated from all perspectives implemented in general language corpora. Using classical concordancing tools, different types of information can be generated. These include examining vocabulary and language patterns involving such techniques as frequency, keyword, and collocation analyses. These analyses can inform studies that reveal stylistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse features that may not be current in other language types. The stylistic analysis examines rhetorical devices and figurative language (metaphors, similes, alliteration, repetition), as well as other features that contribute to aesthetic, persuasive, or emotional impact (e.g., Alduhaim, 2019; Al-Sowaidi, Banda, & Mansour, 2017).

Sociolinguistic analysis investigates aspects of language variation, such as gender, social class, etc. It examines the impact of these factors on language use. In Arabic political discourse, some commonly investigated themes or topics include diglossia, gender, identity, and politics (see, for instance, Abdul Latif, 2017; Alduhaim, 2019; Bassiouney, 2020).

With Discourse Analysis (DA), we can investigate the structure, coherence, and argumentation strategies within political speeches. Different aspects, such as discourse markers, speech acts, and argumentation patterns, can be studied to understand how speakers construct arguments to persuade audiences (Mautner, 2022). Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) is an active area of research that applies DA methodologies and tools to the language used in political contexts. With a focus on Arabic, numerous studies have explored the application of discourse analysis to political speeches, covering a wide range of topics and contexts (see, for instance, Abdul Latif, 2017; Al-Sharoufi, 2006; Al-Sowaidi, Banda, & Mansour, 2017; Golfetto, Osti, & Chakrani, 2021; Maalej, 2012).

Sentiment analysis is used to determine the overall sentiment or tone of a text. By classifying statements as positive, negative, or neutral, this type of analysis is commonly used to help identify the emotional appeal or persuasive strategies in news streams, employee surveys, and product reviews (Bing, 2012; Bordolo & Biswas, 2023; Zong, Xia, & Zhang, 2021). Sentiment analysis has also been employed for various manifestations of political discourse. Among the topics addressed here we find the study of polarity or tonality (Haselmayer & Jenny, 2017), prediction of opinion inversion (Matalon et al., 2021), defining political users’ classes (Caetano et al., 2018), opinion in parliamentary debates (Abercrombie & Batista-Navarro, 2020), the analysis of dynamic events, such as elections (Ebrahimi, Yazdavar, & Sheth, 2017), etc. By applying this type of analysis to our corpus, a wealth of information can be identified on how different issues are approached.

Topic models are an automated way to analyze text data, extract the main topics, and infer information without users having to manually read all the data (Boyd-Graber, Hu, & Mimno, 2017; Jagannathan, Roy, & Delhi, 2022; May 2022). Within political discourse, topic modeling has been applied to a variety of genres, such as parliamentary speeches (Curran et al., 2018), the media coverage of a specific topic (Rouhana, 2023), social movement studies (Lindstedt, 2019), etc. Implementation of Arabic text data is gaining momentum and includes Abuzayed & Al-Khalifa (2021) and Rouhana (2023). BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) is one of the leading models adopted (see, for instance, Abuzayed & Al-Khalifa, 2021; Alhaj et al., 2022; Rouhana, 2023).

The above literature survey indicates that Arabic language corpora and corpus-based investigations involving Arabic remain rare compared to what is available in other languages, such as English (Mansour, 2013; El-Khair, 2016) and other Western and, more recently, Asian...
languages (Crosthwaite, Ningrum, & Schweinberger, 2022). This situation points to the need to develop more Arabic corpora, specifically spoken corpora. The compilation of the ORSC reported in the present article consequently represents a much-needed contribution to the development of Arabic spoken language corpora and fills a gap by making available a research tool that can facilitate corpus-based research, uses, and applications in various areas of investigation.

**Methodology**

**ORSC Compilation**

**ORSC Design**

Building a corpus is subject to specific considerations focusing on sampling, representativeness, and balance, whether this balance is internal, whereby corpus components are of equal size, or external, reflecting the proportions of these components in the actual world (Egbert, Biber, & Gray, 2022; Knight & Adolphs 2022; McEnery & Hardie, 2012; Reppen, 2022). Depending on the purpose of the corpus, the corpus components can be the topics included, the sources, the geographical origins, the chronological periods, etc. These considerations ensure that patterns observed in the corpus are generalizable.

Despite the ever-growing tendency to build larger corpora, there is a noticeable interest in the development of specialized and smaller-size corpora as an effective instrument for the study of specific language uses (Malmkjaer, 1998; Koester, 2022). Specialized corpora involve restricting the texts to be collected to one genre, register, or source, or to a specific time, etc. For the ORSC, the restriction affects the source as it consists exclusively of the Royal Speeches by His Majesty Haitham Bin Tariq and Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos from 1970 to 2020. With this restriction, a “complete representation of the language” (Reppen, 2022, p. 14) is achieved since all the targeted speeches are included in the ORSC. This restriction also eliminates considerations of balance.

**Research Instruments**

Corpus investigation and evaluation typically use a concordance tool as a research instrument. Concordancers allow for various types of queries including simple word frequency searches, N-grams, collocations, etc. The keyword-in-context (KWIC) display format used in these tools allows for an easier identification of patterns of different sorts. For the current project, use was made of the free concordance tool AntConc (Anthony, 2023) in addition to the ORSC’s 154concordance.

**Research Procedures**

The building of the ORSC project went through five major stages:

**Data Capture**

This task involved the identification, retrieval, and storing of the Royal Speeches from official sources.

**Data Processing**

Following collection, the captured data went through the following three sub-stages:
Cleaning up: This stage involved removing any non-text markers and other formatting or coding elements resulting from human error (typos) and capturing from original HTML files for better machine readability, smooth processing, and conversion of the files into XML files.

Validation: This involved several quality assurance checks to ensure that all material is verified and accurate.

Coding: This involved adding standardized speech metadata, including date, time, topic, occasion, speaker, etc., to the files. These categories will represent query filtering criteria available to the concordance tool end users.

Concordance Tool Development
This involved the development of an online concordance tool that allows for several search types using various criteria to exploit the metadata provided. The online concordance tool has been designed to take single or multiple-word queries, allowing for word frequency, collocations, and word usage searches. Results are displayed using the KWIC standard (Bonelli, 2010). In addition to up to 25 words of context on each side of the queried term, the tool allows for extended context by accessing the paragraph that contains the search result with one click and the whole text through a further click on the search result. As indicated under the ORSC design section, the concordance tool allows for different corpus management operations, including incorporating additional future speeches into the database.

Testing and Evaluation
This stage involved testing and evaluating the concordance tool developed and fine-tuning the search options.

Online Deployment
The corpus was made available online for public use at “https://apps.su.edu.om/contool/Default.aspx”.

Results
Following a compiling period of six months, a total of 108 speeches were collected. Since the ORSC is envisaged as a dynamic project, it will incrementally integrate future speeches as they become available. In line with this design principle, the Royal Speeches by His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq in 2021 and 2022 have been added to the current analysis. The corpus speeches vary in length from as short as 148 words to as long as 4,537 words, with an average of 915 words per speech. The Annual National Day Speeches were the longest of all speeches, except for His Majesty Sultan Qaboos’s Speech to Sultan Qaboos University Students on May 2, 2000, which was the longest of all speeches in the corpus, amounting to 4,537 words. The corpus material generally falls under the genre of political speeches and covers a wide range of topics (see Figure One for ORSC themes and Figure Two for a visual representation of the most frequent words in ORSC).
Figure 1. ORSC Themes

Figure 2. Visual representation of the most frequent words in ORSC generated by wordclouds.com (Zygomatic, 2023).
Figure Three provides a view of the user interface, which includes search fields and search criteria, such as speaker or Sultan (that is, His Majesty Haitham Bin Tariq and Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos) and date. Other search criteria include the nature of the search keyword, that is, whether it is a separate word, a phrase, or part of a group of words and the size of the context before and after the search keyword. Another control determines the number of results that should appear on one page.

With the ORSC ready and deployed, it went through several tests to assess its value for research. The following lines provide these analyses and applications.

**Lexical Investigations**

One of the key topics that have characterized the national debate in Oman for many years is the diversification of the economy ("تنويع الاقتصاد") or sources of revenue ("تنويع مصادر الدخل") to reduce reliance on income from oil. If a student of business or political science, a journalist, or any other researcher would like to discuss the topic of diversifying the economy, the ORSC can represent a good starting point where the researcher can easily find the first time this topic was raised in the Royal Speeches, and consequently the circumstances that have led to the discussion of this topic, historical development of the issue, and actions taken by the Government to achieve diversification of the economy since that time until the present, and so on.

A search for the keyword "تنويع" (diversification) returns 46 results related to the topic of diversification in several fields (Figure Four), with the diversification of the economy achieving the highest frequency (40).
Another example of lexical investigations is the preferential use of one item among multiple paradigmatic alternatives, as in the case of synonyms or near synonyms. Such preferential use is often meaningful and symptomatic of regional and local usage. This is the case, for instance, of the two Arabic alternatives for the word ‘year’: “سنة” (15 instances) and “عام” (270 instances). The frequencies of these two alternatives in the corpus clearly show an inclination toward using “عام” (see Table One in Appendix A). Further investigation of the distribution of these alternatives could reveal collocational patterns.

Conversely, when the plurals of these two alternatives are used, the terms “سنوات” and “أعوام”, which are the plurals of “سنة” and “عام”, are used more frequently than “أعوام” and “سنوات”, the plural of “عام”. Another example of the investigation of lexical usage is the ‘royal we’, which is also current in Arabic. As is the case in English, the use of the ‘royal we’ is confined to monarchs and heads of state. Since our corpus is dedicated to royal speeches, the occurrence of this feature is to be expected. The investigation of the corpus confirms using the ‘royal we’, which materializes through two different alternatives; “نحن” (152 instances) and “إنّنا” (489 instances) (see Table Two in Appendix B). However, it is interesting to note that cases of first-person singular are equally available, though less frequently, and usually depict instances that enhance connection with the audience.
Stylistic Analysis

Our corpus analysis has revealed the use of several important stylistic features for various rhetorical purposes. One such feature is the use of the second-person plural pronoun ‘you’ as a direct form of addressing the audience instead of addressing them using the third-person plural to create a sense of engagement, enhance audience interest, and achieve a particular rhetorical purpose. In the first example below, the use of the second-person plural pronoun constitutes an attempt to persuade the audience to view the past achievements as benefits for ‘you’, the people of Oman.

وإذا كانت الأمور تقاس بنتائجها فإنه يمكن القول بأن ما تحقق خلال الحقبة الماضية، بعون منه تعالى، هو إنجاز كبير يشهد به التاريخ لكم أنتم جميعاً يا أبناء عمان.

And if things are measured by their outcomes, then it can be said that what was achieved during the past era, with the help of Allah the Almighty, is an outstanding achievement that history bears witness to for all of you, O sons of Oman.

إن الأمل معقود عليكم أنتم شباب الجامعة [...].

Indeed, hope rests upon you, the university youth [...].

وأنتم.. أنتم جميعا.. أولئك العاملون [...].

And you, all of you, those who work [...].

A similar persuasive effect is intended in examples two and three, which appear in a speech to the graduates of the fourth cohort of Sultan Qaboos University and the 27th National Day Anniversary Speech, respectively, to persuade the young graduates of the university, and the population of workers to exert more effort in their work because they represent the future of the country.

Example three contains another stylistic device, that is, the repetition of the pronoun “أنتم”, to achieve the desired persuasive effect. Another prominent example of repetition can be seen in the use of the address “أيها المواطنين (الأعزاء)” (Dear citizens, repeated 208 times) and “أيها الإخوة المواطنين” (Dear fellow citizens, 19 times) to create a sense of engagement and solidarity with the speaker.

The use of religious references is yet another essential stylistic device that is usually employed in Arabic discourse to appeal to Arab audiences and to achieve unity and solidarity with them. In this sense, Example one in the present section contains an interesting religious reference, relating the achievements to the help of Allah, the Almighty, as a sign of religious belief and submissiveness to the will of Allah to attract the moral approval of the audience.

Sociolinguistic Analysis

In our corpus, sociolinguistic analysis may address the frequent use of national identity markers to appeal to the audience and to achieve a sense of solidarity, materializing through several variations (see Table Three).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>National Identity Variation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>أنباء عمان (Children of Oman)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>العمانيون / العمانيين (For Omanis)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discourse Analysis

The speeches making up the corpus are mainly ceremonial in nature and are usually addressed to the whole nation. An investigation of the way reference to the country is expressed is indicative of this status. In the corpus, reference to the country is usually made through the name of the country “وطن” (“motherland”) or “عمان” (“Oman”). However, the more frequent use of the alternative and more emotionally loaded “وطن” (motherland) is characteristic of this type of speech (see Table Four).

Table 4. Frequencies of different references to “Oman”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Oman)</td>
<td>151, including 19 Sultanate of Oman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Motherland)</td>
<td>162, including 66 this country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to lexical, stylistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse-analytical investigations, further analyses that take advantage of NLP methodologies can be deployed. These include sentiment analysis.

Sentiment Analysis

In a corpus of political speeches, it is only natural that references to the country’s citizens are made in a positive tone. We have carried out a sentiment analysis on the term “مقيمين” (residents, non-Omanis) using Mazajak: An Online Sentiment Analyser (Abu Farha & Magdy, 2019) to determine whether the references to the term have been positive, neutral or negative. As is evident from Table Five (see Appendix C), the term “مقيمين” has been used ten times throughout the corpus. In most cases, the approach to the term is positive, indicating recognition of the status that non-Omani residents enjoy in Oman and appreciation of the role they play. It is interesting to note that the online sentiment analyzer has achieved 90% accuracy since the context of item number six does not warrant a negative sentiment.

Discussion

The linguistic, stylistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse-analytical investigations and sentiment analysis provide a clear answer to our research question. They adequately demonstrate that a corpus of political speeches is a rich source of authentic data that can provide insights into different areas of investigation (Knight & Adolphs, 2022). Though brief, the investigations undertaken on the ORSC identified interesting patterns that, if investigated further, could evolve into full-fledged projects. These results confirm the worth of the ORSC and make it comparable to corpora used in previous studies, whether in stylistics (Alduhaim, 2019), sociolinguistics (Bassiouney, 2020), discourse analysis (Mautner, 2022), or other.
The ORSC may equally be used in the language learning classroom (Arifianto, 2021) by teachers and researchers in the language, translation, and interpreting industries as a source of authentic examples of grammatical patterns and sentence structures, usage, collocations, terminology, rhetorical devices, etc. The corpus can also help translators and interpreters who are creating terminological databases, journalists, historians, and content writers looking for referenced data, and lexicographers developing dictionaries.

At the current development stage, the project’s outcome is the simplest form the corpus can have. At later stages, other features may be added to enrich the corpus and enhance its productivity for further research opportunities and analyses. For example, part of speech (PoS) tagging and annotation may be added to the corpus to analyze various language, lexical, structural, stylistic, and discourse features, including sentence and structural patterns. Research can focus, for instance, on whether sentences used in the corpus begin with a verb-initial structure or a subject-initial structure and the factors motivating this choice, as using one of these structures may imply the adoption of a specific rhetorical purpose such as emphasis. The results and conclusions could inform comparative research into structural choices and factors affecting such decisions in mediated (simultaneously interpreted speeches and translated texts) and non-mediated (original) discourse. The ORSC can thus be used as a reference corpus by integrating it into further larger corpora of interpreted, translated, and original Arabic speeches to allow for search and research in many different areas, including language, history, media, culture, and so on.

Conclusion

This paper has reported on the process of compiling and testing of the ORSC and its deployment through an online concordancer for carrying out various types of queries on the corpus. The findings have demonstrated that the corpus represents a viable research tool for various lexical, stylistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse-analytical corpus-based investigations, making it comparable to corpora used in other research projects. These findings pave the way for future developments of the corpus, both in terms of size, through the incorporation of new speeches, and productivity, through the implementation of PoS tagging that would further enhance query capabilities within the corpus.

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courses on literary and legal translation. His research interests include translator training, translation technology, and corpus linguistics. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3036-8968

References


Appendices
Appendix A
Frequencies of Alternatives to “Year(s)”

Table 1. Frequencies of alternatives to “Year(s)”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular Form of Year</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Examples from Corpus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>عام</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>This number will double according to the ministerial plan prepared for the next academic year; Allah willing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>وفي عام ١٧٩١ صار لدينا (١٥) مستوصفا و(١٥) مركزا صحيا وستة مستشفيات.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In the year 1971 we had (15) clinics, (15) health centers and six hospitals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>سنة</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>I am pleased to inform you that our national economy has made tangible progress in the past year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plural Form of Year</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Examples from Corpus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>أعوام</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>The serious and sincere efforts made by the Council over eight years have allowed it to carry out its duties in various fields with full merit and keenness to provide objective advice [...].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>سنين</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>[... ويؤكدون للعالم أن حياة الشعوب لا تحتسب بالسنين، وإنما تحصى بالإنجازات التي حققتها على طريق التطور الحضاري [...].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the past four years, many significant achievements have been made in the transport sector.

**Appendix B**

**Analysis of 'Royal We' and Normal 'I'**

**Table 2. ‘Royal We’ and normal ‘I’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Examples from Corpus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>إننا</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>Indeed, we have issued orders to our ministers to pay special attention to our youth and to provide them with all opportunities to play their role satisfactorily in the future of their country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>We are absolutely certain, and we have full confidence in your ability to deal with the requirements of this stage and the stages that follow, with the required penetrating insight, profound wisdom, firm determination, and great sacrifices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>إنني</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Indeed, I am happy to talk to you, and the happiness is perfect when the talk is about Oman and what we have offered to it in fulfillment and recognition of its right upon us [...].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>أنا</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>I say and warn that the security of the Region is an indivisible whole, and its stability is the responsibility of all the governments and peoples of the region.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix C**

**Sentiment Analysis of the Term “Residents”**

**Table 5. Sentiment analysis of “residents”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Term in context</th>
<th>Sentiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Oman Royal Speeches Corpus: Compilation and Analysis AlZahran, Jamoussi, Albakri, Al-Maqbali Albuloshi, Alqhefeili, Albadri, Almandhari, & Alharrasi
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Arabic Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Sentiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>لندع كافة المواطنين والمقيمين على هذه الأرض الطيبة الإدلاء بالعلومات الدقيقة، والرد على كل استفساتهم.</td>
<td>We invite all citizens and residents of this good land to provide accurate information and answer all their questions.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>إننا نقوم بتطوير قواتنا المسلحة الباسلة وكافة أجهزة الأمن، وتزويدها بالقوة الممكنة لتحقيقها، من أداء دورها في حماية الدولة وسلامة أراضيها، وكفالة الأمن والطمأنينة لمواطنينا والمقيمين فيها.</td>
<td>We are developing our brave armed forces and all security agencies and providing them with the means of strength that can be delivered to enable them to perform their role in protecting the state and its territorial integrity and ensure security and tranquility for its citizens and residents.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>إننا نؤكد في الوقت ذاته على ضرورة مراجعة الجهاز الإداري للدولة لسياسات وأنظمته بما يضمن سرعة اتخاذ القرارات الكفيلة بتحقيق مصالح المواطنين وغيرهم من المقيمين الذين يسهمون في خدمة عمان والمساعدة على بنائها.</td>
<td>At the same time, we stress the need for the state's administrative apparatus to review its policies and regulations to ensure the speedy adoption of decisions that guarantee furthering the interests of citizens and other residents who contribute to serving Oman and helping to build it.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>ما نفخر به، أن المواطنين والمقيمين على أرض عُمان العزيزة يعيشون، بالنعمة الله، ضمن دولة القانون والمؤسسات.</td>
<td>What we are proud of is that the citizens and residents of the dear land of Oman live, by the grace of God, under the rule of the state of law and institutions.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>كما لا يفوتنا الإشادة بالقطاعات المدنية، الإنتاجية منها والخدمية، التي تحرص على دفعة النشاط الاقتصادي، وتوفير الخدمات اللازمة للمواطنين والمقيمين على هذه الأرض الطيبة.</td>
<td>We also do not fail to praise the civil sectors, both productive and service, which are keen on sustaining economic activity and providing the necessary services to citizens and residents of this good land.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>لقد تعرضت بلادنا وخصوصا محافظتي شمال وجنوب الباطنة لأنواء مناخية، ذهبت ضحيتها عدد من المواطنين والمقيمين.</td>
<td>Our country, especially the governorates of North and South Al Batinah, has been exposed to climatic storms, in which several citizens and residents have lost their lives.</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>منذ الوهلة الأولى حرصنا على متابعة ما حدث أولاً بأول، وقُلينا لتُجلي بالدعاء إلى الله، أن نحفظ بلادنا وأبناءها والمقيمين.</td>
<td>From the first moment, we were keen to follow up on what happened first, and our hearts glowed with supplication to Allah - the Most High, the Almighty - to protect our country, its people, and the residents of its good land from all harm.</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Polarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>وإننا [...] نعزي أنفسنا، وذوي من فقدنا من أبناء هذا الوطن العزيز والمقيمين، أثناء الحالة المدارية [...].</td>
<td>We [...] express our condolence to the families of the citizens and residents of this dear country that we lost during the tropical storm [...].</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ونخص بالذكر اللجنة الوطنية لإدارة الحالات الطارئة، وقواتنا المسلحة الباسلة، وشرطة عمان السلطانية، والأجهزة الأمنية، وكافة المواطنين والمقيمين [...].</td>
<td>We especially mention the National Emergency Management Committee, our brave armed forces, Royal Oman Police, the security services, and all citizens and residents [...].</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>وحرصا منا على توفير أقصى مستويات الحماية، والرعاية لأنائنا المواطنين والمقيمين؛ فإننا نوجه الحكومة بالإسراع في دعم وتطوير منظومة الإنذار المبكر [...].</td>
<td>To provide the highest levels of protection and care for our citizens and residents, we direct the government to expedite the support and development of the early warning system [...].</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effectiveness of Blended Learning Programs/Models in English Instruction in Saudi Universities: A Systematic Review of Literature

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Abstract
This systematic review of literature examines the effectiveness of blended learning programs in the instruction of the English language in Saudi universities. The aim of this review is to critically analyse current studies on the efficacy of BL programs in teaching English language courses in Saudi universities. The review draws attention to impact of blended learning models on English education in Saudi universities and offers insight on how to enhance the use of these models in English language instruction at the tertiary level. Seven research databases were searched, generating 132 studies. Studies published before 2010, not written in English, non-peer reviewed, non-journal, not evidence-based, without abstracts, non-BL focused, and not focused on English learning or university education were excluded, leaving 56 full articles which were then coded based on the data type they presented. The coding model employed was inductively formulated based on a preliminary review of the articles selected together with the most frequent groupings and hence no specific theoretical model guided the process. For each respective coding group, the number of articles that showed BL models were more effective in teaching English courses in Saudi universities was added to the number of articles that showed the approach led to better English language outcomes. The total number of the articles whose findings did not precisely indicate the effectiveness of BL was also obtained. Results show a significant proportion of the studies suggested BL programs positively affected English language learning in Saudi universities. This is evidenced by significant improvements in language skills and the general course learning outcomes.

Keywords: Blended learning, effectiveness, English language instruction, systematic review, Saudi universities

Introduction

With the rise of the English Language as a Key Language of Instruction for STEM courses in most private and public universities in Saudi Arabia, English language instruction practices are a major source of concern. This systematic review of literature examines recent empirical studies to establish the effectiveness of BL programs in English language instruction in Saudi universities. It begins by highlighting current viewpoints about the use of Blended Learning (BL) models in teaching English language courses at the university level. It then outlines the aims of the study and its novel contributions. The review further examines the literature on using BL models in Saudi universities.

BL programs have the potential to influence teaching practice, learning experiences, and course learning outcomes. Several recent studies examine BL as a model for English language instruction in institutions of higher education in Saudi Arabia. Some of the studies review the utility of BL in English language instruction (Almekhlafy, 2020; Sheerah, 2020); some its benefits and challenges (Dahmash, 2020); some the students’ perceptions towards the pedagogic tool as well as their views towards BL environments and the related merits and demerits (Alowedi, 2020; Alowedi, 2023; Anas, 2020; Eldeeb, 2019); and others the impact of BL strategies on English language proficiency (Hezam & Mahyoub, 2022).

Some studies assess the utility of BL programs in English language instruction. Almekhlafy (2020) explored the use of BL, and in particular the blackboard, to support online learning of the English courses in Saudi Universities. The study showed a significant variance in the use of the blackboard as a tool for online learning with individual student perceptions influencing its usage. Sheerah (2020) describes the use of BL in supporting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly how integrating technology in traditional teaching methods improves language learning and teaching. The study established the capacity of the approach to optimise opportunities for EFL students to practice the language freely and conveniently.

Drawing on the traditional perspectives regarding BL, a recent study by Dahmash (2020) examined the benefits and shortcomings of the approach to EFL learners in King Saud University during the Covid-19 period. Findings revealed that while BL enhanced the writing skills and provided an economical and more convenient mode of learning English, it exposed learners to related technological issues, online tests hurdles and resources inadequacy.

A recent study by Alowedi (2023) examined the perceptions of English language learners towards BL and established the students positively perceived the approach given its ability to accord them the flexibility to study and at the same time engage in their other occupations. The findings replicated those of his earlier study which showed female students in the same university were satisfied with the BL experience and utilised the integrated strategies to learn (Alowedi, 2020).

An analysis of the Saudi students’ perceptions towards BL environments has revealed their preference for learning environments that integrate multimedia and virtual learning tools over classroom environments with inflexible and less interactive learning activities (Anas, 2020). This illustrates the significant influence the design of a learning environment has on student engagement and interaction.

Other studies have also examined the effect of particular BL strategies and tools on English language learning. The study by Hezamand Mahyoub (2022) demonstrates the ability of the blackboard and extensive reading online programs to enhance language skills among university students.
The aim of this systematic review is to critically and comprehensively analyse current studies on the effectiveness of BL programs in teaching English language courses in Saudi universities. This allows for an analysis of teaching models in BL model as well as other variables that influence effective use of BL programs in English language instruction.

The review is significant in that it draws attention to impact of blended learning models on English education in Saudi universities and offers insight on how to enhance the use of these models in English language instruction at the tertiary level.

This review has several new and original contributions. Firstly, it combines diverse research literature on implementation of BL programs in EFL classes across Saudi universities. This enables the current review to critically assess and holistically understand the effectiveness of the various BL strategies on English language instruction in these institutions. Secondly, the review methodically assesses far more recent studies on the use of BL programs in English language courses at the university level than any other related study. Thirdly, the review attributes the effectiveness of the application of BL programs in English language instruction to the familiarity of lecturers in different Saudi universities with the various educational technologies, their levels of IT skills, students’ attitudes towards various BL strategies, and the adequacy of and access to the requisite infrastructure and resources in an institution. Additionally, it illustrates the efficiency of BL programs among EFL students of different genders. Further, it considers the suitability of using BL approaches in English language classes for university students in their preparatory year and the efficacy of the same in promoting their proficiency in the language. Lastly, the review provides observations on the efficiency of the various BL strategies in promoting and enhancing learning in English language classes.

Taking into account that English is the chief medium of communication globally and that Saudi graduates cannot effectively compete in the global knowledge-based economy without proper mastery of this critical international language, English language learning in universities has gained prominence leading to the adoption of such innovative pedagogical approaches as BL in teaching the course (Althobaiti, 2020). Thus, the purpose of this review is to examine the effectiveness of BL programs in teaching English language courses in Saudi universities. The review seeks to achieve this by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the effects of BL strategies on the English language proficiency of Saudi university students?
RQ2: What effects does the use of BL approaches in English language classes for university students in their preparatory year have on their course learning outcomes?
RQ3: How does the efficacy of BL programs in English language instruction vary among male and female university students?
RQ4: To what extent does the familiarity of lecturers in different Saudi universities with the various educational technologies affect the efficacy of BL programs in English language instruction?
RQ5: What effect does the adequacy of and access to the requisite infrastructure and resources in the various Saudi universities have on the efficiency of BL programs in English language instruction?

The concepts of BL as well as the aspects of the related physical/face-to-face learning and online learning as they apply in the context of this review are delineated. The most recent literature and perspectives on BL are also examined. Relevant research questions are also developed and inform the methodology, the keywords used in the retrieval of the selected studies, and the guiding
exclusion criteria. The coding model is explained, reliability issues addressed and the findings outlined. The review concludes with a critical discussion of the results and the limitations of the methodology employed as well as a summary of rejoinders to the research questions.

Literature Review

Blended Learning

BL refers to a model of education which combines physical one-on-one classroom-based practices with virtual or online-based instructional opportunities and educational materials (Alowedi, 2023; Dahmash, 2020). BL often consists of 75% online lectures and 25% face-to-face lectures; the proportion of learning for each medium of instruction however varies from university to university (Sheerah, 2018).

Virtual/Online Learning

This is a form of education where teaching and learning occur through the internet or electronic media thus giving learners control over their learning place, space, and time (Eldeeb, 2019). In the context of this review therefore online learning is not merely the use of internet-connected devices to learn but rather the ability to access learning and conveniently complete learning activities outside of the school setting. It goes beyond such “supplementary face-to-face teaching” as online activities and includes “synchronous virtual classes” (Dahmash, 2020, p. 222).

Physical Face-To-Face Learning

This is a form of education in which learning occurs in a conventional classroom setting with the instructor delivering instruction by personally interacting with the learners (Hezam & Mahyoub, 2022). Teaching and learning are teacher-centred given the prominent role of the teacher managing interactions, leading discussions, and providing information to the students.

Supplementary Studies Referenced

Sloan-C Workshop on Blended Learning’s description of BL closely matches with the e-learning project goal of the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education and thus, it has been the basis of several studies on the use of a combination of online and face-to-face pedagogical activities (Al-Ahmari, 2009; Picciano, 2006). This viewpoint is critical in that it reinforces the standpoint of the current review that BL is a combination of traditional learning and e-learning thus negating the need for 100% physical class attendance. Unlike these studies however, the current review goes further to examine the efficacy of using BL in institutions of higher learning, particularly in teaching of English courses. In the United Kingdom (UK), the Higher Education Academy through scholars from the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development (OCSLD) reviews several studies on the use of BL and the undergraduate experience of the teaching practice (Sharpe et al., 2006). The review identifies key studies and issues relevant to the use of BL programs and with significant implications on practice and policy. Relevant ideas from these studies have been extracted and integrated into this review.

Current Systematic Reviews

Recognizing the challenge of integrating qualitative and qualitative studies in a single review, this section outlines various and more recent reviews, based on both quantitative and qualitative studies, on the subject matter.
The comprehensive systematic review of BL in English courses conducted by Yajie and Jumaat (2023) examining the impact of the approach in English Language Teaching and Learning (ETL) and identifying BL gaps, trends and future directions for English language teaching and learning at the tertiary/university level. While the review identifies BL-related variables and factors influencing the effect of ETL in tertiary education, it does not address itself to the impact of use of BL practices in English instruction in Saudi Arabia, the particular educational context of interest. The other review focuses on other systematic reviews on BL where it addresses itself to the gaps, trends and future directions relating to this form of pedagogical practice (Ashraf, et al., 2021). The review does not focus on the effectiveness of use of BL in teaching a particular course but rather on systematic reviews on BL on account of the guidelines for Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Ashraf, et al., 2021). Another recent systematic review of flipped learning by Birgili et al. (2021) found countries with adequately developed educational resources had better opportunities for developing BL experiences and environments as indicated by fewer studies from third world countries on BL. While the review covers issues to do with BL policies, technologies and ICT training, it does not address the effect of use of the approach in teaching a particular course in the higher education context.

Regarding systematic reviews on challenges affecting the use of BL programs, Rasheed et al. (2020) investigate factors impeding effective implementation of the online component of BL among them inadequacy of ICT skills among students and instructors, isolation of students, inadequate ICT infrastructure and the heavy cost implications associated with online learning technologies. This is echoed by the findings of a systematic review by Atmacasoy and Aksu (2018) that highlighted the tendency of instructors with inadequate ICT skills to harbor negative attitudes towards the use of BL models. Other recent reviews have also established inadequacy of ICT infrastructure as a major barrier to effective implementation of blended courses in various institutions of higher education (Ashraf, et al., 2021; Ho, 2017). Another systematic review by Ekici (2021) established the potential of technology to contribute to better learning performance, improved participation and higher motivation. These reviews were based on diverse empirical studies drawn from various databases.

Additional Recent Literature

Several other recent studies explore various aspects pertaining to the use of blended learning in English instruction at the university level. A recent study by Alghamdi and Alnajami (2023) utilises systematic review approaches to examine challenges in the effective use of BL practices in English teaching in higher education and identifies individual readiness, institutional preparedness, pedagogical concerns, digital literacy gaps, inconsistent implementation of BL practices, communication and interaction issues, assessment concerns, and technological disparities as some of the core issues impeding effective utilisation of the approach in English instruction in Saudi universities. Alghamdi and Alnajami (2023) recommend “technological literacy training, the establishment of standard guidelines for blended courses, continuous professional development for educators, fostering robust online communities, and diversifying assessment strategies” (p. 24) as some of the ways through which better implementation of BL in English teaching can be realised.

Ali et al. (2023a) examined the impact of BL on the oral production of first-year Arab university students and found that while use of BL models in EFL settings enhanced student engagement and achievement, use of the approach in Arab EFL classrooms exposed instructors to
such barriers as “limited technological infrastructure, uneven digital literacy, and cultural norms and values” (p.146). The implications for English teachers intending to use BL approaches in such settings include individualised learning, content creation, technological competence, and pedagogical adaptation. Although this study explores the effects of BL on the oral production of first-year Arab university students, it restricts itself to the impact of the approaches on spoken English and does not focus on Saudi students but rather Arab students from all over the Middle East.

Pratiwi and Sumarni (2023) examine the effectiveness of BL in English language learning in the post-pandemic era and note its ability to offer an indispensable “new avenue for English language practice in an ESL/EFL setting” (p. 317) and hence its suitability as an optional language learning model. This study does not examine the effectiveness of use of BL in English instruction at the university level in the educational context of interest but rather on the importance of the approach in the post-pandemic period.

Ali et al. (2023b) employed an experimental approach to compare the impact of BL and online learning on grammatical skill and knowledge acquisition and found that learners in a BL environment perform better than their peers in an exclusively online learning setting. The findings highlight the effectiveness of BL not only in language instruction but also in transforming the related instruction and learning processes. This study however seeks to comparatively examine the effect of BL and online learning and hence it does not explore the effectiveness of BL on English education in the university level.

Alvi (2023) explored the effectiveness of BL model in English for Special Purpose (ESP) instruction among preparatory year medicine students and found use of andragogic strategies to be effective in improving and transforming the students’ English language learning styles, learning motivation, cognitive competence, and proficiency. The findings show the capacity BL models to enhance the process of teaching and learning an ESP course particularly where its marked by, as Alvi (2023), precisely observes a “shift from pedagogic to andragogic strategies” (p. 77). While the study addresses issues concerning the use of andragogy-based customised BL model in ESP instruction, it does not comprehensively address itself to issues pertaining to the effectiveness of the BL model in English instruction.

Nassar et al. (2023) in their study investigating the impact of BL on English learning in Saudi universities established the potential of the approach to enhance personalisation, accessibility, and active English learning particularly in the post-Covid times where use of technology is on the rise and accommodation of students with diverse language learning needs is necessary. The study associates use of BL with high student evaluation scores, better language outcomes for the ethnically and racially diverse students, and improved graduation rates for all learners (Nassar et al., 2023). While this study examines the effect of BL in English teaching and learning in Saudi Arabian universities, it does not comprise a systematic review of the same and hence its limited scope compared to the current review.

**Theoretical Literature**

Modern conversations on integration of technology in education are shaped by such major learning theoretical frameworks connectivism, constructionism, constructivism, cognitivism and behaviourism (Kimmons, 2022). The theoretical frameworks give rise to distinctive pedagogical strategies including: constructivist and constructionist strategies that are employed in teaching ‘why’; cognitive approaches employed in the instruction of ‘how’; and behaviourist approaches that are utilised in teaching ‘what’ (Topping et al., 2022). Today, diverse instructional design
models employed in different educational contexts variously integrate different components of these major learning theories highlighting the need for educators in different educational settings to study the competing frameworks and formulate their own understanding of the different ways in which students learn.

As a learning theory, behaviourism is premised on the view that learning constitutes a response to stimuli (Kimmons, 2022). Behaviourist strategies thus seek to promote teaching and learning by conditioning learners to respond in a certain way to a stimulus. BL strategies support learning by offering students incentives to learn.

Cognitivism is premised on the view that the way the brain processes, stores, retrieves and applies information plays an important role in learning (Ertmer & Newby, 2017). Application of cognitive strategies in learning and teaching focuses on principles and processes of instruction that promote the ability of students to meaningfully and efficiently utilise information presented to them. In the context of the current review, utilisation of such forms of technology as multiple modalities (audio-visual mediums) employed in BL helps deliver instruction in a manner that allows the brain to efficiently process, make meaning, store and retrieve what has been learnt.

Constructivism is premised on the view that different individual and social factors affect learning differently among individual learners (Ertmer & Newby, 2017; Yajie & Jumaat, 2023). Constructivist teaching and learning strategies are thus based on the principle that different people and individuals learn differently and their learning is influenced by their individual or group experiences. Constructivist strategies thus seek to promote contextual and situated learning while allowing individual learners to make their own personal meaning using their beliefs, attitudes and previous experiences (Ertmer & Newby, 2017; Kimmons, 2022). BL tools empower teachers and students to teach and learn by providing them with resources to construct and create external representations of their internal constructions.

Connectivism stipulates that learning is not restricted to the mind of the student as it constitutes a function of the interconnectedness of the learners with each other; the network exceeds the reach of the mind (Mattar, 2018). The goal of learning is thus to provide an environment in which learners are effectively connected with each other and with the network facilitating interaction and access to learning resources (Kimmons, 2022). Based on the perspective, BL helps create an environment in which learners are connected with each other thus consistently enhancing their learning experiences.

Thus in the context of the current review, a balance between the approaches anchored in the various theoretical perspectives is paramount for effective combination of online learning with face-to-face learning, and therefore, effective application of BL models in the instruction of English language courses in Saudi universities.

In the light of the previous literature review, there are no systematic reviews on the effectiveness of use of BL in English instruction at the tertiary level in Saudi Arabia. The existing reviews do not address the effectiveness of BL programs in teaching a particular course but rather systematically review BL on account of the guidelines for Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The reviews also do not address the effect of use of the approach in teaching a particular course in the higher education context; and the only review that seems to, also fails to address the influence of the effect of BL practices on English instruction in the particular educational context of interest. This review thus seeks to fill the existing gap and contribute to the current literature by providing research on the effectiveness of use of BL approaches in the instruction of English courses in Saudi universities. The review will
thus provide a research basis upon which the prevailing BL designing practices and BL practices in English teaching and learning can be enhanced for better English language learning outcomes among the university students.

**Methodology**

The following methodological guidance on how systematic reviews ought to be conducted and the attendant meta-analysis undertaken was adhered to. One, the review was theoretically positioned; two, related technical steps and hurdles defined; three, a procedure for merging and recapitulating the hurdles formulated; and lastly, a process for interpreting and disseminating the findings developed.

**Keywords**

These keywords guided the search for the most suitable studies:

- Saudi universities AND
- Blended learning OR Blended learning programs OR Blended learning models OR online learning and face-to-face learning AND
- English language instruction OR English language courses OR Teaching English as a Second language OR ESL course

Use of the Boolean operators, AND, OR, allowed for expansion and narrowing of the search parameters by facilitating the combination of various search terms to generate the diverse empirical studies for consideration for inclusion in the review. The third sector (English language instruction OR English language courses OR Teaching English as a Second language OR ESL course) helped narrow the number of the generated search results to articles that focused on the particular area this systematic review was interested in.

**Databases and Exclusion Criteria**

Research databases including Google Scholar, Science Direct, ProQuest, ERIC, Wiley Online Library, Scopus, Web of Science databases were searched and a total of 56 empirical and peer-reviewed articles selected for the systematic review (See Table one below for the inclusion/exclusion criteria).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Published since 2010</td>
<td>- Published before 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Written in English</td>
<td>- Not written in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Peer-reviewed journal articles</td>
<td>- Non-peer reviewed journals and non-journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conference papers</td>
<td>- Non-conference research papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Doctoral theses</td>
<td>- Non-doctoral theses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Evidence-based articles</td>
<td>- Articles not evidence-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Articles with abstract</td>
<td>- Articles without abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Articles on blended learning</td>
<td>- Articles on other pedagogical approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A focus on English language/course instruction</td>
<td>- Not focusing on English learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning in university</td>
<td>- Learning in K-12/primary or secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Undergraduate experiences</td>
<td>- Duplicates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Representing Saudi Arabian learning environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of articles generated from the various databases is illustrated in the PRISMA chart captured in Figure one below. Given the tendency of each of the different databases to access varied collection of resources, the amount of articles that had duplicates was minimal. While some
of the studies had been initially thought to have been relevant based on their abstracts, a further scrutiny of the respective full articles indicated a contradiction with the stated inclusion criteria leading to their exclusion. Towards the end of the process, out of the 152 journal articles generated by the search, 96 were excluded at the various phases of the process as shown above for failing to meet the exclusion criteria, leaving a total of 56 articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Included</th>
<th>64.07%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excluded</td>
<td>35.93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

The Coding Framework

Coding of the 56 full articles was undertaken based on the form of data they presented. The coding model employed in this endeavour was inductively formulated based on a preliminary examination of the articles together with the most frequent groupings and hence no specific theoretical model guided the process. Articles that comprised systematic review were coded as reviews while the rest were coded based on whether they were about the utility of BL in English language instruction, the benefits and challenges of BL, the students’ perceptions towards BL as a pedagogic tool, views about BL environments and related challenges and advantages, and the effect of BL strategies on English language proficiency. Articles that had overlapping focus were coded multiply. Since all articles were related to the university level of education, coding of the articles based on the year of study (First year, second year, third year, final year) they focused on was undertaken. Coding of the studies based on the subject area was unnecessary since the focus of this review was on English language instruction and courses and hence all the articles selected for inclusion in the review had met this criterion. The articles were further coded based on the gender for studies whose focus was either female or male students. This was deemed critical in helping establish whether the effectiveness of BL programs in English instruction varied based on the gender of the students.

Consideration of the outcomes, that is, whether the BL program was effective or not in teaching the English course, was done. This allowed for contemplation of the impact of the
learning model on the English language proficiency of the students and comparison of the same with outcomes of alternative pedagogical tools. Observations on whether the BL model was more effective than the alternative learning models were made possible despite the attendant quantification difficulties. The effectiveness of the approach on the English language instruction as indicated by its impact on the reading, listening, speaking, writing skills of the learners as assessed in some of the studies was also considered.

**Coding Descriptions**

All articles included conformed to the current review definition of BL. The studies featured use of a model of education that combined physical face-to-face classroom-based practices with virtual or online-based instructional opportunities and educational materials thus giving students the space to learn the English language both inside and outside the school. This eliminated the need to differently code the selected studies on this basis. Further given that the focus of the current review is on the effectiveness of the model in English instruction in Saudi Arabia, the need to code the articles based on whether the studies were conducted in English or non-English language contexts was rendered unnecessary.

**Full Articles and Inter-Rater Reliability**

The 85 full articles included in the review were equally shared among two renowned scholars and experts in the study subject. The scholars established 29 of the articles failed to meet the inclusion criteria thus shrinking the number of studies fit for inclusion in the review to 56. The excluded studies included no outcome date on the utility of BL in English language instruction (n=11), the benefits and challenges of BL, the students’ perceptions towards BL as a pedagogic tool, views about BL environments and related challenges and advantages, and the effect of BL strategies on English language proficiency (n=13), while the rest focused on use of BL in English courses in contexts other than Saudi Arabia (n=5).

A random sample of 20 items was obtained and a coding inter-rater reliability conducted which produced a between coders’ percentage of concurrence of 97.4%. The fact that 10 of the 29 articles excluded for failing to meet the inclusion criteria, offered useful insights on how to enhance the effectiveness of the BL programs in the instruction of English courses was noted.

**Data Analysis**

For each respective coding group, the quantity of articles that showed BL models were more effective in teaching English courses in Saudi universities was added to the number of articles that showed the approach led to better English language outcomes. The number of articles whose findings did not precisely indicate the effectiveness of the pedagogical approach was also added together. The distribution of the articles in the various coding categories was then established and weighed against that of the relevant flat distribution allowing for estimation of the ensuing probability and chi-squared statistic. Severally, concrete response options included zero rendering the use of chi-squares in such instances impossible. The low overall numbers further rendered it inappropriate to use of the Fisher’s Exact Probability test is such instances as doing so would have introduced reliability issues.
Quality of the Included Studies

Evaluation of the quality of the research articles selected was critical as it allowed for distinction of the various studies based on their strength. To accomplish this, the GRADE model which allowed for the quality of the findings of the individual studies to be rated as Very Low, Low, Moderate or High was employed (Guyatt, et al., 2011). Research studies with a serious risk of imprecision, indirectness, inconsistency and bias as well as a likelihood of publication bias were given a lower rating while those with a huge effect and whose probable confounds had the potential to minimise the demonstrated effect were accorded a higher rating. Despite the challenges obtaining an inter-rater reliability level for the articles that is satisfactory due to their diverse nature, it was surprising to note that the Cronbach alpha of studies rated as High was largely satisfactory when evaluated against the rest of the articles. This allowed for comparison of the results of the research articles rated as High quality with the results of those rated as Low quality, to assess if the studies rated as High quality produced unevenly low or high outcomes vis-à-vis the other articles. There were concerns of the potential of the studies rated as High quality to produce unevenly low outcomes in contrast to the rest of the studies.

Results

Analysis Based on Intervention and Conclusion

Given the tendency of some of the articles to variously characterise BL, a total of 231 mentions were obtained and coded multiple times. Using the framework advanced by Guyatt et al. (2011), coding categorised these mentions into four categories namely; very low quality 35 (15%), low quality 42 (18%), moderate quality 85 (37%), and high quality 69 (30%). Evaluation of the articles on the basis of their outcomes revealed no significance difference in the pattern of their results; p was greater than 0.05. See Table two below.

Table 2. Comparison based on the quality of the studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention rating</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
<th>Worse</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High quality</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate quality</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low quality</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very low quality</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total mentions – 231 (100%)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the data based on the interventions and their outcomes was undertaken. Categorisation of the interventions in the 56 of the studies selected established; BL (34); Learning Management Systems(LMS) especially the blackboard (26); online learning (27); web-based learning (21); and mobile learning (11). It is worth noting that some of the studies involved multiple interventions relating to the blended model. See Table three.

Table 3. Summary of the data based on interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
<th>worse</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blended learning (n=34; 14.7%)</td>
<td>3 (8.8%)</td>
<td>5 (14.7%)</td>
<td>8 (23.5%)</td>
<td>18 (52.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS (n=26; 11.3%)</td>
<td>4 (15.4%)</td>
<td>3 (11.5%)</td>
<td>6 (23.1%)</td>
<td>13 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online learning (n=37; 11.7%)</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
<td>2 (5.4%)</td>
<td>7 (18.9%)</td>
<td>23 (62.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web-based learning (n=21; 9.1%)</td>
<td>3 (14.3%)</td>
<td>2 (9.5%)</td>
<td>5 (23.8%)</td>
<td>11 (52.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile learning (n=11; 4.8%)</td>
<td>1 (9.1%)</td>
<td>1 (9.1%)</td>
<td>3 (27.3%)</td>
<td>6 (54.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Total (n=129; 100%)</td>
<td>16 (12.4%)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(10.1%) (22.5%) (55%)
Note: Figures denote the number of studies mentioning an intervention. Some studies were coded for multiple interventions.

From Table three above, the large sum total of the outcomes (129) in the reviewed papers, a positive picture regarding the efficacy of BL programs emerges; indicating digital and face-to-face learning models in English courses instruction is better (55%) than other forms of instruction, whilst 22.5% find it the same and only 10.1% find it to be worse. With a p-value of less than 0.05, the outcome indicates BL models are more effective than conventional models of instruction; the limitations of the studies reviewed notwithstanding.

Based on the interventions and outcomes analysis, BL programs integrating face-to-face learning with such approaches as online learning, web-based learning, learning management systems and mobile learning or e-learning seem to be the most effective in relation to the impact they have on EFL education in Saudi universities. A significant number of the studies reviewed associated BL (n=71 Better) with positive learning outcomes as reflected by the improvements in the English language proficiency among the university students. Amalgamation of Better and Same results in Table two above yield even a higher figure (n=100 or 77.5%) further highlighting the superiority and by extension the high degree of effectiveness associated with the use of BL in English language instruction at the university level in the Saudi educational context.

Reviews and Meta-analysis

Of the 56 journal articles included in the review, 19 of the studies comprised of meta-analyses and reviews involving various universities across Saudi Arabia. As shown in Table four below, seven of the 19 studies were reviews and 12 meta-analyses involving multiple but unspecified Saudi universities. Despite the diverse nature of these reviews and meta-analyses, there was hardly any substantial variance in their conclusions informed by the broad nature of their approach.

Table 4. Summed-up data for the meta-analyses and reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reviews</th>
<th>Meta-analyses</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articles (n=56, 100%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities involved</td>
<td>Non-specific universities</td>
<td>Multiple universities</td>
<td>Specific</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the effectiveness of BL models in English language instruction at the university level, 2 of the seven reviews showed BL programs provided English language learners with the opportunity to conveniently and freely practice the language by providing the students with the right environment for English learning and motivating them to learn the language. The other five reviews showed BL impacted positively on English language learning by significantly improving writing and speaking, comprehension and retention of spoken discourse, masterly of grammar and the general English language skills of the students (p<0.05).

As quantitative measures of the degree of an effect, effect sizes (ES) relating to the effect of BL on English language instruction, and as given in the reviews, were assessed. The ESs normally ranged between zero to one or higher and with larger ESs indicating a strong association among the variables of interest and negative ones indicating deterioration in effect. This contrasted with statistical significance which differed based on the sample size. As regards the BL, only two reviews provided effect sizes, with a range of between 0.36 and 1.24 and a mean of 0.88 indicating a strong correlation between BL strategies and English learning outcomes.

Based on the reviews, the effectiveness of BL programs in English language instruction seems to range from moderate to high. Some of the reviews appear to suggest BL is more effective
than other pedagogic approaches owing to the significantly positive effect it has on the English language skills of Saudi students at the university level. However, given that most of the reviews did not give ESs for BL relative to English instruction, care should be taken when interpreting the provided figures. Nonetheless, the fact that all the reviews analysed focused on the use of aspects of BL strategies in teaching English courses in Saudi universities helps alleviate the inherent interpretation issues to some extent. While the reviews yield largely similar results, BL appears to perform better (is more effective) when the other 37 individual studies conducted in specific Saudi universities are considered.

**Analysis by Research Questions and Institution**

Analyses of the studies in relation to the research question provide data into the effectiveness of BL in English language instruction. Concerning Research Question 1 (RQ1), 37 (85.7%) of the studies suggested BL strategies significantly affected the English language proficiency of Saudi university students. Regarding Research Question 2 (RQ2), 11 (19%) of the studies showed use of BL approaches in English language classes for university students in their preparatory year positively affected the course learning outcomes. For Research Question 3 (RQ3), 5 (9.5%) studies suggested the efficacy of BL programs in English language instruction vary among male and female university students. For Research Question 4 (RQ4), 33 (59.5%) studies appeared to suggest the familiarity of lecturers in different Saudi universities with the various educational technologies significantly affected the efficacy of BL programs in English language instruction. For Research Question 5 (RQ5), 19 (33.3%) studies gave the impression that adequacy of and access to the requisite information and communication technology infrastructure and resources in the various Saudi universities significantly affected the efficiency of BL programs in English language instruction. See Table five below.

**Table 5. Summary of data based on the research questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RQ1 n=56,100%</th>
<th>RQ2 n=56,100%</th>
<th>RQ3 n=56,100%</th>
<th>RQ4 n=56,100%</th>
<th>RQ5 n=56,100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporting studies</td>
<td>48 (85.7%)</td>
<td>11 (19%)</td>
<td>5 (9.5%)</td>
<td>33 (59.5%)</td>
<td>19 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support not clear</td>
<td>8 (14.3%)</td>
<td>45 (81%)</td>
<td>51 (90.5%)</td>
<td>23 (40.5%)</td>
<td>37 (66.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding of the studies by the university they were conducted in was critical in facilitating the analysis of the impact the distribution of the institutions may have had on the outcomes of the studies used in this review. In Table six (see, Appendix 1), the distribution of the 56 studies by university is presented.

**Discussion**

Regarding the research questions, various studies supported various indicators of the effectiveness of BL models in English language instruction in Saudi universities.

*RQ1: What are the effects of BL strategies on the English language proficiency of Saudi university students?*

RQ1 was supported by 37 studies. This means that 85.7% of the studies reviewed suggested BL strategies significantly affected the English language proficiency of Saudi university students.

*RQ2: What effects does the use of BL approaches in English language classes for university students in their preparatory year have on their course learning outcomes?*
RQ2 was supported by 11 studies. This indicates 19% of the studies included in this review concurred that application of BL approaches in English language classes for university students in their preparatory year positively affected the course learning outcomes.

**RQ3: How does the efficacy of BL programs in English language instruction vary among male and female university students?**

RQ3 was supported by five studies, meaning that 9.5% of the studies examined suggested the efficacy of BL programs in English language instruction varies among male and female university students.

**RQ4: To what extent does the familiarity of lecturers in different Saudi universities with the various educational technologies affect the efficacy of BL programs in English language instruction?**

RQ4 was supported by 33 studies. This shows 59.5% of the studies reviewed appeared to suggest that the familiarity of lecturers in different Saudi universities with the various educational technologies significantly affected the efficacy of BL programs in English language instruction.

**RQ5: What effect does the adequacy of and access to the requisite infrastructure and resources in the various Saudi universities have on the efficiency of BL programs in English language instruction?**

RQ5 is supported by 19 studies meaning that 33.3% of the studies examined gave the impression that adequacy of and access to the requisite information and communication technology infrastructure and resources in the various Saudi universities significantly affected the efficiency of BL programs in English language instruction.

Despite the significant variation in the number of studies supporting each of the research questions, the results appear to suggest each of the factors considered significantly affected the effectiveness of the pedagogic approach on the performance of the university students in the English course. The findings are consistent with the overall conclusions of the individual studies reviewed and hence the need for careful interpretation these results.

This systematic review included 56 studies with a total of 231 mentions relating to BL and English language instruction in Saudi universities. Based on their quality, the 231 mentions were categorised into four categories; very low quality 35 (15%), low quality 42 (18%), moderate quality 85 (37%), and high quality 69 (30%). The quality of the mentions notwithstanding, and with a p-value of greater than 0.05, BL models were found to be more significantly effective in English language instruction in Saudi universities particularly given its ability to facilitate language learning both inside and outside the school setting. As Sheerah (2018) opines, this illustrates the capacity of BL as a technology-enhanced pedagogic tool to support English language learning both within and outside the school; a flexible form of learning that promotes the development of the requisite writing, speaking, listening, and reading skills among the learners.

In terms of interventions and outcomes, of the 56 of the studies selected, 34 directly focused on BL; 26 on Learning Management Systems (LMS) especially the blackboard as a component of BL; 27 on online learning as a facet of BL; 21 on web-based learning as an aspect of BL; and 11 on mobile learning (11) as an element of BL. LMS such as the blackboard are crucial tools in the implementation of BL models in EFL courses owing to their capacity to allow students to access course materials and learn at their own convenience (Hezam & Mahyoub, 2022). According to Hezam and Mahyoub (2022) through LMS students can attend live discussions and lectures from anywhere including cafes or their homes “through virtual classes” (p. 364). In line with the overall outcomes of the studies, BL appeared to be a generally better pedagogic approach to English language teaching in institutions of higher education in Saudi Arabia (n=100 or 77.5%). In this
case, the total number of studies based on the interventions \( (n=129; 100\%) \) may seem higher than the number of studies selected for inclusion in this review \( (n=56) \) since some of the studies involved multiple interventions relating to the blended model and hence they were coded multiple times.

Meta-analyses and reviews were 19 in total; a figure that comprised of seven reviews and 12 meta-analyses of the phenomenon of interest in multiple but unspecified Saudi universities. The fact that 100% of these reviews focused on universities in Saudi Arabia helped paint a clearer picture of the effectiveness of BL programs in English language instruction within the educational context. This affirms position of several recent studies (Ali et al., 2023a; Ali et al., 2023b; Alvi, 2023; Nassar, et al., 2023) regarding the positive effect of BL practice on English instruction and education in the Saudi Arabian higher education. The finding however left no room for comparison of the effectiveness of the approach in other levels of education. Although most of the reviews included no effect sizes (ESs), the relatively high mean ESs obtained from two of the reviews implied a strong correlation between BL and English language instruction; which was interpreted to mean the approach was significantly effective in this area of instruction. It is worth noting that the interpretation was in line with the overall results of the reviews and hence prudence ought to be observed when making inferences from these figures.

The distribution of included studies by where they were conducted indicates a fairly even distribution across the country with 29 (51.8%) of the studies having been conducted in unspecified multiple universities, one in two different universities and five being the highest number of studies conducted in a single university. Despite the disparity in the settings and populations in which the studies were conducted, the findings of the individual studies are not significantly dissimilar and hence the consistency of their results vis-à-vis the effect of BL programs on English instruction (Ali et al., 2023a; Nassar, et al., 2023).

Even though this review found BL programs to be significantly effective in teaching English language courses at the university level in Saudi Arabia, the capital and technologically intensive nature of this form of learning cannot be downplayed. These issues among several others have been cited as key challenges impeding efforts to implement BL approaches in EFL contexts (Alghamdi & Alnajami, 2023; Ali et al., 2023a; Sheerah, 2016). BL models are designed to support learning both inside and outside the school(Ali et al., 2023a; Hezam & Mahyoub, 2022) indicating the need for students to not only possess but also have access to the requisite education technology and the supporting IT infrastructure. This brings to the fore the issue of access to such technologies and infrastructure as the internet and computers at home especially for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds as well as their vulnerable counterparts from rural or remote regions in the country (Alghamdi & Alnajami, 2023; Ali et al., 2023). In the review 19 or 33.3% (see Table four) of the studies analysed suggest adequacy of and access to the requisite IT infrastructure and resources in the various Saudi universities significantly affect the efficiency of BL programs in English language instruction. This highlights the significance of access to and availability of the requisite technology and the related infrastructure at both the student and institution level in promoting the effectiveness of BL programs in English language instruction (Alghamdi & Alnajami, 2023; Hezam & Mahyoub, 2022). Based on this rationale therefore, further critical analysis into the impact of poor access to the requisite education technology and inadequate IT infrastructure on the effectiveness of BL in English instruction among the economically vulnerable university students and those from institutions situated in the rural Saudi Arabia is needed.
Strengths and Limitations

Among the core strengths of this review is the fact that it included a variety of papers including systematic reviews, meta-analyses and individual studies both qualitative and quantitative. Also, the search strategy upon which the included studies were obtained employed broad search terms thus helping generate as many relevant papers as possible. The search for the studies included in the review was also conducted on numerous renowned databases thus not only facilitating the generation of huge amount of papers but also the selection of diverse papers for inclusion in the review. All the studies considered in the review were further conducted in Saudi Arabia thus allowing for better contextualisation and a more focused assessment of the phenomenon of interest.

A key limitation of the study is that the number of studies selected for inclusion in the review was lower than expected; at 56 or 36.8% of the initial 152 studies retrieved. Further the search strategy only considered studies conducted after 2010 effectively excluding potential substantial and noteworthy studies published prior to that period. The papers selected for the review also included a doctoral thesis which might not have followed the standard peer-review channels. Another limitation may be the categorisation of the studies into Unclear, Worse, Same, Better as regards the effect of BL on English language instruction without indicating the extent to which their respective findings met these parameters. All the studies considered in this review, except two, also failed to provide Effect Sizes thus precluding the ability to determine the impact of publication bias on smaller studies.

Implications for Future Practice, Research and Policy

Practice

The review associated BL strategies with improvements in English language skills among Saudi university students. This aligns with the findings by Alowedi (2023), Anas (2020) and Alowedi (2020) regarding the positive effect of BL practices on English teaching and learning. Implications for future pedagogical practice is that Saudi instructors still using other less effective teaching methods will embrace and use of BL models for English language instruction in their respective universities. The review also established the positive effects of BL strategies not only on language learning but also on course learning outcomes of university students in different levels of study. This reflects the findings by Ali et al. (2023a), Alvi (2023) and Sheerah (2018) that BL models has the potential to enhance English language skills and knowledge acquisition among preparatory year students which leads to improvement in their language learning outcomes in the subsequent years of their study. The implications for educators and pedagogical leaders in universities across the country is that they will be inspired to seize the opportunity to empower and motivate instructors in different faculties to explore the modalities of integrating and promoting BL programs in their courses.

Research

The findings of this review provide insight into the various ways in which BL strategies impact on the English language proficiencies of university students effectively drawing interest into the manner in which the pedagogical approach leads to better speaking, writing, reading, comprehension, grammar and translation skills. The implication of this for education scholars is the cognisance of the necessity of more research into the integration of BL programs in English
language instruction and especially ways in which the learning model enhances the acquisition of the particular skills.

Policy

From the review, only one university in the country, the Saudi Electronic University, offers “degree programs in complete mandatory BL model of education in all courses” (Alowedi, 2023, p. 1205). This highlights the capacity of universities in the country to put in place policy initiatives supportive of BL programs across all their learning areas. Further implications for policymakers include the realisation of the significance of enhanced professional development for teachers in the area of BL. The national and local governments could formulate policies that establish frameworks for pre- and post-service teacher training aimed at equipping them with the requisite pedagogic skills. A further national policy measure on IT infrastructure could also be established to underpin efforts towards improving nationwide availability and accessibility of the requisite technology.

Conclusion

The aim of this review was to critically and comprehensively analyse current studies on the effectiveness of BL programs in teaching English language courses in Saudi universities. A significant proportion of the studies reviewed indicated BL programs positively affect English language learning in Saudi universities. The effectiveness of the use of BL strategies in English language instruction is reflected by significant improvements in the language skills of the learners as well as the general course learning outcomes. From the review, 85.7% of the studies analysed showed use of BL models in English language teaching led to better speaking, writing, reading, comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, listening, pronunciation and translation skills; by promoting use of indirect language learning strategies including social, affective and meta-cognitive approaches, making English learning collaborative interactive and interesting, and by motivating students to learn the language and enhancing the environment for English learning. The overall results of the studies reviewed affirm the positive effect BL has on English education in Saudi universities. The results further offer insight into the factors leading to discrepancies in the effectiveness of BL programs in English language instruction. These include the gender of the students, the ICT skills gap among the instructors and the variance in inadequacy of the needed IT resources and infrastructure in the different Saudi universities. The findings highlight the need to explore ways in which the different impeding factors can be mitigated if the full potential of use of BL models in English language instruction in Saudi institutions of higher learning is to be realised.

About the author:

Yasir Alenazi has been working in the fields of education/applied linguistics since 2012. He has lived and pursued academic studies in Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Australia. Having completed his Ph.D. in Education/Applied linguistics at the University of Newcastle, Australia, in 2021, he is currently Assistant Professor of TESOL and Applied Linguistics at the Faculty of Arts and Education, the University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia. His research interests include second language acquisition/learning, error analysis, corpus linguistics, and English for academic purposes. https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9366-7606
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Eldeeb, S. (2019). An investigation into students’ views on blended learning at the English Language Institute in King Abdulaziz University. *Arab World English Journal: Special*
Effectiveness of Blended Learning Programs/Models in English Instruction

Alenazi


**Appendix A**

Table 6. Distribution of included studies by university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>No. of included studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Multiple (more than two)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Non-specific</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>King Abdulaziz University</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>King Khalid University</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Qassim University</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>University of Bisha</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Saudi Electronic University</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Majmaah University</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Majmaah University &amp; King Abdulaziz University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Najran University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Taiba University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>King Saud University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Shaqra University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Integrating an Intelligent Language Tutoring System in Teaching English Grammar

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Abstract
This paper describes a research project using an intelligent language tutoring system model in teaching grammar in English. The study aims to investigate the perceptions of a group of students regarding the effectiveness of this system and its service quality. This investigation is significant since it gives further insights into how Intelligent Language Tutoring Systems can help students learn grammar in a personalized manner based on their levels. Research has revealed that classroom teaching may fall short in providing customized instruction and feedback. Therefore, intelligent language tutoring systems can support adaptivity to individual learner needs. In order to assess the effectiveness of this system, the participants answered a survey questionnaire at the end of this study. The research project involves a class of adult mixed-ability students in a continuing education program at the National School of Applied Sciences in Fes, Morocco. The results demonstrate that these students have a positive attitude toward the merits of such technological tools. These advantages are mainly related to enhancing learner achievement and motivation. Based on these findings, some implications for both teaching and learning grammar can be drawn.

Keywords: individualized instruction, intelligent language tutoring systems, student achievement, student perceptions, teaching grammar

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Introduction

Since English is the primary language of science and technology, the demand for improving the English level of students involved in these fields of study has increased. Concerning this research project, the participants are professionals who work in the field of information technology. They are simultaneously involved in a continuing education program to get a master’s degree in computer science for better work prospects. One of the objectives of this specialized master's program is to help learners improve their English language. However, these students make up a class of mixed-ability learners with significant differences in their English levels. The reason for these differences is that these students got their Bachelors from different institutions, some of which devote just some modules to English and others none. Therefore, the teacher researcher in this research project uses an Intelligent Language Tutoring System (ILTS) model to help the participants improve their English grammar in a personalized manner. This system can determine the level of an individual learner or what they know and guide them to learn and improve what they do not know in a personalized manner. There are two reasons behind this focus on enhancing grammar skills. First, any job involves communication, oral or written, with employers, co-workers, and customers. Those who fail to communicate coherently or cannot write grammatically accurate work documents will likely to be marked down. Second, if these students want to continue their Ph.D. studies, they must publish articles with proper grammar in international journals.

Research has asserted that students can achieve better learning outcomes with one-to-one instruction that considers their individual needs and learning styles. In this respect, this study aims to help a group of fourteen students enrolled in a specialized master’s degree program for professionals learn English grammar using an Intelligent Language Tutoring System called Cambridge English Grammar in Use. They all have a common need for time and place-independent learning. Therefore, using an ILTS is the most effective learning strategy to help them learn English grammar anytime, anywhere, at their own pace, and get continuous assessment and feedback on their progress.

Accordingly, this investigation seeks to answer the following research questions:
- What are students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of this Intelligent Language Tutoring System?
- What are students’ perceptions regarding this system’s service quality?

Review of the Literature

Starting from the 1970s, education has integrated different frameworks of Artificial intelligence like Intelligent Language Tutoring Systems (ILTSs). Shute and Zapata-Rivera (2010) define an ITLS as educational software that uses artificial intelligence to track students’ learning and adapt feedback. Van Lehn (2006) explains that ITS use artificial intelligence to personalize instruction and adjust it to the personal needs and characteristics of individual students.

According to Nagao (2019), ILTSs enhance human intelligence through problem-solving. It implements artificial intelligence techniques in four main components. The knowledge base provides the domain knowledge that the system teaches. The student model represents the student’s knowledge level. The pedagogical module analyses the student’s knowledge state and offers the appropriate instructional measures that improve learning outcomes. The user interface establishes effective communication between an ILTS and learners.
This personalized learning approach of these intelligent systems is supported by the analysis realized by Bloom (1984). It emphasizes the importance of adapting instruction to each student as the most effective way of education.

The term Intelligent Tutoring Systems originates in the publication of Carbonell (1970), which describes a system called Scholar. The technique involves programs that analyze the learners’ data. These programs also use a semantic representation of these learners’ knowledge and characteristics, and accordingly adapt instruction to their individual needs. Later, Sleeman and Brown (1982) listed the main features that the architecture of a typical ITS should possess. It should respond to the student’s individual needs, it should share the control with the student, and provide domain-specific knowledge. The evolution ITSs went on with Wenger (1987), who presented an architecture for an ITS made up of four modules: communication, tutorial, student, and expert.

According to Butz, Hua, and Maguire (2006), a typical architecture for ITSs consists of four basic modules: knowledge base/domain module, student module, pedagogical/tutoring module, and user interface module. The system functions through an interaction between these four modules. In this interaction, the domain, student, and tutoring modules communicate through the user interface module as the central module. The following figure describes this architecture:

![Figure 1. A typical architecture of an ITS (Adopted from Butz et al. 2006, p.3)](image-url)

The domain model contains the lessons/knowledge to be acquired by the learner and related practice exercises that the system provides. It also includes the images, videos, and sounds that help deliver knowledge to students. When a learner provides an answer, this model determines whether the answer is correct.

The student model is the frame that provides information on the knowledge that students get from the domain model. Cataldi and Lage (2009) add that this module also gives insights into students’ learning levels and styles based on the answers to different questions.

The tutoring, also called, the pedagogical model, uses information from the student module to generate feedback. Polson and Richardson (2013) explain that when a student gives a wrong answer, the tutor interferes in giving error-specific feedback. The tutor, then, guides the correct
answer. This module may also select the most appropriate learning material and exercises for its users.

The user interface is the communication interface between the student and the ILTS. It receives the learners’ content requests and provides feedback and support to the students’ activities. Millan (2000) emphasizes that the interface should be user-friendly so that the students quickly learn how to use it.

Methods

The teacher-researcher in this study implemented an ILTS for online English grammar learning as an off-class option for the English module. Fourteen students from a continuing education master’s program at the National School of Applied Sciences of Fes used a web-based ILTS called Cambridge English Grammar in Use. The participants could use the system to study at any time and any place they wanted for twelve weeks. This system allowed them to have access to a variety of grammar content. At the end of each grammar lesson, the students take assessment tests and receive feedback on their progress.

Participants

The participants are male and female professionals who work for different companies in information technology. Their age ranges from 23 to 26 years old.

Research instruments

After twelve weeks, the students answered a survey questionnaire about their perceptions of the ILTS used in this research project. The questions are related to the ILTS’s usefulness, its service quality, and the challenges that the students experienced using it. The study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to interpret the findings.

Findings

The Intelligent Language Tutoring System implemented in this research project is a web-based education system designed for learners of English who want help with grammar. It employs illustrations with text to deliver the target content. The learning content contains units with sub-sections. Each unit revolves around a particular grammar point and provides explanations and examples. At the end of each sub-section of a unit, the learner has to take a progress test. If students get the predetermined score for a particular area, they can move to the next one. Learners can get feedback on their work; they can check the correct answer for the wrong ones, and they get hints on the content section they have to review. They can also get additional practice exercises. The system updates the student module after every test and movement between units. The learners can check the “My record” option in the menu to see which units they have covered, and the tests they have taken, as well as their grades.

After using this ITLS for twelve weeks, the participants answered a survey questionnaire to evaluate the success of this instruction system concerning its effectiveness and service quality.

Perceived effectiveness of the system

Table 1. Participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the ILTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire item</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The ILTS provides the useful grammar information you need</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The ILTS provides clear explanations with sufficient examples</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Integrating an Intelligent Language Tutoring System in Teaching English

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Analysis of the participants’ answers on the effectiveness of the ILTS used in this study shows that 85.7% of the students perceive that it provides the useful grammar information they need. Intelligent Language Tutoring Systems (ILTS) are well-known for delivering personalized instruction (Ma, Adesope, Nesbit, & Liu, 2014). These programs are responsive to individual student needs to enhance their understanding and learning further. Human tutoring may fall short here as teachers cannot attend to their students’ different needs due to time and class size limitations (Bloom, 1984).

Also, 92.8% of the participants think that the system gives clear explanations with sufficient examples of the grammar components. 71.4% of the students further justify that the colorful on-screen visual aids used in illustrations help them like and better understand the grammar content. McLaren et al. (2010) discovered, based on the findings from their study, that learners prefer on-screen agents and find them much more motivating. These findings demonstrate also that such animated pedagogical agents have a positive effect on their learning outcomes.

Motivation is a crucial criterion that influences the outcome of an instructional technology design. Rashid and Asghar (2016) maintain that there is a strong relationship between technologies-enabled relevant learning activities and student motivation. Concerning this study, 78.5% of the learners perceive that the system provides, challenging enough contact that motivates them to learn new things.

Concerning practice, 85.7% of the respondents think that this system provides enough exercises and instant feedback. Amaral, Meurers, and Ziai (2011) stress the advantage of ILTSs in providing instant feedback for learners. These systems create a supportive learning environment in which students receive customized assistance when they need help. This instant feedback helps these students overcome any frustration that they may experience if they feel they are left alone in the shadows.

An important question when considering the integration of Intelligent Tutoring Systems in classrooms is whether they have a positive impact on student achievement. According to 78.5% of the participants, their grammar has improved thanks to this ILTS. Many studies in the literature have reported that the implementation of Intelligent Tutoring Systems has improved learners’ performance. For instance, in their studies, Taylor et al. (2013), Cooper and Steenbergen-Hu (2014), and Kulik and Fletcher (2016) report that intelligent tutoring systems have improved students’ performance because they are adaptive and interactive.

Perceived System Service Quality

Table 2. Participants’ perceptions of the system service quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire item</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The ILTS is user-friendly</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. During these twelve weeks using this ILTS, I had to contact the help service for usability problems</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. This ILTS is motivating because it offers time and place learning flexibility</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Integrating an Intelligent Language Tutoring System in Teaching English

Dahbi

4. While using the ILTS, I don’t feel distracted as I have the choice of the length of my learning sessions 12 85.7 2 14.2

Service quality is another aspect that has a significant impact on learning achievement. In this respect, Gorla et al. (2010) emphasize that a well-prepared and flexible system helps fulfill the desired learning outcomes.

According to Delone and McLean (2003), an intelligent tutoring system must be easy to use in order to achieve the desired learning goals. However, if the tool is difficult to use, it may be perceived as an obstacle to learning and good performance. Concerning the system in this study, 92.8% of the participants found this ILTS user-friendly. Also, the participants didn’t have to contact the help service for any usability problems.

Another advantage of this ILTS is that 92.8% of the participants in this study find learning using it much more motivating because it offers time and place flexibility. Besides, 85.7% of the respondents appreciated the freedom that this ILTS gives to students to choose the length of their learning sessions. As such, they can keep focused and avoid being distracted compared to the long periods in classes. According to Calkins and Vogt (2013), learning research is best informed by a deepened understanding of how, where, and why students learn most effectively. Given this requirement, the anytime/anywhere mantra and the Intelligent Language Tutoring Systems have successfully attended to learners’ needs for choice and flexibility.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study is to measure the impact of integrating an intelligent language tutoring system on the learning experience of a mixed-ability class of students enrolled in a specialized master's program for information technology professionals. The findings reflect a positive attitude of the participants towards this web-based instructional system in terms of its learning effectiveness and service quality.

Implications

As a result of this research and other similar research in the literature, one can conclude that we should measure the overall impact of technology on learner achievement based on some essential criteria. These criteria relate mainly to its perceived effectiveness, relevant content, sufficient practice, instant feedback, motivating on-screen visual aids, system ease of use, and flexibility.

The findings also imply that ILTS can be an excellent tool to supplement teacher-directed instruction in classrooms. These systems provide one-on-one instruction and feedback to students in an impossible way for teachers to achieve.

We can also deduce from the participants’ perceptions in this research project that the ILTS should be of good service quality. It can encourage students who are yet to try a new learning environment to be more motivated and engaged.

Finally, ILTSs can be an excellent way to enhance autonomous learning. When students learn on their own at their own pace, they gain the confidence they need for academic achievement and personal development.

About the Author

Dr. Dahbi Manar is an assistant professor of ESP at the National School of Applied sciences of Fez. She holds a PhD in applied linguistics. She is the author of a book, a chapter in an international...
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References


Students’ Perceptions of The Use of ICT Tools in Language Preparatory School

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Abstract
This article examines the role, advantages, and obstacles associated with the utilization of Information and Communication Technology tools in the context of language learning and teaching. The primary objective of this study is to explore the advantages of technology tools throughout various domains of life, particularly in the context of education, encompassing students, instructors, and parents. Additionally, this study aims to investigate both the detriments and advantages associated with using these tools. This study utilized a Likert-scale questionnaire administered through Google Forms to gather student perspectives. Additionally, face-to-face interviews were done with a sample size of 31 students. Upon analysis of the findings, it was discovered that the students had a predominantly favorable disposition towards these instruments. They stated that these tools contributed to their language learning and improved language skills. According to the findings of the study, the mobile phone emerged as the predominant instrument among students, with a utilization rate of 84%. Furthermore, certain drawbacks have been identified through empirical investigations, in addition to the mentioned advantages. Recent findings indicate that the utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in educational settings has been associated with many negative consequences. These include the potential for distraction among students, their increased isolation, and the exacerbation of existing disparities among students from diverse economic backgrounds. The prevailing consensus derived from extensive study suggests that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools possess a greater number of benefits in the realm of language learning and instruction, as opposed to drawbacks.

Keywords: Advantages of ICT, ICT in English classes, students’ perceptions

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Introduction

ICT itself stands for Information and Communication Technologies. It has become an indispensable concept in many areas of our lives. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) covers numerous ideas, including the internet, computers, television, interactive whiteboards, and radio. These instruments are often utilized in modern education and are an essential component of education (Fu, 2013).

The 21st century is a period of fast development in numerous fields. These areas include economics, culture, politics, society, and education. Today, phrases such as 21st-century education and 21st-century qualities are very prevalent. Due to this transformation, schools and teachers are struggling to satisfy the needs of pupils and educate them appropriately for their age (Cakrawati, 2017). Educational technology is not a particularly ancient concept. The instructors included technology as supplementary material in the training. Especially in the digital age we live in, education and teaching are transitioning to an utterly technology-based demand (Yildiz, 2021; 2022). However, it is important to acknowledge that a technology-driven educational system is subject to variations dependent on the financial and economic circumstances of the learners (Celik & Kara, 2022).

In the past and present, instructors and educators utilized abacuses, pencils, and overhead projectors. In recent decades, these have been replaced by computers, smart displays, and the Internet. In addition to these enhancements, research has been conducted on how to captivate and engage students. Researchers have been working for a long time on integrating this emerging technology into the classroom and boosting the academic success of pupils (Lewis, 2013). In order to comprehensively comprehend and effectively incorporate the technological tools employed in the instructional process, it is crucial that both students and educators possess an adequate array of equipment. Educators and students can solve this problem by taking technology classes and courses. The utilization of computers and technology in the classroom is widely supported by a significant proportion of educators, who hold a favorable perspective on this matter. Furthermore, these teachers advocate for the further advancement and refinement of technical instruments in educational settings. (Carnoy, 2004a).

As educators, incorporating technology into our teaching is like adding gas to our vehicles. In the same way that we put water in our cars instead of gas, it will create an environment where we will meet many challenges. In the event that educators fail to incorporate technology into their instructional practices, they risk lagging behind contemporary educational trends and may be seen by students as traditional pedagogues (Celik, 2020a). The use of technology in classrooms does not utilize all of its negative or good characteristics. Just like a baker puts flour through a sieve before creating bread to remove inappropriate and unattractive elements, the educator utilizes features of technology that are relevant to the lesson and beneficial to the pupils (Hew & Brush, 2007).

Today, technology has become an inseparable part of education, especially in economically developed countries, and it has become a frequently used tool for the realization of instruction in schools and classrooms. In fact, instead of just simple technology, the classrooms of some educational institutions are equipped with smart boards. The implementation of Wi-Fi connectivity has been observed in both classrooms and corridors, with several educational institutions even offering pupils access to digital publications. The integration of the World Wide Web in educational institutions has facilitated convenient access to desired materials for students and educators. Furthermore, individuals have been granted online access to necessary courses without
any financial burden. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has shown to be advantageous, particularly in the realm of distance education, as it enables individuals to remain connected with the global community and ensures that students are not disconnected from their academic lectures (Dourish, 2003).

The convergence of the Internet and computer technology has created vast opportunities for education, expanding its scope and transforming its nature. Students can access the desired resources from the comfort of their own homes by clicking the mouse button. A sick student can attend live classes online and is not required to miss classes (Celik et al., 2022). They can even complete their homework online and submit it to their teachers via the Internet (Tinio, 2003). When technology is appropriately utilized, it becomes an engaging domain with substantial educational advantages. Goals should be set while integrating technology into the curriculum. The role of teachers as educators is to show both their colleagues and pupils the methods to benefit from technology and to search for ways to use it in the most effective way (Lewis, 2013). Technology in the classroom enables quick access to many resources, flexibility, pedagogical efficacy, independent learning, a stress-free learning environment, immersion in course content, continuous feedback, consciousness, and more time to connect with students (Daskan & Yildiz, 2020; Yildiz & Yucedal, 2020).

In addition to all of these advantages, technology has certain disadvantages. In industrialized countries, ICT tools have facilitated the work of students, educators, and educational institutions and improved the quality of education. On the other hand, in developing and low-prosperity nations, pupils and educators have followed technology from a distance due to budgetary difficulties; they have even encountered terms such as smart board or wireless internet too late. This is the reality of the world (Celik, 2020b; Tinio, 2003).

We can almost say that the century we live in is the century of technology. It is an obvious fact that ICT tools are in every aspect of education and our lives. Educators who neglect to recognize this fact will fall behind current instructional methodologies and encounter difficulties in establishing efficient communication with their students (Kucuk, 2023). In order to fully leverage the benefits that digital tools provide; it is necessary for educators to possess the proficiency to integrate these tools into their teaching practices. For this reason, the benefits, and drawbacks of Internet Communication Technology tools to students, teachers, parents, and education were examined in this research study. This study will be a useful resource for educators who will research the importance of ICT tools in education and will reveal the importance of these tools for all elements of education. This study aimed to investigate the following research inquiries:

1- What are the benefits and harms of ICT tools to education, students, teachers, and parents?
2- What are the perceptions of Language Preparatory Students regarding ICT tools?
3- What is the role and significance of information and communication technology (ICT) instruments in education?

**Literature Review**

In recent years, Information and Communication Technology has had a tremendous impact on the fields of education. The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) instruments into educational classes for the purpose of student development is widely acknowledged and welcomed across all segments of society. Studies have revealed that ICT-integrated education increases motivation for students, provides more participation in classes, and
Students’ Perceptions of The Use of ICT Tools

Kucuk

gives positive results. Various research conducted by Carnoy (2004b) and Kara (2023) have demonstrated a significant positive impact of artificial learning environments and online educational game tools on students' motivation. Other studies by Papastergiou (2009) and Kara (2020) revealed the effectiveness of ICT tools used in lessons in language teaching. Based on the findings of these studies, it has been ascertained that the utilization of technology exerts a favourable impact on students' motivation, fosters active engagement in classroom activities, and enhances students' capabilities. Finally, may be stated that using ICT tools can be a valuable resource for language teachers (Amrullah & Sumayani, 2023).

In addition, it was noted that integrating ICT tools into lessons will completely affect student and teacher relationships (Yuting et al., 2022). Iordache et al. (2017) concluded in a study that ICT tools positively support communication between teachers and students and provide a more supportive and interactive learning environment.

When examined in general, ICT tools integrated into education and training aim to increase student outcomes and improve the learning and teaching experience. However, the efficacy and effectiveness of information and communication technology (ICT) instruments in the realm of education are contingent upon various aspects; the type of technology used, the quality of education, and the participation levels of students.

Upon close examination of many studies, both the benefits and drawbacks of information and communication technology (ICT) technologies have been extensively investigated and analyzed. Bilgin et al. (2022) assert that technology offers a multitude of advantages within the realm of education. When examining these difficulties, it is critical to consider a particular topic. According to Mirsharapovna et al. (2022), it is said that the central emphasis of a lesson, whether for a student or an instructor, should not be on technology and computers. The utilization of technological equipment should be employed as supplementary resources. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the curriculum not only captures the interest of students but also enhances the duration of their educational experience.

Makura (2014) conducted research at South African University to get students’ opinions on technology. According to the results of the survey, most of the students have a positive attitude towards technology as it facilitates their learning. The students further proposed that the school administration should consider offering educational courses specifically designed for educators who possess little proficiency or encounter challenges in utilizing ICT technologies during instructional sessions (Bolaji & Adeoye, 2022).

According to a study conducted by Cakrawati (2017), it was suggested that incorporating technology into the values of pupils residing in the digital era is advisable. There is no point in keeping technology, which we need and frequently use in every aspect of life, separate from education. According to the research conducted by Cakrawati (2017), pupils reported a heightened comprehension of verbal communication and enhanced language proficiency because of technological interventions. In another study, Palak and Walls (2009) examined teachers’ attitudes toward technology in a school equipped with technology. According to the study results, teachers use technology in lesson plans, classroom management, and administrative work. The proposition was made that the integration of technology into the curriculum should be considered, alongside a recommendation for educators to prioritize student-centered education to a greater extent.

In their recent study, Minamatov and Nasirdinova (2022) stressed that instructors must refrain from opposing ICT tools and instead seek methods to incorporate technology into their lessons. It has been suggested that educators ought to engage in training classes and collaborate
with their colleagues to explore developing digital options. Player-Koro (2012) presented a study comparing and contrasting teachers' views toward technology. According to the study, self-efficacy is the most crucial aspect for educators to be proficient with technology. Certain educators possess a high level of proficiency in utilizing information and communication technology (ICT) tools, however, struggle to effectively incorporate them into the educational setting. Consequently, a proposal has been put up suggesting that attitudes and self-efficacy play a substantial role in influencing the adoption and integration of ICT in education.

**Contributions of ICT Tools to Education**

ICTs are accessible to anyone without exception. People can simply get the necessary resources whenever they desire. There is no need to spend additional money or drive far for this. In other words, they can access the knowledge source without necessarily being in a school setting. Tinio (2003) mentioned the following benefits in his study.

*Every time, Everywhere*

One of the most beautiful features of ICT tools is that there are no time and place restrictions. The desired online resources can be accessed and utilized at any time. The advent of online apps has facilitated the ability to conduct concurrent meetings and lectures. Examples of these programs are Zoom and Google Classroom.

*Easy Access to Distance Education Materials*

The advent of internet resources has significantly reduced the necessity for physical copies, resulting in numerous books and resources being neglected on library shelves, exposed to dusty conditions, and left unutilized for extended periods. Thanks to computers and the World Wide Web, vibrant online resources open their doors to an unlimited number of people all the time. Such resources are beneficial for both developed and developing countries because the resources in their libraries are limited (Ayu, 2020).

*ICT Prepares Individuals for their Working Lives*

The most significant known benefit of ICT is that it prepares students in school and classroom environments for the environments in which they will work. Computers and the internet have become integral components of contemporary society, permeating both present and future contexts, and have established a ubiquitous presence inside various professional environments. For this reason, they train future generations in schools to be prepared for such conditions and teach everyone to use ICT tools at the minimum level (Küçük, 2023c). In his study, Mohanty (2011) conducted an examination of the advantages of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) across four primary categories: general benefits, benefits pertaining to teachers, benefits pertaining to students, and benefits pertaining to parents.

**The Benefits of ICT in Education**

Many studies have been conducted investigating the benefits and harms of ICT tools in education, students, teachers, and parents (Amrullah et al., 2023; Celik, 2020; Kara, 2023; Küçük, 2023). Based on the collective findings of this research, the subsequent data was acquired.

*General Benefits of ICT*

1. Increasing general efficiency in schools,
2. Increasing communication channels thanks to e-mails, chat groups, and online applications,
3. Contributing positively to the motivation of students through the regular, controlled, and planned use of ICT resources and their integration into education (Dayan & Yildiz, 2022),

_The Benefits of ICT for Teachers_
- ICT makes it easier for teachers to deliver the resources they hold to students,
- Eliminating place and time restrictions in the control of assignments given to students and offering more flexible time,
- Giving educators general ICT skills, professionalization, self-confidence, and enthusiasm,
- Facilitating lesson preparations and helping to prepare richer lesson content (Kucuk, 2022),
- Providing the opportunity to reach the desired information and people quickly, anytime, and anywhere,
- Contribute to displaying a positive image of educators toward colleagues,
- Contributing to the more practical study of students and preventing the teacher from being burn-out,
- Contributing to the constant contact of students with teachers and the ability of the teacher to help students outside of school,
- Providing ease for educators to send supplementary materials to students with assignments,

_The Benefits of ICT for Students_
- Efficient lessons emerging from teachers' online resource sharing,
- A student-centered education tailored to student wishes and needs,
- Using more practical methods to record students' academic progress,
- Developing students' writing, speaking, listening, and reading skills thanks to digital resources (Yuting et al., 2022),
- Developing language skills of students using social networks,
- Providing an environment for passive students to express themselves more clearly,
- Especially the development of students' writing skills (punctuation, grammar correction, correct use of words, compatibility between sentences),
- Developing students' sense of responsibility by making assignments on their own,
- The convenience of reaching their teachers without time and place restrictions,
- Ease of delivering the work done by the students even on the days when they can't come to school (Küçük, 2023c),
- Cooperating with other students and realizing collective education,
- Utilizing diverse resources while creating tasks and preparing comprehensive homework,
- In general, students consider ICT-integrated education to be more student-centered than traditional education,

_The Benefits of ICT for Parents_
- Providing parents with more effective and faster communication with teachers,
- Access to higher quality, readable, and detailed student reports for parents,
- Ability to reach student absenteeism in the fastest and most accurate way,
The fact that parents are more engaged in their children's education and can track their academic progress more closely thanks to online applications (Lystopad et al., 2023),

- Being in constant communication with other student parents and school administration
- Thanks to ICT, it is easy for parents to connect and follow their students' lessons online (Marchlik et al., 2021).

Disadvantages of ICT in Language Lessons

Besides the indisputable benefits of ICT in education, it also has some disadvantages. The lesson involves students, the teacher, and classroom materials in which learning and teaching occur. The absence of one of these degrades educational quality and creates issues. Students' character development will go more slowly or in a negative direction if they are overly dependent on ICT and have access to all materials through online platforms (Talebian et al., 2014; Dayan & Yildiz, 2022). In contrast, online assignment assessments using ICT technologies are not as practical as in-person assignment checks.

ICT provides limitless resources and enhances learning for both educators and students, but it makes it challenging to evaluate and provide feedback on some student work (Al Rawashdeh et al., 2021). ICT tools give educators enormous benefits if they know how to use them but pose a severe obstacle if they do not. Educators who generally have negative attitudes about technology have not attended ICT courses before and have not improved themselves in this regard (Blatchford & Whitebread, 2003; Küçük, 2023a).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has gained the necessary importance in modern societies and its place in education has reached an undeniable level. In addition to all the benefits that ICT provides, there are a few disadvantages. In order to minimize the challenges and negative consequences associated with Information and Communication Technology (ICT), it is necessary to possess a comprehensive understanding of its functionalities and actively explore strategies for its effective integration within educational contexts (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). One of the most significant handicaps of ICT is that it reduces student-teacher interaction when used too much by students. With the development of technology, students feel lonelier. They distance themselves from society, start a life dependent on computers, and isolate themselves from face-to-face interaction with their friends and teachers. These factors restrict the development of students' social skills and establishing relationships, which are indispensable for student success (Chen et al., 2020).

Another disadvantage of ICT tools in education is that they cause student distraction. Students who can easily access all kinds of useful or useless information on the Internet may have difficulty concentrating on their lessons and may experience decreased productivity and attendance. Since students can access all kinds of information with just one click, cheating cases among students begin to increase, and information quickly learned can be easily forgotten (Prensky, 2009).

Besides the challenges of ICT on students and teachers, there are also some critical issues at the state level. The high costs of ICT tools pose an obstacle for schools in setting states. Due to the cost implications associated with procuring, monitoring, and advancing technology, the continuous expansion of technological resources poses a challenging endeavour for numerous educational institutions (Küçük, 2023b). In addition, integrating technology into schools appears to be a risk that will increase inequality between segments of society. For example, students studying in a low economic domain do not have the opportunity to receive the same education and
use the same quality technology as their peers, and this turns into a disadvantage for them, unlike in developed societies where ICT has turned into an advantage in education (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015).

Methodology

In this study, a mixed methodology was used to combine student opinions and analyse the data obtained. The purpose of mixed methods is to examine, control, and classify the accuracy of the information obtained (Greene, 2006). Initially, a comprehensive examination of the literature was undertaken to explore the efficacy and potential drawbacks of information and communication technology (ICT) tools in the field of education, drawing from relevant sources. Subsequently, the collected data was analyzed and evaluated. In the second stage, a questionnaire was applied to the students via Google Forms. During the concluding stage of the research, in-person interviews were carried out with the students, and the collected data was documented.

Participants

This study involved the participation of 31 pupils, including 21 boys and ten girls. The English proficiency level of the study's participants is A1 (Starter) according to Common European Standards. The research was carried out throughout the academic year of 2022-2023, employing a Stratified Sampling Method. A consent form was devised for the students enrolled in five distinct classes at the language preparation school, with student participation being contingent upon voluntary selection. Students who lacked willingness and enthusiasm were substituted with alternative students who willingly volunteered. At the Language Preparatory School, an educational institution affiliated with TISHK University, a private Iraqi university, all students are enrolled in English language courses.

Table 1. Participants’ frequency in terms of gender and age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable(s)</th>
<th>Option</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Instruments

This study employed a mixed methods approach, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. In order to investigate the psychological associations between students and ICT tools, a survey was conducted using a Likert-scale questionnaire in the form of a Google Form. The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions aimed at gathering information and understanding the students' perspectives. The formation of groups was facilitated by inviting the students included in the study to participate using an online platform. Subsequently, links were distributed to them, enabling them to complete the Google Form. In the first section of the form, the content of the questions asked which technological device the students used most. In the following areas, students were asked questions about the purposes for which they used these devices and how often. In the last section, strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree questions were presented to measure how students were psychologically inclined toward technological tools.
Findings

The data collected in this area is categorized into two primary sections. The initial phase involved the utilization of Google Forms to administer the questionnaire, while the subsequent stage entailed conducting face-to-face interviews with the students. The data was divided into two distinct sections for individual analysis, and the subsequent findings are presented below.

Table 2. *What is your favorite ICT tool?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable(s)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Phone</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in the table above, the most used ICT tool of today's generation is the telephone. It is the most used tool for social media and for making assignments for students. For this reason, 84 percent of the students chose the telephone option. This number makes up 26 of the 31 students in total. Surprisingly, none of the students chose the tablet option.

Table 3. *Students` opinions on ICT usage in education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I know how to use ICT (phone, computer, internet)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I appreciate the utilization of (ICT) technologies employed by my instructors within the educational setting.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Item One, as the third question of the questionnaire, the statement "I know how to use ICT (phone, computer, internet)" was given to the students. Twenty of the students, 60% of them, determined the strongly agreed option. Ten students chose the agree option. This emerging data reveals to us the fact that the participants of the study have knowledge about ICT tools and are well-equipped with how to use these tools. According to the table, no students selected the disagree option. Only one student selected "strongly disagree." This amounts to an average of 3%. Overall, 97% of pupils can utilize ICT tools.

In Item Two, students were given the statement "I like the ICT tools that my teachers use in the classroom". Eleven of the students chose 36% strongly agree option. Twelve of them chose the 37% option. Considering these data, 23 students, or 73% of them, are satisfied with their teachers' integrating ICT tools into the lessons and they find it beneficial. The interesting result that stands out in this table is that seven students, 24%, stated that they were not satisfied with the ICT tools used in the courses.

Table 4. *What is the average duration of your daily engagement with ICT tools, such as smartphones, computers, and the Internet?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable(s)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 hour</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 3 hours</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 4 and 6 hours</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 7 hours</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we examine the table above, only one student stated that they use ICT tools less than one hour a day. Fourteen of the students, 45%, spend between one and three hours with ICT tools. The findings revealed that a notable outcome emerged from the study, with eleven participants, or
36% of the total sample, reporting that they allocate a significant portion of their daily 24-hour period to engaging with ICT tools, specifically ranging from four to six hours. What is particularly intriguing is the fact that a total of five students, constituting 16% of the sample, allocate approximately one-third of their daily time engaging with technological gadgets. Upon analyzing the statistics, it becomes evident that a significant majority of the participants allocate a substantial portion of their time engaging with information and communication technology (ICT) tools.

**Table 5. Students’ purpose of using ICT tools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing Homework</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling or texting</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time on social media platforms</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following news</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching movies</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading books</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online shopping</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching videos on YouTube</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking WhatsApp, Viber, or Snapchat</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the feedback provided by the students, it is evident that many of them utilize information and communication technology (ICT) tools to fulfill their homework obligations. Specifically, 68% of the students confirmed that this is their primary mode of engagement. This discovery suggests an increasing incorporation of technology inside the educational system, with students relying more heavily on it to complete their academic assignments.

The most prevalent application of ICT tools pertains to communication, as evidenced by 42% of students reporting their utilization for calling or texting purposes, at the same time an equivalent amount employs them to access and review messages on platforms such as WhatsApp, Viber, or Snapchat. The empirical evidence suggests that a significant percentage of students dedicate a substantial amount of their time to interacting with social media platforms, indicating that these platforms are widely accepted as a popular form of entertainment and social interaction.

Using ICT tools for watching videos on YouTube is a prevalent practice, as indicated by 52% of students who consider it a primary application. In summary, a smaller percentage of students participate in the use of ICT tools for passive activities, such as staying informed about current events, watching movies, reading literature, and engaging in online commerce. In general, information and communication technology (ICT) tools play a crucial role in students’ lives, serving many goals such as education, entertainment, and communication.
The data presented in Figure One illustrates that a considerable percentage of the student body, particularly 61%, maintain the perspective that their daily lives are reliant on technology. Conversely, the remaining 39% maintain the perspective that they can without such technological reliance. The outcome is unsurprising considering how technology has become ingrained in our everyday routines. The incorporation of technology, including a wide range of devices such as cell phones and laptops, has become an essential and integral element in multiple facets of our existence, including professional endeavours, interpersonal communication, and recreational pursuits. Additionally, it is essential to consider that the age range of the surveyed pupils might have influenced their answers. The younger cohorts have been raised in an environment where technology is consistently present, hence rendering it increasingly challenging to conceive of a reality devoid of technological advancements.

**Interview Analysis**

Within the current section, a direct, in-person interview was carried out with a cohort of 31 students who were enrolled in a language preparatory school. During this interview, the students were queried regarding their perspectives on information and communication technology (ICT) tools. Some of the participants' opinions are given below as an example.

ICT tools have become like power supplies for me. I used to struggle with traditional learning methods, but now I think I am making progress. I especially like using language learning applications. *(Student 2)*

I couldn't imagine learning a foreign language without a teacher, but I witnessed that I could do this by using ICT tools. In my spare time at home, I listen to native speakers and get feedback on my pronunciation. At the same time, I have the chance to follow my own language development. *(Student 6)*

ICT tools allow me to connect and exchange information with other students after class. I believe that language learning should take place outside of the classroom, and ICT tools are quite helpful in this regard. *(Student 9)*

ICT tools have made learning a foreign language more fun and I enjoy using them. I increase my vocabulary and grammar knowledge, mainly thanks to online games and quizzes. On the other hand, I also have the chance to improve my listening skills by watching movies. *(Student 13)*

The most important thing for me is that I can access the information I need whenever and wherever I want. ICT tools help me in this regard, and I also improve my speaking skills by using speech applications. *(Student 16)*

Unlike my other friends, I am not someone who loves technology very much and my friends know me as old-fashioned. But this is my style, and I don't think about changing it. *(Student 17)*

ICT arcs have completely changed my language learning. I can reach and practice with people worldwide whenever I want. This is an excellent chance for me. *(Student 29)*

When student interviews are examined, we see that 90 percent are satisfied with using ICT tools and that they contribute to their education. When we look at the general results, we see that these arcs are preferred because they provide easy access to the targeted information and are practical. One of the participants stated that he chose to learn with traditional methods, and this opinion is shown above among the sample opinions.
Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the opinions of children attending a language preparation school regarding Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools. Specifically, it attempted to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of using Internet communication technology tools in education, including their impact on students, teachers, and parents. Interviews and the use of a Likert-scale questionnaire were used to collect the data. Each research tool contains important elements in this regard that must be considered in turn.

In question One, it was planned to determine which technological device students spend more time with and enjoy spending time with. The results were like the study conducted by Kara (2023). The analysis of the resulting data revealed that most pupils utilized smartphones. The academic achievement of their students and the effectiveness of their own classes will both benefit from teachers who can use student phones in lessons (Widana, 2022).

The provision of technological tool training to students has the potential to enhance the efficiency of their education, hence creating opportunities for further academic advancement. A communication was sent to the pupils regarding their technology usage skills in the context as stated in Item One. Subsequently, numerous participants expressed their perspectives on the incorporation of technology within their academic pursuits. Conversely, the responses provided by the students revealed that a minority of individuals had a notable lack of familiarity with technology. Within this particular setting, the investigation undertaken by Haleem et al. (2022) reveals a convergence between students’ technological requirements and the imperative nature of attaining education at each phase of their academic journey.

The proper utilization of technology holds equal significance to its mere utilization. Based on the examination of obtained data, it has been determined that 16% of pupils engage with technological gadgets for a duration exceeding seven hours each day. If students don’t use them properly, mental and psychological problems could develop, which would be problematic for both their academic achievement and general well-being (Stecula & Wolniak, 2022).

Parents and teachers alike need to be aware of the precise goals that students use technology resources for. Homework, with a prevalence rate of 68%, had the highest level of resolve among the options offered to the participants and requested for selection. The obtained outcome indicates favorable data. This research shows that young people are aware of and use technology responsibly. In contrast to the earlier findings, Stecua and Wolniak (2022) found that students use technology for a variety of purposes while no one is watching them, which can result in eye illnesses and psychological problems.

The relationship between the results of Nikolaeva et al. (2023) and the observations presented in Figure One of this study is the same. Integrating technology tools into education and daily life has become indispensable, rendering life and education devoid of such technologies inconceivable. Consequently, it is crucial to study the methods of effectively incorporating these tools into educational settings and everyday activities, and afterward implementing them appropriately.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine how students in language preparation programs felt about information and communication technology tools and to look at how these technologies were used and any potential drawbacks for the students. Additionally, the advantages and disadvantages
of these tools were examined with an emphasis on their effects on students, as well as their ramifications for education, teachers, and parents.

Information and communication technology (ICT) tools have a significant impact on and support the teaching of foreign languages, according to survey and interview results. It has been noted that using these technologies in the classroom not only makes learning enjoyable but also gives students access to a more vibrant learning environment. It has been studied that incorporating technological tools into language teaching contributes to their core abilities such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The results of the questionnaire and interviews reinforce the idea that, as educators, we must be well-versed in technology to meet the requirements and demands of today's students who grow up in the era of technology. It was examined that most of the participants gave importance to language learning and used Information and Communication Technology tools effectively in this process. It has been revealed that the courses containing these features are more interesting and desirable than the others. Another emerging feature of these tools is that they support collaborative learning and provide environments for students to exchange ideas and discuss different perspectives. One of the data obtained is that the self-confidence of students who use innovative tools increases and motivates them to speak in the target language.

A few drawbacks of information and communication technology tools should be considered in addition to these benefits. For students unfamiliar with technology and who have not used it before, these tools can be frightening and may prevent them from learning. In addition, since students from some low-income families and countries do not have the budget to spare for technology, they may fall behind their other friends in terms of opportunities and conditions, and this may cause the equality system among students to deteriorate. When all these data were examined, it was observed that Information and Communication Technology tools had more benefits than harms in language learning and language classes. Educators should work devotedly and create equal environments in ensuring equal conditions and integrating these tools into classrooms. When all these measures are taken into consideration, it can be said that a very high-quality education will emerge, and language learning will be enjoyable.

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References


Abstract
Speaking assessment is believed to be difficult in its expansion and execution. Thus, it is a challenge for teachers in preparing students for speaking tests. This study’s purpose was to identify whether topic familiarity affects speaking performance among students who were preparing to sit for the high-stakes Malaysian University English Test speaking test. The study aimed to investigate the validity and reliability of the speaking assessment measures and, subsequently, to examine the speaking tests’ item difficulty measures differences according to topic familiarity level. Data were collected from 40 non-native speakers of English among Malaysian Form Six pre-university students who were preparing for their MUET test. The researcher conducted two practice speaking tests, which used retired papers of the MUET CEFR-aligned speaking tests, to the 40 participants who were grouped into 10 speaking test groups. The practice speaking tests were video and audio-recorded. Topic familiarity was measured using self-report questionnaires. In the second phase, each of the seven appointed raters scored all 40 students’ responses in two speaking tests consisting of two speaking tasks assessed across four criteria: task fulfillment, language, communicative ability, and group discussion. Many-facet Rasch measurement results revealed significant differences translating to significant influence of topic familiarity on speaking performance. The present study’s results not only confirmed the significance of topic familiarity in the preparation for speaking assessments, but also highlighted the need for formal teaching on potential topic themes that are commonly encountered in such assessments, particularly those that are at the post-secondary level. These findings imply importance in designing speaking tests taking into account test-taker topic familiarity.

Keywords: language testing, many-facet Rasch measurement, oral performance, speaking assessment, topic familiarity

Introduction

In English language testing, it is crucial to understand the factors that influence task difficulty so test tasks can be tailored to best suit target test-takers, such that neither the extremes of difficulty nor leniency are unreasonable. Test designers will profit from this by being able to create tests with higher levels of validity and fairness, which will lead to test-takers being able to be given more accurate decisions, particularly those who are sitting for high-stakes tests.

Moreover, initiatives have been attempted to emphasise the task-based aspect of college-level ESL instruction (e.g., Ismail & Abd. Samad, 2014). The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) format was revised by matching its test specifications with CEFR descriptors because the CEFR is task-based (Council of Europe, 2001; Fischer, 2020). In order to assess secondary school leavers' proficiency in the English language, the MUET was developed in 1999. The test evaluates a candidate's listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills in English. In 2021, the MUET was modified into a proficiency test that was aligned with the CEFR with the assistance of the English Roadmap 2015–2025. This demonstrates how crucial it is for the nation to increase its citizens' proficiency in English-language communication (Chonghui, 2019). This proficiency test is required for some employment in Malaysia and is utilised by the majority of higher education institutions to position students in the correct English ability levels related to their respective programmes (Rethinasamy & Chuah, 2011). Because the majority of MUET candidates use the test to gain admission to higher education institutions, test-takers have a lot at stake. Therefore, the MUET has undergone CEFR alignment as well as rigorous validation procedures conducted by the Malaysian Examination Council (MEC) together with Cambridge Assessment English (Geranpayeh & Ahmad Zufrie, 2018; Malaysian Examinations Council, 2019). Despite this, the MUET speaking test is nevertheless vulnerable to concerns of variability, much like other tests of speaking proficiency have been shown to be. There have been a plethora of studies conducted on the issue of variability, and many factors have been identified and segmented into different categories. Variability in rater-mediated exams, such as the speaking test, may be due to rater behaviour issues (Aryadoust et al., 2021; Bijani, 2018, 2019; Khabbazbashi, 2017) as well as task characteristics. On the other hand, sources of variability might also be garnered from personal traits, more specifically, test-taker characteristics (Abu Kassim & Zubairi, 2006; Bachman, 1999). Hence, there is a need to fulfill the gap in the literature and delve into test-taker characteristics of Malaysian test-takers, which could be a cause of the variability that occurs in the speaking test performance in the MUET test task.

Zooming into test-taker characteristics, whether experiential or psychological, are among the variable contribution which Skehan (2014) claims influences task difficulty, and subsequently influences task performance. For the speaking test, several “parallel” versions with different topics are made to make sure it is fair. This means that a test-taker (or group of test-takers) in the same group would not get the same topic as the previous test-taker. Khabbazbashi (2017) says that in this kind of situation, most people would believe that even though the speaking test topics are different, they are all about the same level of difficulty. Despite having different topic familiarity
backgrounds, one test-taker and another would appear to have the same chance of passing the test. In reality, this is a concern because tests with very unfamiliar topics could show that there might be bias against different groups of test-takers who are less familiar with the given topics. Studies which look into the area of effects of topic familiarity of L2 learners towards oral performance concerning L2 assessment have been growing worldwide in the past two decades (e.g., Huang et al., 2018; Khabbazbashi, 2017; Lumley & O’Sullivan, 2005; Qiu, 2019). Unfortunately, relatively few studies have focused on how Malaysian test-takers’ topic familiarity could influence their oral test scores. To date, studies on topic familiarity of Malaysian students have revolved around its connection to L2 reading anxiety (Rajab et al., 2012) and L2 listening anxiety (Tahsildar & Yusoff, 2014); studies focusing on L2 oral performance such as that conducted by Abu Kassim & Zubairi, (2006) and Mohd Noh & Mohd Matore (2022) are very scarce. Therefore, in order to address this gap, it is crucial to recognise the effects of topic familiarity on the speaking performance of Malaysian test-takers. This understanding is vital for enhancing the design of the test task and refining the approach to its administration.

The following are the research questions which guide the study:

1) To what extent are the test-takers’ speaking test measures valid and reliable considering:
   a. Item fit statistics
   b. Item separation
   c. Category functioning

2) How do item difficulty measures differ according to level of topic familiarity?

**Literature Review**

In this section, an overview of topic familiarity is presented. Subsequently, past studies concerning topic familiarity in relation to oral performance assessment and previous research in the Malaysian context is discussed.

**Topic Familiarity**

Topic familiarity is a variable representing individual characteristics of the test-taker within the language testing contexts which may have been overlooked by many tests (Banerjee, 2019; Brown, 2003; Huang et al., 2016; Qiu, 2019). Over the course of the last few decades, topic familiarity in language testing has been investigated in previous studies (e.g., Abu Bakar et al., 2019; Afaf Ayed Alrowaithy, 2021; Fu et al., 2021; Ovilia, 2019; Xiaolei et al., 2023). Past findings indicate that possessing knowledge or experience in a particular field may have a positive influence on one’s ability to perform well in assessment evaluating inter-language fluency, complexity, and accuracy. In a study conducted by Banerjee (2019), the researcher examined the impact of topic familiarity on the performance of second language (L2) learners in language assessment. The research also discovered that the language proficiency performance of second language learners is influenced by their understanding of content and vocabulary, despite the fact that these factors manifest distinctively in the processes of acquiring and sharing information. This
finding aligns with the proposition put forth by Skehan (2014) that familiarity with a given topic might aid in the process of conceptualisation.

**Topic Familiarity and Speaking Assessment Performance**

Research has been given due attention to the validity of rubric-based performance assessments of speaking (e.g., Bijani & Khabiri, 2017; Hidri, 2018; Huang et al., 2018; Mohd Noh & Mohd Matore, 2022; O’Grady, 2019; Sims et al., 2020), with only a handful of studies exclusively focusing on the influence of topic familiarity on speaking assessment (Banerjee, 2019; Han & Md Yusof, 2019; Huang et al., 2018; Khabbazbashi, 2017; Qiu & Lo, 2016). As empirically evidenced by certain research studies, it was found that topic familiarity significantly affected oral performance among learners (e.g. Bui & Huang, 2016; Huang et al., 2018; Lumley & O’Sullivan, 2005; Qiu, 2019). Still, the influence of topic familiarity variably depends on other factors such as planning time, test-taking strategy, anxiety, and confidence (Abu Kassim & Zubairi, 2006; Ameri-Golestan, 2016; Bui & Huang, 2016).

In their study, Bui & Huang (2016) discovered that the level of familiarity with the subject of a language task had an impact on the results of language task planning for learners; task-internal readiness was proposed to help test-takers with fluency. The study conducted by Qiu (2019) provided evidence that a total of eight participants, accounting for 38.10% of the sample, reported perceiving benefits in the practise of reiterating novel topics.

**Previous Studies on Topic Familiarity in Malaysia**

Reviewing past studies in the local context, it was found that the topic familiarity facet has revealed to influence Malaysian tertiary level learners where the topics for speaking assessment are usually selected among familiar topics (Abu Bakar et al., 2019; Lai Kuen et al., 2017). Willingness to communicate among Malaysian students were reported to be influenced by factors including topic relating to one’s experience and the fear of being ridiculed or judged (Jahedi & Ismail, 2020). This could explain why Malaysian students in the classroom would not be able to keep up with certain parts of a conversation or discussion in the classroom due to lack of topic familiarity towards certain topics discussed by their teacher or lecturer (Hiew, 2012). Lack of comprehension towards content would definitely affect the learners when they sit for their language proficiency assessments; in turn, this will apparently be connected to what is taught during classroom lessons.

The Malaysian context has seen studies concerning effects of confidence and anxiety learner factors and task aspects of task difficulty of institutional speaking tests (e.g. Abu Kassim & Zubairi, 2006; Ahmad Tarmizi et al., 2022; Idris & Zakaria, 2016; Lateh et al., 2015), studies on effects of rater characteristics towards speaking assessment (e.g. Baharudin et al., 2022; Mohd Noh & Mohd Matore, 2020) as well as learner-driven speaking assessment (e.g. Idris & Abdul Raof, 2019; Lateh et al., 2015), yet it is necessary to investigate additional factors that may have a role in test-takers’ level of speaking performance within the context of Malaysia. In view of the
paucity of research in this area and the importance assigned to the linked aspects of topic familiarity, a detailed investigation of this test-taker characteristics' impact on speaking ability is necessary and serves as the justification for the current study.

Concerning the current MUET test format, varying levels of topic difficulty may affect test fairness for test-takers without topic knowledge (Huang et al., 2018; Ketworachai & Sappapan, 2022). The Malaysian Examination Council specified that MUET's latest CEFR-aligned speaking test topics would range from “familiar topics within the test-takers’ personal experience to more abstract topics in a range of fields and interest areas that may be encountered in late secondary/early tertiary education contexts” and “in the case of the more abstract topics, the test is limited to covering familiar and unfamiliar topics in different academic areas that a non-specialist would be able to talk about” (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2019, p. 21). Thus, the newest MUET speaking test specifications say that the test includes “unfamiliar topics,” which necessitates studying factors that may cause task performance variability.

Therefore, present study seeks to further examine the relationship between topic familiarity and oral performance among form six pre-university test-takers in Malaysia. This is in response to the paucity of research on the subject in the Malaysian educational context to date. By doing so, the study aims to reinforce and verify the critical importance of topic familiarity in speaking assessment.

**Method**

The study was conducted in a quantitative descriptive research design implementing purposive sampling. Participants responded to two different versions of the MUET speaking test using a parallel forms reliability design (each set covered five topics). The familiarity of the participants with the topics was assessed using topic familiarity self-reporting questionnaires, and their oral performances were rated by seven different raters. The data that were obtained from this were analysed using MFRM.

**Context of Assessment**

The assessment context for this study is the MUET Speaking module, a high-stakes standardised test of English proficiency. It consists of two face-to-face tasks required to be taken in a group of four test-takers; the first task is an individual presentation that is required to be delivered to the examiners and fellow candidates while the second task is a group discussion. The group discussion makes MUET unique since international speaking tests of IELTS, ACTFL, and TOEFL do not have this task in their respective speaking test formats (Idris & Abdul Raof, 2019).

With an information-transfer focus, this speaking test is primarily made up of independent, heavily topic-based tasks. These tasks need test-takers to rely on their background knowledge (Khabbazbashi, 2017) in order to reply to prompts and generate topics. Due to the strict examiner frame, candidates cannot choose topics or manage them (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2019).
Thus, it is possible to argue that the influence of topic familiarity seems notable in this test, and therefore this setting was selected for the study.

**Participants**

The study involved two groups of participants, which were the test-takers and the raters. Test-takers in this study were 40 Malaysian speakers of English as a Second Language aged between 18 and 20. There were 26 females and 14 males. All were enrolled in Form Six which made it mandatory for them to take MUET preparatory classes in their respective schools. They therefore constituted a fairly homogeneous sample in terms of L1, cultural background and exposure to English as a second language.

For the second phase, the rating of the speaking assessment tasks by the test-takers was carried out by seven raters, consisting of five females and two males who spoke English as a second language. They were chosen for the position based on their academic credentials, as well as their vast experience in both teaching and assessing a range of speaking assessments that are CEFR-aligned. It is important to note that all of the raters were provided training prior to evaluating the speaking tasks.

**Research Instruments**

Speaking tasks were selected from a collection of MUET previous papers that were made available to the general public. In order for (any) differences in scores to be predominantly attributable to topic differences and test-takers' topic familiarity, it was crucial to ensure that, with the exception of task topic, all other task-related variables were controlled for (Bachman, 2002; Weir et al., 2006) type of task input was controlled for by following the MUET speaking test format, the examiner role was fulfilled by a trained MUET teacher to control for any interlocutor effects (O’Sullivan, 2000), and by complying attentively to the MUET administration guidelines, the researcher was able to ensure the quality of the test's delivery, except for the condition of having one examiner instead of two in the real MUET speaking test.

To make sure that all the topics included in the study were able to be estimated in the study, an incomplete-connected data collection design (Eckes, 2009; Weir & Wu, 2006) was adopted; two test versions were applied (Q and R) each consisting of 4 Task A topics and one Task B topic following the MUET Speaking Test format. Two common tasks, which were the Task B tasks, were used in versions Q and R in order to create the necessary common link between the tests, allowing for coverage of 10 different topics (see Table One), meeting the requirements of MFRM.

According to the MUET speaking test, participants take the role of Candidate A, Candidate B, Candidate C, and Candidate D. Each candidate responded to versions Q and R resulting in 4 topic-based performances for each participant while ensuring that the requirements of MFRM are met through task overlap. Note that while the two groups were connected through common tasks from only one task type (B), there was full overlap on all task types within each group which ensured construct coverage and supported quality of the equating.
Rating Scale

The rating scale in this study was utilised by the raters to score the speaking performance of the test-takers in the video recordings. The rating scale was adapted from a CEFR-aligned rating scale which was developed, validated, and currently being used in the 17 Malaysia matriculation college institutions all over Malaysia to score course based speaking assessments which is modelled from the MUET. The original 6-band rubric was modified to a 5-band one. This five-band analytic scale consists of four criteria: Task Fulfillment (TF), Language (L), Communicative Ability (CA), and Group Discussion (GD). Scores were awarded for each criterion (as whole bands) to be estimated in the FACETS software.

Questionnaire on Topic Familiarity

According to the viewpoint of this research, differences in test-takers' topic familiarity of a task are a complex characteristic that cannot be simply predicted. After the speaking tests, participants completed topic familiarity questionnaires to gauge their level of topic familiarity. A four-point Likert scale was used to collect answers to the questionnaire's four questions.

Speaking Performance Scores

Using the FACETS software, the MFRM analysis of speaking test scores was conducted (Linacre, 2023). The researchers began by conducting a number of MFRM analyses runs with four facets, using test-takers, raters, tasks, and items as the facets. The resulting subject measurement reports were utilised in answering Research Question (i). After that, a MFRM run with five facets was analysed, and the topic familiarity was added. The topic familiarity measures were categorised into four categories: least familiar, less familiar, familiar, and most familiar. The Topic familiarity measurement summary was then used to answer RQ (ii).

Research Procedures

Participant data collection took place in the Form six classes during school hours. The participants were called out group by group to a private room as the mock exam hall, where two versions of the speaking test were administered in succession. Once the test-takers were finished with all four tasks (1 topic for each task), test-takers then completed the topic familiarity questionnaire to measure their topic familiarity based on the 4 topics that they had to prepare and perform for.

Responses to topic familiarity questionnaires were scored. Each recorded speaking test was edited and the sequence of videos was arranged providing 20 speaking files (10 groups × 2 versions) for the raters to score. The researcher shuffled the sequence of the videos to make sure each rater had different arrangements of videos. This was done to minimise potential rater halo effect. Rater training was provided via a teleconference platform with all the raters. Following Weir & Wu (2006), a complete judging plan was used where all test-takers were judged by all raters.

Table 1. Incomplete-connected data collection design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Candidate A</th>
<th>Candidate B</th>
<th>Candidate C</th>
<th>Candidate D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Data Analysis

The MFRM analysis of speaking scores was carried out using FACETS (Bonk & Ockey, 2003) (Linacre, 2011). A series of four-facet MFRM analyses with examinees, raters, topics and criteria as facets were first run. Resultant topic measurement reports were used to address RQs (i) and (ii). A five-facet MFRM was subsequently run where topic familiarity was conceptualised as an additional facet.

Results

The wright map (Figure One) visually represents MFRM, displaying calibrations for all facets in the first FACETS software run. The test-taker measurement report illustrated a wide distribution of speaking abilities spanning about 5 levels from -3.58 – 1.73 logits. Separation indices indicated about eight statistically discriminating speaking ability strata (G=8.24, H=11.31), with a Rasch person separation reliability of r=.99. The seven raters in the study demonstrated high levels of consistency in their marking, with infit statistics lying between lower and upper control limits of 0.7-1.3., suitable for tests of lower stakes (Aryadoust et al., 2021). The results of the criterion facet suggested that the analytic criteria used in the study (TF, CA, L, and GD) contributed in various ways to classifying test-takers into different ability levels. An examination of the structures and categories of rating scales revealed that the categories within the scales were generally functional.

Test-takers’ speaking test measures validity and reliability

For the first stage, a 3-Facet MFRM run was conducted in order to estimate the validity and reliability of the test-takers’ speaking performance measures. Item fit statistics, item separation, scale functioning, and threshold gaps were first investigated to make sure the data is fit before the second MFRM run was employed.
Item Fit Statistics

Item fit is one of the Rasch assumptions that needs to be fulfilled before further detailed analysis is performed. Fit indices are crucial in informing the study whether or not the assumption of unidimensionality of the measured construct is obtained (Bond & Fox, 2015). Report on item fit will ensure the items used in this study are able to measure speaking skills and traits among the test-takers. Item fit is determined by the value of infit and outfit for mean square (MnSq) and standardised fit statistics (Zstd).

Linacre (2002) outlines that the expected value for MnSq is 1.0, while Fisher (2007) states that value for MnSq between 0.77 to 1.30 logits are acceptable. In this study, the infit and outfit MnSq for the Communicative Ability criterion were 1.00 and 1.02 respectively; the values for the Language criterion (0.89 and 0.88 respectively), Group Discussion (1.06 and 1.06 respectively) and Task Fulfilment criterion (1.26 and 1.25 respectively) are indicated in Table Two. It is evident that the value for infit MnSq and outfit MnSq for all the four criteria used in this study are within the accepted range.

Next, the standard error indicates the accuracy of the measurement for each item. The standard error for all the four items are less than 0.25 and is adequate for its accuracy, as suggested by Fisher (2007). Specifically, the SE are ranged between 0.05 to 0.07. Table Two displays a summary of the fit statistics of all the items as criteria of the speaking test.

Table 2. Report on item fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Logit Value</th>
<th>S.E</th>
<th>Infit MnSq</th>
<th>Outfit MnSq</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicative Ability (CA)</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language (L)</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Discussion (GD)</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Input on item separation is important to inform the study about the extent to which the items used are able to discriminate test-takers’ capabilities. Item separation was analysed through separation ratio, index and reliability. Table 3 shows that the separation ratio for the four items used is 4.28. This signals that the difficulty of the items is divided into four levels of difficulty in relation to the precision of measure. Next, the value separation index is 6.04 which indicates that the items are able to discriminate the test-takers into six different levels of ability. Finally, the separation severity appears to achieve the desirable value, 0.95.

Table 3. Item separation report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Item facet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separation ratio</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation index</td>
<td>6.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation reliability</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale Functioning

Analysis on scale functioning seeks to determine the quality of scoring scale categories used by raters. The objective of scale functioning is to identify whether the scales were able to measure the intended construct and also whether raters were able to use all the scales consistently. The findings emerged from the analysis can also inform the study if there is any problematic scale category which needs to be combined, divided or omitted (Myford & Wolfe, 2004). Linacre (2002) states that there are six basic assumptions about scale functioning that need to be fulfilled before further analysis is performed. Table Five illustrates the report of the six scales used in the study extracted from FACETS.

The first criterion conditions that each scale must be used more than ten times (Bond & Fox, 2005). Based on the findings shown in Table Five, it was found out that each scale in this study was used more than ten times. Specifically, scale 3 was the most frequently used scale by raters and awarded to test-takers 2,050 times (52%). This is followed by scale 2 that was used 935 times, scale 4 (734 times), scale 5 (143 times) and scale 1 (49 times). Only scale 6 did not meet the requirement with only 8 times used by the raters. This may be due to the reason that this high ability scale is only achievable by a minority of the test-takers in this context.

As for the second criterion, the infit mean square for each scale must be less than logit 2.0. The results in Table Five portrays the value of outfit MnSq for each scale are within the acceptable range that is either 1.0 or 1.1.
Next, the fourth criterion requires the threshold measure to be increasing from the smallest to the biggest scale. This assumption is also fulfilled as the thresholds for each scale in this study ascend systematically starting with -5.67, followed by -2.31, 0.88, 2.62 and finally 4.48. These results are important to prove the absence of disordered scales in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Gap</th>
<th>Threshold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$S_{1.2}$</td>
<td>0.00 – (-5.67)</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S_{2.3}$</td>
<td>-5.67 – (-2.31)</td>
<td>1.00 &lt; 3.36 &lt; 5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S_{3.4}$</td>
<td>-2.31 – 0.88</td>
<td>1.00 &lt; 3.19 &lt; 5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S_{4.5}$</td>
<td>0.88 – 2.62</td>
<td>1.00 &lt; 1.74 &lt; 5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S_{5.6}$</td>
<td>2.62 – 4.48</td>
<td>1.00 &lt; 1.86 &lt; 5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the last criterion aims at determining the distinctions between thresholds through a visual representation of the scale usage given by the output. This was conducted through observation of the curve graph produced from the FACETS analysis. The assumption is fulfilled when each category has a distinct peak in the probability curve graph. When there is even one category with no clear peak, it signals that the particular scale is not sufficiently used by the raters. Figure Two portrays that all the scales in this study managed to have their own peak and there isn’t any scale that is hiding behind that of another. Hence, the sixth criterion is fulfilled in the study. To sum up, all the necessary six criteria were fulfilled in the study. Thus, all the six scales are maintained and further analysis was able to be executed for the second MFRM run positioning topic familiarity as a dummy facet.
The Difference in Item Difficulty Measures when Differentiated by Test-takers’ Level of Topic Familiarity

The study intends to identify if the difficulty of the items used in the speaking tasks appeared to be different when answered by test-takers of different topic familiarity. Figure Three depicts MFRM, displaying calibrations for all facets in the second run, anchoring the values for rater, task, and topic facets.

Based on the questionnaire on topic familiarity responses, the test-takers showed different levels of topic familiarity and they were divided into four different groups. The test-takers were either least familiar, less familiar, familiar or most familiar with the topics of the speaking test that they were assigned to respond to. Based on these different groups of test-takers familiarity, analysis was performed to determine if the item difficulty was distinct when differentiated by different group of test-takers. The findings revealed that the items were of different level of difficulty to different group of test-takers. Interestingly, the difficulty of the items has a linear pattern to the test-takers’ familiarity of topics. Specifically, the items appeared to be most difficult for least familiar test-takers with logit value of 0.97. This is followed by the less familiar test-taker group with -0.29 logits for item difficulty and the familiar test-takers group with -0.32 logits.
Figure 3. Wright map (4-Facet MFRM) of test-taker, topic, topic familiarity, and item (Criteria) difficulty

Finally, the item difficulty was the least difficult or the easiest for test-takers that are most familiar with the topic with the logit value -0.36. The Chi-Square analysis depicted that the differences of item difficulty differentiated by the test-takers’ level of topic familiarity were statistically significant with the Chi-square value, $\chi^2 = 47.5$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$. Thus, the null hypothesis that there was not any difference in item difficulty based on their topic familiarity was rejected.

Table 6. The topic familiarity measurement report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Familiarity Level</th>
<th>Obs avg</th>
<th>Fair-M avg</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Model S.E.</th>
<th>Infit MnSq</th>
<th>Outfit MnSq</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Least Familiar</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Familiar</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiar</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Familiar</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (N=4)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model, Sample: RMSE .10 Adj (True) SD .64 Separation 6.20 Strata 8.60 Reliability .97
Model, Fixed (all same) chi-square: 47.5 $df$:3 significance (probability): .00

To summarise, the results indicate that the speaking measures were both reliable and valid, as evidenced by their item fit statistics, item separation, and category functioning. Additionally, when the speaking measures were calibrated with the topic familiarity dummy facet, significant differences were observed between the various topic familiarity group categories in terms of the speaking test criteria items. In general, it was found that the Communicative Ability and Language criteria were the most challenging for the test-takers.

Discussion
Question 1: To what extent are the test-takers’ speaking test measures valid and reliable considering: a) item fit statistics, b) item separation, c) category functioning

It was found that the speaking test measures were valid and reliable as an outcome of examining the three stated indicators. When evaluating internal consistency, Rasch is considered a better measure as it has the ability to transform the measurement units to logit in ratio data type. This transformation results in a linear numerical representation, which can be extremely helpful in analysing the data and drawing meaningful insights. The study chose to employ the Rasch model to measure validity and reliability of the data where it is more valuable in terms of the information it gives as compared to other techniques, i.e. the Cronbach’s Alpha from classical test theory. This is in line with the study by Anselmi et al. (2019) where they discovered that the Rasch model is a modern measure of internal consistency. Studies concerning speaking assessment measures like Khabbazbashi (2017), Mohd Noh & Mohd Matore (2022), and O’Grady (2019) also implemented the same methods for validity and reliability. They reported using similar methods in MFRM to validate their speaking measures before calibrating their respective dummy facets. For future research investigating rater-mediated assessment, item fit statistics, item separation, and category functioning could be considered.

Question 2: How do item difficulty measures differ according to level of topic familiarity?

When calibrated with the speaking test measures of the test-takers, the findings demonstrated that test-takers of higher performance were among those who indicated topics as most familiar towards the topics given; conversely, test-takers with lower speaking performance were among the group of test-takers which specified topics to be least familiar. Although the logit ranges between the most familiar, familiar and less familiar test-taker groups were not as large as that between least familiar, nevertheless the results showed a consistent pattern between the continuum of the topic familiarity groups and the speaking performance, serving evidence that topic familiarity has a direct affect towards speaking performance. These results are similar to that of Huang et al. (2018), Qiu (2019), and Xu & Qiu (2021) which also identified a statistically significant role for topic familiarity in L2 speaking performance. Huang et al. (2018) argue that language tests are unfair when the rating scale assesses topic development in conditions where the objective is not to test topical knowledge in the first place. Thus, high stakes language tests should have an eye on the mechanism of topic selection for their speaking tests. Specifically, the MUET proficiency test speaking component in Malaysia could consider constructive upgrading in selecting topics which would be familiar to both high and low proficiency test-takers.

Concerning the item criteria comprised in the speaking rating scale sourced by the raters, the results found that the item criteria most difficult for test-takers to perform in are the communicative ability and language criteria. Having to sit for the speaking assessments in a group could have hindered the test-takers’ fluency due to intimidation of being observed by fellow group members. In turn, heights of anxiety and a cutback in self-confidence would be most possible in
a situation (Badrasawi et al., 2021) where the test-takers are obligated to speak about less familiar topics.

In addition, the language criteria would also be a challenge for lower proficiency test-takers to perform well in if their cognitive capacity is incapable of processing both the conceptualisation of the least/less familiar topics and language accuracy simultaneously (Skehan, 2014). Pre-task planning time of 2 minutes before the Individual Presentation task could be too overwhelming for lower performers to prepare for a two-minute presentation; O’Grady (2019) suggests that 5 minutes could elicit substantial speaking performance. Bui & Huang (2016) suggested that task-internal readiness is applied to strategies of getting test-takers prepared for their language tests. In the context of the speaking test component, this study serves evidence that topic familiarity should be part and parcel of the preparation needed to enhance task-internal readiness that teachers can provide test-takers.

Conclusion

This study investigated how topic familiarity affects English Language proficiency speaking assessment, specifically of the MUET format, a high-stakes English test in Malaysia. Having advantageous levels of topic familiarity is widely acknowledged to facilitate in second language assessments. However, in language assessment settings, empirical evidence indicating the need to take into account test-taker topic familiarity in designing speaking tasks is still inadequate. The overall effects of topic familiarity conveyed to be significant towards MUET test-takers’ performance in their speaking test practice, where there is involvement of speaking production from familiar and less familiar topics in language testing contexts. Therefore, steps should be taken to lessen (any) negatively influential topics in order to facilitate test-taker readiness and ensure that test-takers perform at their optimum level; it could be recommended to provide a choice structure in which test-takers are subject to choose their topic for speaking test. As a result, test-takers would be able to display their true language proficiency when cognitive load can be optimumly used towards speaking about a topic that is familiar to them.

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References


The Students’ Perception towards the Use of Icebreakers, Warmers, and Energizers in EFL Classrooms: A Tertiary Study

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Abstract
This study examines first-year students’ perceptions in the English Language Teaching Department at Tishk International University regarding using icebreakers, warmers, and energizers in the classroom. The research aims to assess the effectiveness of these activities in enhancing student engagement and participation, as well as their impact on the overall learning experience. The study contributes valuable insights into the practical applicability of these techniques in an educational setting. Additionally, the positive perceptions of the students underscore the potential of these activities in establishing a favorable and comfortable learning environment. Data were collected through surveys and interviews, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. For the quantitative aspect, 32 participants (10 males & 22 females) were surveyed, while the qualitative segment involved interviews with 10 students (five males & five females) at Tishk International University. The study’s results indicate that the overwhelming majority of students hold a positive perception of the use of these activities. They view them as beneficial for creating a relaxed and comfortable learning atmosphere, fostering interaction and collaboration among classmates, and boosting motivation and interest in the language. The study suggests that incorporating these activities into EFL classrooms can significantly enhance the overall student learning experience and contribute to a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment. The findings are consistent with existing literature in the field.

Keywords: Classroom engagement, English as a Foreign Language, Energizers, Icebreakers, Warmers

Introduction

Students in the 21st century do not have the same attention span as students did a decade ago. Educational research indicates that students’ attention diminishes in the first 10 to 15 minutes of a lecture (Bradbury, 2016). Learning requires attention (Schmidt, 2012). We live in an age where distractions come in various shapes and forms. The distractions may lead to taking teachers and students’ attention away from what is being taught in the classroom. Nowadays, smartphones are the biggest classroom distractions. Students can easily be distracted by the notifications they get from various social networking and messaging applications.

So, where do we want to go when we find a way to grab student’s attention? The answer is one word: students’ engagement. Student engagement is defined as “the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education” (Sabbott, 2016). Bernate (2019) highlights, “Student engagement is the key to building a safe, positive, and creative school culture that increases achievement.” The objective of creating an engaging learning environment, as articulated by Bernstein (2023), is to promote learning and development in students, preparing them to lead lives that are both productive and meaningful.

Teachers are the central figures in the learning process, and they need to keep their students in mind as they set standards for their classes. Apart from being competent and possessing knowledge of the subject matter, they need to pass on their knowledge to their students in a creative way. Anwer (2019) quotes Ericksen (1978) as saying that “effective learning in the classroom depends on the teacher’s ability to maintain the interest that brings students to the course in the first place” (p.155). So, the learning process is facilitated through building a positive teacher-student relationship in an engaging environment.

This study examines how first-year students in the English Language Teaching Department at Tishk International University view the use of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers in the classroom. The research aims to evaluate how effective these activities are in improving student engagement and participation, as well as their impact on the overall learning experience. The significance of this study is that it provides valuable insights into the practical use of these activities in an educational setting. In addition to that, it highlights the potential of these activities in creating a positive learning environment.

To achieve the purpose of the study and address the perceptions of the university level students on the use of the mentioned activities, the current study attempted to answer the following questions:

- Do icebreakers, warmers, and energizers help the students or do they waste time?
- If they are helpful, how do they help?

Literature Review

Defining Icebreakers, Warmers, and Energizers

DiCarlo (2009) states that “students do not learn by simply sitting in a classroom listening to the teacher, memorizing assignments, and spitting out answers” (p. 262). He argues that they must be able to explain what they are learning, write about it, and use it in their everyday lives. Students gain knowledge by active participation and then processing it via articulating what they have discovered. Icebreakers are activities that aid students to cooperate and encourage classroom interactions (Interactive Classroom Activities | Sheridan Center | Brown University, n.d.). Astuti et al (2020) define icebreakers as “an activity that can be used to solve the tension and saturation
of students in learning so that the class becomes fun and more conducive before entering into core activities” (p. 211).

There are many names used for icebreakers, such as warm-ups, tension reducers, brainteasers, feedback/disclosure loops, energizers, and games, yet in one way or another, these terminologies all refer to the same idea. Taylor (2009) believes that “icebreakers, energizers, and simulation games” are activities that can be used “to break down barriers, to bring a group together, as a tool for learning, and of course, for some light relief when needed” (p. 4).

British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), in an educational guide entitled *Using icebreakers and energizers to support online teaching* (2020), defines icebreakers as “short activities and experiences (2–10 minutes) that engage learners, support interaction and learning, and add variety and life to a class” (p. 3). These can create a notable difference in the classroom environment and interactions between teachers and students. The guide uses three different terms: “icebreakers, warmers, and energizers.” The three terms are sometimes used for “the same activity or type of activity. However, the distinction is when the activity is done, and what the purpose is” (*Using icebreakers and energizers to support online teaching*, 2020). According to the BCIT guidelines (2020), icebreakers are utilized at the start of a class, whereas warmers can revisit previously covered topics, and energizers can be implemented to alter the pace of a class.

**When to Use Icebreakers, Warmers, and Energizers?**

Teachers can find many opportunities to use icebreakers, warmers, and energizers in the classroom. However, the timing of using such activities is crucial and, to a good extent, influences their effectiveness. Thompson (2023) points to four important times when the activities could be effective. They can be used on the first day of school, which can be challenging for students as they may not know each other. These activities help students feel more comfortable with their classmates. They can also be used after holidays when students might feel a bit down about returning to school. These activities allow students to share and interact, helping them get back into the school mood. These activities are particularly useful at the start of the week, a challenging time for students. Engaging in these activities can assist them in preparing for the learning ahead. In addition, towards the end of the week, when students may find it difficult to maintain focus, incorporating icebreakers, warmers, and energizers can effectively redirect their attention back to the class. Ougham (2023) adds one more time. He specifically refers to the energizers as activities that “help our learners to reactivate their brains after extended periods of sitting, writing, and listening; giving them time to re-adjust and re-focus their attention back to healthy learning.” Thus, energizers can be used during the class to grab the student’s attention back.

**Why use icebreakers, Warmers, and Energizers?**

Desthuis-Francis (2021) believes that “the belonging feeling” and “building relationships with fellow students, professors, tutors, and mentors” are two important key points in students’ engagement, retention, and overall success. Also, students need to take a break from classwork, from time to time, and help disperse the anxiety. Rahmayanti and Saraswati (2019) highlight,

[At] the beginning of the lesson, [icebreakers] is like a warm-up. It can raise the students’ spirit to learn. In the middle, it can regain the students’ concentration and attention. Meanwhile, in the end, it can create addiction sense to the students to learn. (p. 595)
In an EFL classroom, the focus is on language learning. “Language develops best through interaction” (Sinha, 2021, p. 1137). Keeping the interest of today’s students alive and harnessing their attention span, in an atmosphere where distractions all around, can often be a challenge. For that reason, constant conversations and interactions among the students and with their teachers are highly encouraging. Students need to make learning a part of themselves. Keeping students engaged in the classroom through icebreakers, warmers, and energizers (Using icebreakers and energizers to support online teaching, 2020).

The advantages of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers can be plenty, but BCIT (2020) summarizes them in the following points. The same points have been used as items in developing the survey:

- Create a positive learning experience in the classroom.
- Encourage active learning, interaction, and engagement.
- Restart attention spans.
- Create an opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions.
- Improve teamwork among classmates.

Creating A Positive Experience

According to Dornyei (as cited in Velandia, 2008), “Teachers need to try and actively generate positive students’ attitudes toward learning” (p. 11). Dornyei believes the “Key issue in generating interest is to widen the students’ appetite; that is, to arouse the students’ curiosity and attention and to create an attractive image for the class so that they will get more involved with it and a better learning process will take place” (As cited in Velandia, 2008, pp. 11).

Desthuis-Francis (2021) highlights the advantages of implementing icebreakers, warmers, and energizers, citing three key benefits. Firstly, they offer a moment of break and relaxation amid a busy day. Secondly, they create connections and encourage teamwork within a safe environment. Lastly, they provide an entertaining way to engage with others.

Getting the Students Engaged

Kawasaki (2021) writes that icebreakers are intended to keep students engaged as active participants. Sometimes, there is a feeling of nervousness when freshmen students first enroll in a class. The class atmosphere creates much more nervousness for the students if they are not familiar with each other well. Yeganehpour (2016) draws on that point, saying that it is crucial to break the ice in the classroom in a positive way to make sure that the students feel relaxed. For that, icebreakers, warmers, and energizers assist students in overcoming nervousness while they help the students get oriented to the new environment.

Desthuis-Francis (2021) highlights the importance of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers in helping students get oriented in a new classroom. She believes that the activities assist students to get acquainted with one another and form personal connections. She goes on to explain that entering a new environment and meeting new people can be discouraging and intimidating. This is particularly true for first-year students. Thus, teachers must arrange a variety of fun and engaging icebreakers, warmers, and energizers to ensure that students feel accepted and comfortable.

Restarting the Attention Span

When students are bored or uninterested in the material they are taught, they cannot focus on the classroom tasks. The attention span they have will most likely wear out soon and they
become distracted. Allwright (1984) points out that there are activities that teachers can use to grab attention. He argues, “The focusing of attention by underlining words on the blackboard, or by using coloured chalks, is a simple example” (p. 165). Lavery (2017) states that German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus is believed to be the first person to coin the term Serial Position Effect. The effect is the psychological process where one remembers the first and last items in a series better than those that come in the middle. The effect includes two periods; the primacy and the recency effect (Cherry, 2022). With the primacy effect, someone tends to remember information presented at the beginning. However, with the recency effect, someone tends to remember information presented at the end (Lavery, 2017).

![Retention During a Learning Episode](image)

*Figure 1 Retention span (Adopted from Sousa, 2016, p. 148)*

Sousa (2016) posits that, throughout a learning episode, students undergo periods of prime and down times in cognitive engagement. Optimal learning occurs at the beginning of a class (primacy), followed by enhanced retention towards the end of the class (recency). Lastly, the least effective learning tends to take place during the middle phase (downtime). In Figure One, Sousa provides a clear visual representation of this tendency for a 40-minute learning episode (Curriculum, 2016).

![Three-hour Module](image)

*Figure 2. Three-hour Module without Activities (Adopted from Tamblyn, D., 2006, p. 19)*
However, by having a warm-up activity with a learning episode, the primacy and recency time can be increased. Each activity resets the attention span and creates a new primacy and it decreases the down time. Figure two and three are three-hour modules of the learning episode. Figure Two demonstrates a class with no activity that has only its primacy and recency effect along with a downtime. However, the breaks in Figure Three represent the activities a teacher can implement in the classroom. The figure demonstrates the multiple primacy and recency effect in the attention span of the students.

**Improving Idea-Exchange**

Encouraging the exchange of different viewpoints among students is an important responsibility for teachers. This is particularly true in the first year of college, where the learning environment significantly varies from their previous high school setting (King, 2012). Aimerie (2023) stresses that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers are “designed to discuss, question, share ideas, experiences, feelings, etc. (depending on the nature of the activity chosen) with other students as well as with the teacher.”

The student-to-student relations help to ensure that the students are all getting along well. They also make sure how safe students feel in the classrooms. Yeganehpour (2017) posits that icebreakers, energizers, and warm-up activities can be utilized to facilitate interaction between students and teachers as key players in learning. These activities contribute to creating a more friendly atmosphere among students and between students and the teacher.

**Building Team-Work**

Icebreakers, warmers, and energizers can be useful for team-building when they involve everyone in a group who works together to achieve a specific task. McGhee (2018) states that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers “may seem trivial, but they can assist with building meaningful relationships with students.”

Fierce Education Staff (2022) asserts that there are some skills that students cannot acquire merely from textbooks. For instance, understanding the art of getting along with classmates goes beyond mere memorization. The website suggests that students acquire essential life skills like communication and collaboration through completing group activities. The staff (2022) stresses, “Engaging, relevant team-building activities for students that can energize classroom and take learning to a new level.”
Icebreakers, Warmers, and Energizers in Language Learning Environment

The student-centered gained significant attention and came under the spotlight in the mid-20th century (Bojana, 2023). Student-centered learning changed the classroom setting by placing students at the center. In this approach, the teacher assumes the role of a “guide on the side,” providing assistance and guidance as students work towards their goals (Overby, 2011). Student-centered learning gives importance to the incorporation of warm-up activities, energizers, and icebreakers in the classroom. The activities serve the purpose of student-centered learning by grabbing students’ attention, producing a positive learning environment, and building peer relations.

Apart from that, the use of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers promotes active learning. In an article written for the Cambridge Assessment blog, Morris (2016) defines active learning as learning that “focuses on how students learn, not just on what they learn.” Active learning is a term used to describe strategies that emphasize students’ active involvement in the process of constructing knowledge. With this approach, students actively engage as participants, assuming responsibility for their learning and constructing understanding through various activities (Active Learning: Teaching Guide | Center for Teaching & Learning, 2001).

Icebreakers, warmers, and energizers play a key role in establishing an interactive learning environment in EFL classrooms. It is particularly effective at the start of a lesson, assisting in the introduction of new topics or smooth transitions between the topics. Moreover, the activities are effective in reactivating students' focus when they feel lethargic or experience a decline in attention span. Additionally, they contribute to promoting a positive atmosphere in the classroom.

In addition to that, the activities are excellent strategies to be used in language-learning settings. They provide opportunities for students to use and reinforce their English language skills in a relaxed and supportive setting. For instance, the activity “marooned” helps students search for and check new vocabulary and practice using English sentences.

Examples of the Activities

A quick online search will give a plethora of resources on icebreakers, warmers, and energizers to be used in classrooms. The following activities are some examples that have been used in the class:

**Play ball:** A softball is needed for this activity. The students can be arranged in circles or sit in their seats. The idea is that a student throws the ball at someone in the classroom. On catching it, the other students are to disclose something about themselves, before throwing it to someone else. The information they disclose can be adjusted to the purpose of the classroom. For our class, we used this activity for self-introduction. This activity is preferred to be implemented at the beginning of the year (Schweitzer, 2019).

**Deserted Island:** This activity is based on the theme of being stranded on a desert island. Students pretend to have been trapped on a desert island. They have to think of five things that they will have with them if they want to survive. For our class, the students were divided into four groups, and they were asked to discuss the items they needed. It was an excellent activity for idea exchange and teamwork. It gave them the chance to search for new vocabulary and express themselves in English (VIPKid, 2018).

**Blobs and lines:** Gonzalez (2015) argues that this activity promotes active student engagement and communication, assisting them in discovering shared interests. The idea behind this game is for students to respond to their teacher's prompts, arranging them either in a line (e.g.,
alphabetical order of last names) or in “blobs” based on a shared characteristic (such as birth month) (Gonzalez, 2015). This example works as a good warmer or energizer, after a holiday break, to get the students back on track of studying. Here are some examples of prompts we tried:

- Stand in chronological order of your birthdays.
- Arrange yourselves by the number of siblings you have.
- Form a line according to the chronological order of your shoe sizes.
- Line up based on the chronological order of your heights (Gonzalez, 2015).

**Random questions and answers:** With this activity, each student has a chance to write an open-ended question on a piece of paper. They can ask about anything they are curious about. Once they are done, they can fold the papers and drop them into a box that is passed around. Next, the students will write down random answers on another piece of paper, whether it is just a single word or a complete sentence. Afterward, they will fold their papers and add them to the box. The thrilling part is that the teacher randomly selects one paper from the question box and another from the answer box. The pairing of a question with an unrelated answer creates a fun and unexpected environment. This activity is an engaging and fun way to foster engagement in the classroom.

**Beep-Baap:** This is an energizer that works well for ESL classrooms (Turner, 2021). Students substitute a number with the word “Beep” and another with the word “Bap” as the teacher goes around the room asking them to count. For example, the students would say, “Beep” for every number that has “four” such as “4, 14, 24, 34, etc.” they would say “Bap” for every number that has “eight” such as “8, 18, 28, 38, etc.” If the students fail to say “Beep” or “Bap” at the right number, they have to sit down. The last one standing becomes the winner. This activity was practiced as soon as lethargic feeling was sensed among the students to restart their attention span (Turner, 2021).

**Video:** Jackie (2023) says, “Videos are ideal for a quick warm-up activity.” A variety of video content can be used in the classroom. Short videos were used as a warmer easing the students into understanding a new topic or easing the students into the mood of study after a holiday or break.

**Research Gap:**

The literature review thoroughly covers the definitions, purposes, and benefits of integrating icebreakers, warmers, and energizers in EFL classrooms. However, there is a significant gap in research when it comes to empirical studies assessing the simultaneous application of these activities within an educational setting. While the review emphasizes the importance of these activities individually, their collective influence has not been extensively investigated. This study aims to bridge this gap by gathering participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the three types of activities when implemented in an educational setting.

**Method**

A mixed-method approach was chosen to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data. By choosing that, diverse perspectives of the students were explored, and a rich picture was created. The quantitative methodology was used to measure the relationship between different variables while the qualitative methodology was used to understand the perceptions of the students about the activities. Furthermore, a mixed-method approach was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the researcher's data.
Participants

![Bar chart showing participants for quantitative data]

*Figure 4. Participants for quantitative data*

![Bar chart showing participants for qualitative data]

*Figure 5. Participants for qualitative data*

The participants of this study were first-grade students, from the year 2021-2022, in the English Language Teaching Department at the Faculty of Education at Tishk International University, where the researcher taught reading and writing skill courses. For the quantitative part, 32 (10 males & 22 females) Kurdish EFL students were surveyed. As for the qualitative, 10 (five males & five females) students were interviewed.

For the data sampling method, a homogeneous sampling was used. Homogeneous sampling is a purposive sampling technique used on units that share similar characteristics or identical traits. In this case, the units were the first-grade students who took the class where the teacher used icebreakers, warmers, and energizers. The students were exposed to the experience equally and were able to express their views on the experience easily.

**Research Instrument:**

The data for the present study were collected using Google Forms. Five single-answer multiple-choice questions and one multiple-answer multiple-choice question were distributed. The researcher designed the survey to determine the perceptions of the students towards the use of the activities, their usefulness, and whether they want to continue having them or not. In addition to that, three specific questions were formulated for the qualitative aspect of the study, which were asked of participants during interviews.
Procedure

Table 1. Reliability statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.818</td>
<td>.834</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before the questionnaire was deployed, a pilot study was carried out for the reliability and internal consistency of the questions in the survey. The questionnaire was distributed among 10 students and then the results were tested using Cronbach’s alpha. Many sources consider above 0.70 to be acceptable, but 0.80 or greater is preferred (Cortina, 1993). The alpha coefficient for the eight items of the survey questionnaire was 0.834, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency. After being assured of the reliability and internal consistency of the items, the survey was delivered to the participants. The results of the collected data were analyzed by Microsoft Excel.

For the qualitative aspect, 10 students (five males and five females) were individually interviewed. They were asked three questions. The interview duration spanned three to six minutes, depending on their willingness to express their thoughts. The interviews were conducted in a quiet environment that encouraged participants to comfortably share their experiences. Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed. Once the transcriptions for all the interviews were completed, data analysis was carried out to identify common patterns and themes.

A thematic analysis was used for the qualitative part. A “thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data. It is usually applied to a set of texts, such as an interview or transcripts. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes” (Caulfield, 2023). After the transcription, the common themes were identified. Each theme was examined to better understand the participants’ perception of the experience they had in the classroom with icebreakers, warmers, and energizers. The following questions were asked:

Q1. Do you think the icebreakers, warmers, and energizers were helpful or they were a waste of time?
Q2. If helpful? How do you think icebreakers, warmers, and energizers were helpful?
Q3. Do you think it would be beneficial if we continue doing these activities in the classroom? Why or why not?

Results

Quantitative Result

The quantitative findings indicated that all participants agree that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers are helpful, and a significant majority do not consider the activities a waste of class time. All participants (%100) confirmed that these activities were beneficial, highlighting their positive effects. While a small number (%9.4) had concerns about these activities being a waste of class time, the majority (%90.6) disagreed, highlighting the perceived value of the activities. Further examination showed that %75 of participants believed these activities created a positive learning environment. Additional advantages included promoting active learning (%59.4), refreshing attention spans (%51.3), encouraging idea-sharing (%56.3), and enhancing teamwork (59.4%).
Qualitative Result

The qualitative aspect reiterated the same findings, with participants highlighting the positive influence of the activities on their learning experience. The participants expressed a strong consensus that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers contribute to creating a positive learning environment. This positivity is associated with increased engagement, active interaction, and renewed attention spans. Students feel that these activities help them overcome uneasiness, connect with peers, and familiarize themselves with the classroom environment. Additionally, participants recognize the role of these activities in promoting teamwork, idea-sharing, and further improving their classroom experiences.

Discussion

Connecting the research findings with the research questions, the results strongly affirm the beneficial impact of these activities on the learning process. Students overwhelmingly stated that these activities are genuinely helpful and play a vital role in creating a positive learning environment.

Quantitative

The questionnaire includes two yes/no questions about whether icebreakers, warmers, and energizers have helped them or not and whether they believed icebreakers, warmers, and energizers were a waste of class time or whether they would rather spend the time studying the core topic of the course. As Table Two indicates, all the participants (%100) answered Q1 with yes, meaning that they strongly agree that the icebreakers, warmers, and energizers have helped them. Even though a few participants (%9.4) answered yes to the Q2, I believe icebreakers, warmers, and energizers are a waste of class time, I would rather spend the time studying the core topic of the class, the majority of them (%90.6) answer the question with no, meaning that they do not believe the activities are a waste of time.

Table 1. Students’ perceptions on icebreakers, warmers, and energizers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1 Icebreakers, warmers, and energizers have helped me.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>%100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 I believe icebreakers, warmers, and energizers are a waste of class time, I would rather spend the time studying the core topic of the class.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>%9.4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>%90.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To elaborate on how the icebreakers, warmers, and energizers help them, the participants were provided with a question (Q3) that had five items to choose from. The items address the areas where they believe that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers benefit them. The participants could choose more than one item. As Table Three illustrates below, the item that stands out among all is the icebreakers, warmers, and energizers that “create a positive learning environment.” %75 (24 out of 32) of the participants believe that the activities create a positive learning environment. This can be because when first-graders come to college, the first thing that they look for is a positive learning environment. Finding themselves in an environment different from high school, they may feel some uneasiness. Therefore, they need something to free them from the stress and uneasiness. Icebreakers at the beginning of the year offer the students this opportunity to overcome their uneasiness. This result closely resembles those reported by Velandia (2008) and Desthuis-Francis (2021) who stated that arousing the students’ curiosity and
attention is crucial to getting students more involved within the class and providing an entertaining way to engage with others.

The other four items, in the question, are equally considered to be beneficial to the participants. For the second item, “Encourage active learning /interaction/ engagement,” %59.4 of the participants, which is more than half, are with belief that the aforementioned activities encourage active learning, interactions among peers, and engagement in the classroom. This supports the literature that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers are intended to keep students engaged as active participants. An optimistic classroom ambiance motivates students to join in, understand the subject matter, and start discussions with their peers.

Recognizing and restarting the attention spans during class time was what %51.4 of the participants chose in the question. In an age where students are surrounded by distracters, the icebreakers, warmers, and energizers are designed to keep students’ attention intact and prepare them to focus on the activities that come next.

Most of the icebreakers, warmers, and energizers, that were implemented in the class, required interaction among the students, so %56.3 of the participants indicated that the activities “create an opportunity to share ideas and opinions or to ask questions.” This shows that understanding of the peers’ perspectives is enhanced when direct interactions happen in the classroom.

Finally, the group nature of the majority of the activities necessitated the students to be a part of a team, and for that, %59.4 of the participants agreed that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers improved their teamwork in the class.

Table 2. Q3 Icebreakers, warmers, and energizers have helped me with the following (Please select your choices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Create a positive learning environment</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>%75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Encourage active learning /interaction/engagement</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>%59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recognize and ‘restart’ attention spans</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>%51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Create an opportunity to share ideas and opinions or to ask questions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>%56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Improve teamwork among classmates</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>%59.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Four indicates that %96.9 of the participants answered yes to Q4, “I think it would be beneficial if we continue doing these activities in the classroom.” This shows that the majority of the participants persist in having icebreakers, warmers, and energizers in their classes. This also underscores the important value of the activities in keeping an engaging and collaborative classroom atmosphere.

Table 3. Participants' opinions on the activities' continuance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q4 I think it would be beneficial if we continue doing these activities in the classroom</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>%96.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>%3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants also indicate their favorite types of activities in the classroom. Table Five illustrates that %50 of the participants prefer the energizers (to change the pace of the class), %37.5
of them choose *icebreakers* (at the start of the year/ to allow students to get to know each other), and %25.5 of them the *warmers* (introduce/ review a topic/ after a long holiday or break) as their preference. The different rate of preferences among the students towards energizers, icebreakers, and warmers provides valuable information about the participants’ desires for the classroom activities. Energizers, with a preference rate of 50%, appear as the most favored type. The fact that half of the participants prefer energizers indicates a strong interest in keeping the classroom mood active. It also suggests that participants recognize the benefits of including activities that inspire excitement in the learning environment.

Following energizers, 37.5% of participants chose icebreakers as their preferred category. The percentage underscores the importance the participants place on building a sense of community within the classroom, which contributes to a more comfortable learning atmosphere.

Warmers, selected by 25.5% of participants, indicate that a quarter of the participants identify the value of starting or restarting class sessions with activities that refresh their understanding. This preference reveals that the students appreciate a learning approach that helps continuous learning progress. Together, the various percentages guide educators to tailor classroom activities to meet the students’ diverse needs. The patterns identified in the quantitative part are akin to those discussed by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Icebreakers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Energizers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Warmers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Activity preference

**Qualitative**

Similar to the quantitative results, the qualitative results showed that all of the participants (10 out of 10) showed a positive attitude towards icebreakers, warmers, and energizers that they experienced during the year. As to Q1, all the participants strongly agreed that *the icebreakers, warmers, and energizers were helpful*. This positive perspective is attributed to several factors which they answered in the question.

The participants’ answers to Q2 share several common patterns and themes. One of the common themes that stands out is “positive,” whether it be “positive thinking,” “positive environment,” or “positive vibe.” Participant No.1 states, “The icebreakers, warmers, and energizers created a positive thinking in the classroom... and they made me feel comfortable.” Similarly, participant No. 2 focuses on the positivity of the activities, highlighting that they “helped me to create a positive environment.” The participant also adds that “At first, [I] was shy, when [I] did those activities [I] felt comfortable.” Sharing the same pattern, participant No. 9 states, “The activities created a positive vibe in the class.” Participant No. 10 shares the same point and also underscores that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers “created a positive environment where we loved studying and learning... [they] helped us with adapting to the new environment of the college at the beginning of the year.” Participant No. 7 restates the same point, saying that “the activities helped us get familiar with each other very quickly.” Student No. 3 points out that the activities “helped me enjoy the class more.”

Another common theme that emerges in the participants’ answers is “attention.” Across the responses, the participants consistently expressed how the activities positively affected their
focus during class. Participant No. 1 mentions, “They started my attention span, especially when I was getting bored in the class and sleepy. They made me more active and focused on the lessons.” Participant No. 2 elaborates on how the activities are particularly effective at the beginning of the day, saying that “they helped bring our attention back to the class. In the morning, they made us energetic and brought our focus to the class.” Similarly, participant No. 5 emphasizes the usefulness of these activities in retaining a positive environment when they get bored. Participant No. 3 notes that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers effectively restart the class mood “after coming back from a holiday.” Participant No. 6 and Participant No. 7 both refer to the “mood” transition as well, emphasizing how the activities help them reconnect with the mood of learning after some time away from the classroom. A couple of participants emphasized the energizing effect of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers. Participant No. 5 articulates that the activities “gave us energy when we became sleepy,” especially during early hours, while Participant No. 9 adds that the activities help them warm up to new topics. The participants’ perspectives on the classroom activities underscore their significance in increasing energy levels grabbing their attention back to the class.

Some participants highlight another common theme, saying that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers increase interaction and engagement within the classroom. Participant No. 1 emphasizes that increased engagement, noting that the activities “made me interactive in the class ... [they] made me more interactive with the teacher as well.” Participant No. 3 also stresses the advantages of these activities in motivating student interaction, especially “during the group activities.” Participant No. 4 underscores that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers “made us become friends and interact with each other very fast.” No. 9 confirms the same theme, stating that the activities increase personal activity levels in the classroom.

The participants referred to another common theme, noting that icebreakers, warmers, and energizers promote idea-sharing in the classroom. Participant No. 2 points out that these activities “helped us get ideas from others and share ours at the same time.” Participant No. 5 and Participant No. 10 highlight that the exercises encourage them to express thoughts and opinions in English, motivating language use. Similarly, Participant No. 6 underscores that the activities increase collaboration in groups. Participant No. 7 echoes idea-sharing in collaborative groups. Participant No. 9 emphasizes that the activities “created an opportunity to share opinions in the class.”

The participants also draw on another positive influence of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers. They believe that the activities enhance teamwork within the classroom. While Participant No. 2 acknowledges that “the activities made a great teamwork” in the classroom, participant No. 3 adds that the activities facilitate teamwork among students with different English proficiency levels. Participant No. 4 underlines that the activities improve teamwork, “especially at the beginning of the school year when we did not know each other very well.” Lastly, Participant No. 5 emphasizes that, along with promoting “teamwork,” the activities “made us become friends... fast.”

In response to Q3, “Do you think it would be beneficial if we continue doing these activities in the classroom? Why or why not?” A strong majority of the participants stress in their responses that they want to have icebreakers, warmers, and energizers in their classes. This collective
sentiment indicates the positive impact of the activities in creating a positive classroom environment, extending attention span, enhancing teamwork, and promoting idea-sharing.

Conclusion
The study aimed to explore the impact of incorporating icebreakers, warmers, and energizers in the learning process for first-year students at Tishk International University. Both quantitative and qualitative findings support the positive influence of these activities. The quantitative results show unanimous agreement among participants on the helpfulness of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers. Qualitative interviews reinforce these results, highlighting the constructive effect of these activities on the overall learning experience. Participants consistently emphasize the creation of a positive learning environment, increased engagement, enhanced interaction, and improved attention spans. Additionally, the study indicates a strong preference among participants to continue these activities in the classroom, with energizers being the most favored, followed by icebreakers and warmers. In summary, the research demonstrates that these activities play a crucial role in cultivating a positive classroom atmosphere, encouraging engagement, extending attention spans, and facilitating teamwork and idea-sharing. These findings align with existing literature, affirming the validity and relevance of such pedagogical practices in educational settings.

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The Students' Perception towards the Use of Icebreakers

Kurdi & Meena


*Using Icebreakers And Energizers To Support Online Teaching*. (2020). BCIT Learning and Teaching Centre. British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). Available at
Appendices

Appendix A: Students’ Questionnaire

Dear Students:
This survey is to get the first-year students' perceptions of the use of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers implemented at the English Language Teaching department at Tishk International University. The result of this survey is going to be used for a research paper.

The following activities have been used with students since the beginning of the year:
- Icebreakers (at the start of the year/ to give students a chance to get to know each other)
- Warmers (introduce/review a topic or after a long holiday or break)
- Energizers (during a class to change the pace when energy gets low)

Researchers: Soran Mustafa Kurdi & Reman Sabah Meena

1- Gender
   ○ Male
   ○ Female

2- Icebreakers, warmers, and energizers have helped me:
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

3- I believe icebreakers, warmers, and energizers are a waste of class time, I would rather spend the time in studying the core topic of the class.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

4- Icebreakers, warmers, and energizers have helped me with the followings (Please select more than one choice)

   [ ] Create a positive learning environment.
   [ ] Encourage active learning / interaction / engagement.
   [ ] Restart the attention spans.
   [ ] Create an opportunity to share ideas and opinions or to ask questions.
   [ ] Promote a sense of trust and friendship.)

References


https://www.bcit.ca/files/ltc/pdf/ja_using_icebreakers_energizers_support_online_learning.pdf
5- I think it would be beneficial if we continue doing these activities in the classroom
   o Yes
   o No

6- Which type has interested you more?
   o Icebreakers (at the start of year/ to give people a chance to get to know each other)
   o Warmers (introduce/review a topic/ after a long holiday or break)
   o Energizers (during a class to change the pace when energy gets low)

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

This survey is to get the first-year students' perceptions towards the use of icebreakers, warmers, and energizers implemented at the English Language Teaching department at Tishk International University. The result of this survey is going to be used for research purposes.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated / / and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

- I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

- I agree for this interview to be recorded. I understand that the audio recording made of this interview will be used only for analysis and that extracts from the interview, from which I would not be personally identified, may be used in any conference presentation, report or journal article developed as a result of the research. I understand that no other use will be made of the recording without my written permission, and that no one outside the research team will be allowed access to the original recording.

- I agree that my anonymised data will be kept for future research purposes such as publications related to this study after the completion of the study.

I agree to take part in this interview.

____________________  __________________  __________________
Name of participant     Date                     Signature
Autism Spectrum Disorder: Developing ESL Proficiency via Visual Teaching Tools in International Schools of China

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Abstract
The effectiveness of using video-based instruction to teach English to young Chinese autistic language learners is the focus of the following article. The present study employed several methods such as online questionnaires, commentaries, interviews, and quantitative and qualitative methodologies to assess data and accomplish its objectives. The research's relevance is limited by the reality that Chinese students struggle academically and find it difficult to socialize with their peers on a daily basis. The purpose of this study is to present the results of educating young Chinese autistic students through video-based instruction and visual learning activities. The research's practical value is strongly reinforced by the content's usefulness in teaching English to students with special needs. The results demonstrate that visual learning activities and video-based education promote inclusivity in the classroom and encourage peer social engagement.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder, ESL proficiency, international schools, second language learning, video-based teaching, young Chinese learners

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Introduction

Autism is a highly complex disorder, and there is no way for us to generalize autism or children with autism. Each child will be at a different point of the spectrum, and child or adult, each will have a unique set of needs (Nothbohm & Zysk, 2006).

Autism affects over 67 million people worldwide. Autism is a complex disorder that affects people in different ways, and its prevalence varies across countries (Schiller, 2023). Children with autism spectrum disorder may face many difficulties and hinders in social interaction, and mass and interpersonal communication, and exhibit repetitive or restricted behaviors and interests. ("Social Difficulties in Autism Spectrum Disorder", 2023).

Some common characteristics of autism include challenges in understanding and using nonverbal communication cues, difficulty maintaining eye contact, a preference for routine and sameness, and sensitivity to sensory stimuli. Autism typically appears in early childhood, and the signs and symptoms can vary widely. Some individuals with different autistic variations may have exceptional skills in certain areas, such as mathematics, informatics, and technology, while others may face significant challenges in daily functioning.

Autism is not a disease or a result of bad parenting, etc. It is a neurodevelopmental condition that is believed to have a combination of genetic and environmental factors contributing to its development. Scientists believe multiple causes of autism spectrum disorder act together to change the most common ways people develop. We still have much to learn about these causes and how they impact people with ASD ("What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?", 2022).

For now, we do not know the exact cause of autism, however, research suggests it’s a combination of developmental, genetic, and environmental factors. ASD has no cure ("Stand for Children", 2023). With early intervention, therapy, and support, individuals with autism is that it can develop skills that help them improve their quality of life. It is essential to approach autism with understanding, acceptance, and inclusion to create a supportive environment.

The following article aims to study young Chinese autistic students' second language acquisition through video-based related task learning and whether video-based second language learning benefits autistic students. The current study addresses the following questions:

1) How might young Chinese autistic children studying English as a second language in a small classroom environment benefit from video-based English instruction?
2) Does video-based learning foster inclusivity and social engagement between peers and students with ASD diagnoses?

Literature Review

**Autism and Second Language Learning**

English has become a global language, and inclusive education will help children with autism survive in the future (Yunus et al., 2020). Learning a language is a process, and the first stage is to learn vocabulary. Word knowledge, or vocabulary, is the foundation for most aspects of language and achievement, according to (Govindasamy et al., 2019). According to Hashim et al. (2018), vocabulary development is an important part of language learning.

In the last half-century, the status of the English language has dramatically changed. The rise of the Internet and telecommunication has drastically increased mass communication and cultural exchanges among countries. Everybody knows that the Internet is a global computer network that embraces millions and millions of users all over the world and helps us to communicate with each other (Ochildinova, 2020).
Naturally, the latter has caused a massive spread of the English language to speakers with different cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds. Learning English as a second language is in high demand, especially in Asian countries: China, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, etc. In Asian countries, for some years now, China has been cited as a significant English-learning society (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). According to a 2019 article, there are estimated to be around 400 million Chinese people learning English, larger than the entire population of the United States (Zhengyu, 2020).

Nowadays, in China, English is frequently perceived as a gateway to higher education opportunities and better career prospects. Generally, second language acquisition differs depending on learners' preferences and learning styles. As different students have different learning styles in the classroom setting, second language learning programs should be designed in such a way as to cater to the different styles. The role of learning styles in second language learning among distance education students (Moenikia & Zahed-Babelanb, 2010).

ASD-diagnosed young learners require different learning strategies and routines. Children and young people with learning disabilities or Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) need clear practices (Learning Disabilities, 2018). By and large, autism can impact second language learning in various ways, as individuals with autism may come across unique challenges in the process of second language acquisition and communication.

Despite their challenges, children with autism have the right to participate in all parts of their lives, including learning English. As a result of technological breakthroughs and the world of the 4th Industrial Revolution (Hariharasudan & Kot, 2018). English has become a global language, and inclusive education will help children with autism survive in the future (Yunus et al., 2020).

In comparison to the other languages (Chinese, Thai, Malay, Japanese, Korean, etc), the English language is known for its less amount of syllables, which makes it easier for young learners with autism to grasp and master the language. Research conducted by Hashim has proved that autistic child finds English words simpler to speak because of the number of syllables. He believes English words to be easier because they are simpler and have fewer syllables in each word. T1 acknowledged that ASD children tend to learn English faster than their mother tongue language after seeing this. OT1 went on to say that because of the linguistic component of the language, autistic youngsters prefer and absorb the English language more quickly (Hashim et al., 2022).

Regardless, young Chinese learners with autism still encounter and undergo specific difficulties in learning and acquiring the language, as the process is not straightforward process for every learner. Studies have shown that uncovering and supporting children’s favored learning styles can improve performance in all areas (McCabe, 2015).

Effective family-school partnerships can improve outcomes for autistic students (Smith et al., 2023). Every learner with autism has their own styles and methods of learning. Preferences in acquiring a foreign language, primarily English, are due to the mainstream tendency. There has not been extensive research done in the very particular area of English as a second language (ESL) acquisition amongst students with ASD (Ekblom, 2021). Learning a second language is vital for people with ASD because of the increase in social life quality. Their results from the self-rating social-life quality scale, where the participants rated their own experience of their social-life quality, showed a higher self-rating from bilingual participants compared to monolingual (Ekblom, 2021).

Early diagnosis and intervention can reduce ASD complications and related disabilities and improve educational performance and cognitive development in children suffering from ASD.
Autistic Students and Visual Tools

Some individuals with ASD can remember large chunks of information with limited presentation of stimuli, like conversations from movies and words from a song they have heard on a single occasion (Heaton & Wallace, 2004).

It is proved that ASD children have relatively intact visuospatial abilities (DeMyer 1981; Lincoln 1988; Shah 1983), good auditory short-term and rote memory skills (Bartak 1976; Hermelin 1970; Wing 1976), as well as remarkable memory for specific kinds of information (Kanner 1943; Wing 1976). For that reason, visual aids or written words are very appropriate for ASD students.

According to Djabbarova, among the other four skills, listening is the one that has been most forgotten and neglected in second-language classrooms. Teachers do not pay much attention to this skill and teach it carelessly (Djabaraova, 2020). Teaching listening skills to autistic children is an individualized process. Despite the normal, pure-tone hearing sensitivity (NH), many autistic children exhibit abnormal listening abilities on parent or self-report questionnaires and auditory test measures (Rance et al., 2014; Schaër et al., 2020).

However, most autistic students demonstrate solid and competitive listening abilities when teaching listening is combined with visual tools i.e., videos. Nowadays, lots of linguists agree that video-based teaching is a productive and effective way of developing listening and speaking skills. Many autism-specialized researchers also state that video technology-based language acquisition can be a powerful tool for autistic people.

Teaching a foreign language through videos could apply to a wide range of autistic individuals ages, from preschool children to adults. Video-based teaching is a great way to teach new skills to autistic learners with limited access to print materials or traditional methods of instruction. Generally, video-based teaching does not contain the psychological elements of anxiety, exclusivity, etc, or distractions. Moreover, video-based teaching provides autistic students with a visual parameter of focus, which is crucial when dealing with ASD-diagnosed people.

Autism in The People's Republic of China

Compared with developed countries, China started to implement inclusive education relatively late. Instituting inclusive education necessitates educational changes such as institution, curriculum, teaching, and evaluation, which may fail to be reformed without the support from specific laws and policies (Watkins, 2009).

Special schools are scarce in China, with little access for those in rural areas (which is, of course, much of the country) (Bambridge-Sutton, 2020). Most people in China have never heard of the term autism, and no nationwide systematic epidemiological studies have ever been reported to examine the prevalence of this disorder in China. (Bambridge-Sutton, 2020).

According to Chinese researchers Huang and Wheeler, autistic children are still often refused an education from government-run public schools, including special education ones (Huang & Wheeler, 2007). Many public schools in China lack special educational programs to deal with autistic children. At present, the educational process of autistic children in China faces many problems, among which the lack of public educational institutions is a key one. Many public schools do not possess special education teachers. Schools for special needs are mainly concentrated in big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, etc. Chinese second-tier cities mostly
lack this kind of institution. The physiological issues experienced by young Chinese autistic learners with autism spectrum disorder often lead them to be ignored and even excluded in public schools.

Due to the shortcomings of China’s state-run programs and educational system, many families and autistic individuals seek intervention from private organizations (McCabe, 2004). The situation turns out to be even worse in rural regions of China, where families cannot afford special treatment provided by private organizations.

In Chinese traditional culture and society, autism is frequently perceived as something shameful. Parents of autistic children often experience disgrace, criticism, and social harassment from their relatives and the community. The latter triggers many conflicts and obstacles. In Chinese traditional culture, disability is viewed as a punishment for sins committed in this lifetime or previous life.

By contrast, the majority of the teachers in Chinese schools lack awareness of ASD. For instance, in Shanghai, one of the developed cities in mainland China, 83% of public primary and secondary school teachers answered inaccurately to over half of the questionnaire testing knowledge related to ASD (Wu, 2022).

Chinese parents often do not actively seek inclusive education for their autistic children. When making choices between mainstream education and special education, they tend to choose the latter as they believe that teachers there are better trained so that their children will not suffer stigma or isolation in special education schools (Peters & Forlin, 2011; Su et al., 2020). Unlike Western countries, parental choices are greatly affected by Chinese culture, where the issue of losing face is deeply settled in Chinese people’s minds (Peters & Forlin, 2011).

**International Schools in China: Small Size Classes**

In the last two decades, many international schools have been established in China. Moreover, many schools are appearing in Mainland China, delivering a fusion of national (Chinese) and international curricula (A-Levels, IGCSE, AP, IBDP, Ontario, Alberta). These schools have been labeled Chinese Internationalized Schools (CISs). They are characterized by the uneasy coexistence of national and international orientations, which is being termed “cosmopolitan nationalism” (Wright et al., 2021, p. 237).

Compared to public schools, the educational environment and facilities in international schools are better. Students enjoy small-size bilingual classes (5-15 students per class). Small class sizes create a more inclusive learning environment for general learners and learners with autism. Schools with large numbers of students in one class are not suitable for inclusive education. Inclusive education requires teachers to work more individually with each special student, especially in the primary grades (Rahimova, 2022).

Parents of both autistic children and general children consider small-size classes substantive for autistic children for several reasons:

1. Personalized attention: With fewer students in the class, teachers can provide more individualized attention and support to each student. The latter allows a better understanding of each student's unique needs, strengths, and challenges. Teachers can meet the diverse learning styles and abilities of the students, ensuring that no one is left behind.

2. Increased interaction: In smaller classes, there is more opportunity for students to actively participate and engage in discussions and activities. Students may feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions, which fosters a sense of belonging and inclusivity.
3. Reduced distractions: In larger classes, students may get easily distracted by the noise and activity around them. With a smaller class size, there are fewer distractions, leading to improved focus and attention.

4. Flexibility in teaching strategies: Smaller class sizes provide teachers with the flexibility to employ a variety of teaching strategies and methods. They can differentiate instruction to accommodate various learning styles, abilities, and preferences. This flexibility helps ensure all students can access and participate in the curriculum effectively.

5. Enhanced feedback and assessment: With fewer students to assess and provide feedback, teachers can dedicate more time and attention to evaluating students' progress. This allows for more detailed and timely feedback, supporting students in their learning and growth.

Because of the stigma and social harassment, as well as the lack of acceptance in many public schools, parents of autistic students, despite the financial heavy burden, prefer to take their children to international schools.

**Method**

**Participants**

The current research was conducted in the People’s Republic of China in the 2022-2023 academic year. The data of the following study were collected from ten private international schools in Mainland China and autonomous regions of China. The selection of the schools was based on the need to access as varied a non-probability sample as possible. Thus, ten of the best-known regional schools with foreign curricula were chosen. To evaluate data and achieve its goals, the current study used a variety of techniques and methods, including commentary, interviews, online questionnaires, and quantitative and qualitative procedures.

**Research Instruments**

The qualitative method was used in this study to provide complex answers to the research questions. As a result, field notes, questionnaires, observations in the classroom, interviews with teachers, a target group of young autistic learners, and other methods were used to collect data.

**Participants**

Ten teachers and ten primary school students diagnosed with ASD from ten different international schools participated in the following study. All the teacher participants were notified and adequately informed of the aims of the subsequent research, and, of course, their consent was sought, and received before the data collection process.

Short video interviews were conducted with the teachers who were selected to carry mixed purposive sampling method (See Appendix “Questionnaire”), to ensure a range of disciplinary areas and teaching experience. The average interview length was 10-20 minutes, depending on the participant. We interviewed ten teachers from different countries who held ESL teaching qualification certificates. Our interviews with these foreign teachers mainly focused on teachers' views of the challenges that ASD-diagnosed students undergo in the Chinese educational system, as well as the major challenges that these teachers face in teaching and learning English as a second language to young autistic students. From the interviews, it was apparent that the faculty of international schools lacked experience in teaching kids with special needs. From the results of the interviews conducted by ten foreign teachers, it is evident that young autistic Chinese learners in international schools come across different obstacles, among which classroom exclusivity, lack of
special needs teachers, and individualized methods of teaching are apparent (see in Appendix Table Summary of the demographic information about the teachers).

Table two (Summary of the demographic information about the students) contains detailed information on participant students, the degree of ASD symptoms (see in Appendix). Participant students in this research is ten: three female students and seven male students. The detection process of participant students was quite challenging for us because many international schools tried to hide the fact that they provide accessibility to education for children with disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder in order not to develop a lousy reputation in the local market and not to have any sort of conflicts with parents as potential clients. This is one of the key reasons for the participants’ number. Participants in current research have been selected with the help of expat groups of teachers.

**Research Procedures**

The observation of ASD-diagnosed participants occurred in their natural learning environment, in actual language classrooms. For this study, around 30 lesson observations were conducted throughout the course. Sloan (2007) asserts that data from observations and interviews can complement each other.

Our experiment with autistic students was conducted with the help of natural learning methods, i.e., developing speaking fluency, listening comprehension, reading, and writing. So, instead of achieving linguistic proficiency with the help of writing, reading, speaking, and listening (the traditional Chinese way of teaching a second foreign language), we started focusing on developing listening skills first).

Of the four skills, Ismail and Aziz (2020) argued that listening is the most frequently used language skill in the daily communication life of the average human. The keystone of mastering any foreign language is its listening and speaking aspects. The latter constitutes an integral part of English language learning.

With the mutual agreement of 10 foreign teachers, four videos have been chosen: The Ant and the Dove, The Vegetable Garden, The Horse and the Snail, Aesop's Fables "The Tortoise and the Hare. For conducting the study, all foreign teachers were supposed to follow the following steps:

**Step 1** - start the class with a warm-up multimedia song.
**Step 2** - replace all morning reading classes (generally, the duration of morning reading classes is around 25-35 minutes) with video-demonstration classes.
**Step 3** - demonstrate every video not less than twice in every class during the rest of the week.
**Step 4** - organize role-play games in week two.

The primary purpose of transforming the traditional reading classes into video-input classes was to understand the level of inclusiveness of autistic learners and general learners in the classroom setting, as well as to acknowledge the efficiency of video-based teaching in the second language teaching spectrum.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected through these classes conducted by foreign teachers were triangulated and analyzed through qualitative content analysis, and key themes were identified. The following data were analyzed based on Biggam’s framework (see Figure One).
The current study applied QAP as the principal means of data analysis. Meantime, directional and conventional QAP were also used.

The coding process began after all the video-based teaching classes had been conducted. In the video-based second language teaching process, ASD-diagnosed students’ positive and negative reactions to the new type of class were coded. The codes were categorized according to positive and negative responses by foreign teachers. The latter is illustrated in Table Three. The principles of the following observations were ordered according to the type of activity.

### Table 3. Instruments and codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ClassFlow</th>
<th>Teachers' feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warm-Up</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-video tasks</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video-illustration</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game-based Vocabulary Enrichment</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
<td>Positive/negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASD-diagnosed student/general interaction student</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-ASD interaction student</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Biggams's Framework*

The principles of the following observations were ordered according to the type of activity.
Findings

This section provides an overview of the observations, which compromises the typical format and description of activities conducted during the experimental classes. Moreover, the findings are supported by teachers' concise descriptions and reports. Every experimental class contains elements of video-based teaching tasks. Video-based teaching was conducted through various teaching activities. The most common components were role-plays (imitating the characters of the videos) and dialogues, which, in fact, are opposed to mechanical drills carried in traditional classrooms. The following activities constitute natural patterns of second language acquisition. The presented activities are combined with short extracts and quotations from teachers to possess a better and solid understanding of the reactions of ASD-diagnosed young learners.

Warm-Up

Each experimental class started with warm-up multimedia songs. The songs were conducted purely in English. During the warm-up, all the students were instructed to sing loudly and move according to the video. It was observed by all foreign teachers that autistic students completed this activity without any hesitation. Some teachers stated that sometimes ASD-diagnosed students moved more actively than general learners. However, all foreign teachers agreed that warm-ups provide inclusiveness and a positive start for all learners. In terms of the usage of warm-up songs, participant teacher commented on the following:

To start the class with a warm-up multimedia song is a good idea. It makes the students feel happy and positive at the beginning. The regular usage of multimedia videos is a helpful tool for teaching vocabulary. After playing the same multimedia song several times, both ASD-diagnosed and general learners tend to learn whole phrases or sentences, which is, of course, much better than separate words.

Table 4. Teachers’ reflections on warm-up songs as class starters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multimedia Warm-up Songs</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
<th>T5</th>
<th>T6</th>
<th>T7</th>
<th>T8</th>
<th>T9</th>
<th>T10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sign ‘x’ indicates the same responses gotten from all participants were positive.

Pre-video Questions

After warm-up songs, teachers made students get ready for the video demonstration by asking some simple questions (Have you seen ants? Do you like doves? What color is the dove? etc.). The general feedback on these tasks was neutral or negative. All foreign teachers reported that these questions were mainly answered by general learners, whereas ASD-diagnosed young learners demonstrated a passive attitude. Some teachers used flashcards and asked questions to the target group participants.

When the researcher asked the student questions, it seemed the student was not willing to answer my questions. His answers were limited only to yes or no. Sometimes, the whole class was waiting for him to answer: some classmates provided some hints in Chinese, but still, he was unwilling to answer.
Table 5. Teachers’ reflections on pre-video questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-video questions</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
<th>T5</th>
<th>T6</th>
<th>T7</th>
<th>T8</th>
<th>T9</th>
<th>T10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Video Demonstration and Pronunciation Drills**

All the participant teachers reported that during the video demonstration, ASD-diagnosed students and general learners were kept focused. After the first demonstration, teachers played the video for the second and third time by pausing the video and instructing all the students to repeat the sentences in unison. (Teacher's feedback)

The students got so excited when we started to play the video and pause for pronunciation drills. She came to the front of the classroom and did not allow me to pause the video. She wanted to watch it over and over again. (Teacher's feedback)

When students began to repeat the sentences in chorus, he started to jump and repeat the sentences in a booming voice. He was repeating the sentences in a thunderous voice. That made him feel happy. (Teacher's feedback)

The autistic student kept asking me when another video was going to be shown. Generally, he likes watching videos, but for pronunciation drills, he was repeating some words only randomly. (Teacher's feedback)

Table 6. Teachers’ reflections on video demonstration and pronunciation drills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Demonstration and Pronunciation Drills</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
<th>T5</th>
<th>T6</th>
<th>T7</th>
<th>T8</th>
<th>T9</th>
<th>T10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Role-play games (Video Characters Imitation)**

The role-play/imitation technique was implemented throughout the course. The latter was also illustrated as short dialogues combined with different visual aids. In their reports, foreign teachers reflected that after video illustration, role-play activities help ASD-diagnosed students memorize words, expressions, and sentences quickly. Both autistic students and general learners practiced video-based content and took turns imitating different characters.

The current activity allowed students to interact with each other and practice their spoken English in a classroom setting. At the same time, this activity enabled students to use the new vocabulary. Role-play activities are mainly regarded as relaxing, inclusive, and fun teaching techniques.

Table 7. Teachers’ reflections on role-play games (Imitation Video Characters)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-play games (Imitation Video Characters)</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
<th>T5</th>
<th>T6</th>
<th>T7</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflections on Teaching English as a Second Language through Videos

Participant teachers stated that video-based teaching was mainly perceived as relaxing, valuable, and interactive. ASD-diagnosed students, as well as their parents, found homework more manageable and more relaxing than the Chinese traditional way of teaching foreign languages. In a general sense, both ASD-diagnosed and general learners had a positive perception of learning English through videos. The reflections from the foreign teachers strengthen the idea one more time that videos are compelling teaching tools for developing listening skills. In addition to their listening skills, students also enriched their vocabulary and better their spoken English.

Drawbacks of Teaching English a Second Language through Videos

In China, reading and writing skills in a foreign language are more prioritized than listening and speaking. Chinese university exam "gaokao" mainly focuses on the reading and writing aspects of English. This is the key reason why many Chinese students possess excellent reading and writing skills. Because of the teaching methodology carried out in international schools, many autistic students undergo numerous difficulties and frustration while learning English as a second language. Autistic students cannot concentrate for a long time, so their reading is mainly a failure, especially regarding long words. Reading and writing skills require intense concentration, which causes autistic students to have some sort of anxiety. By conducting video-based teaching, many students will develop listening and speaking skills, whereas their reading and writing skills will prevail. So, taking into consideration the importance of the "gaokao" exam, video-based teaching should be combined with teaching tasks on developing writing and reading skills.

Discussion

Coming back to the research questions: “How might young Chinese autistic children studying English as a second language in a small-size classroom environment benefit from video-based English instruction?” and “Did video-based teaching activities provide inclusiveness and social interaction among ASD-diagnosed students and general learners?” it should be mentioned that videos can offer visual and auditory stimuli that can engage and capture the attention of autistic children. The combination of visual cues, gestures, and facial expressions in videos can enhance comprehension and make language learning more accessible. At the same time, videos provide a consistent and structured learning experience. Autistic children often thrive in predictable environments, and videos can offer a standardized format for language instruction. This consistency can help them feel more comfortable and confident in their learning. Videos can provide repetition and reinforcement of language concepts. Autistic children often benefit from repeated exposure to new information, and videos can be replayed multiple times to reinforce vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Additionally, video-based instruction allows for individualized learning. Autistic children may have different learning styles and paces, and videos can be paused, rewound, or fast-forwarded to accommodate their specific needs. This flexibility can promote a more personalized learning experience.

Lastly, videos can provide a visual model for social interactions and communication skills. Autistic children often struggle with social communication, and videos can showcase appropriate language use, turn-taking, and conversational skills. By observing these models, they can learn and practice these skills in a controlled and supportive environment.

As shown by the data and reflections, the implementation of video-based teaching activities
was mainly positive. Students regarded multimedia song warm-up activities as an interactive and enjoyable beginning of the class. According to teachers’ reports and observations, multimedia warm-up activities were considered positive because both general learners and ASD-diagnosed learners were able to move around. There were no restrictions. Video illustration and pronunciation drills had a positive impact as well, as they provided a relaxing environment for autistic students and social interaction among peers. Role-play activities were also considered to be beneficial as autistic students were able to move freely as opposed to being unable to move in the traditional Chinese classroom layout. Video-based teaching and role-play activities provided a natural setting for autistic and general learners to use the language in a way that is close to the social nature of the language. Students used the language authentically. At the same time, they developed their vocabulary.

Considering the observations made by Wu, Peters, Forlin, and McCabe regarding the dearth of autism acceptance and awareness in China, it is clear that, in some cases, innovative teaching methodologies used in Chinese Internationalized schools can enhance the circumstances and academic achievement of students with ASD diagnoses.

The repetitive and regular demonstration of videos was also perceived as positive. Children with autism are often recognized for repetitive actions (Hashim et al., 2022). Moreover, participant teachers said that ASD students were happy during the classes as they were familiar with the teaching content.

All participant teachers stated that those activities mainly affect autistic students' social interaction positively, sometimes providing them with some confidence. Participant teachers also mentioned that these kinds of teaching activities primarily reduce the anxiety that ASD students have in classroom settings.

Conclusion

The purpose of the ensuing paper is to investigate whether autistic kids benefit from video-based second language learning and how young Chinese autistic pupils acquire a second language through related task learning. International schools should incorporate video-based teaching into the traditional methodology of teaching foreign languages. Teaching a foreign language through videos provides inclusiveness in the small-size classroom. Generally, the application of audiovisual tools in the classroom makes autistic students focused and concentrated. Teaching autistic students foreign languages, and listening skills should be prioritized. Teaching vocabulary can be achieved through visual teaching aids. Mid-term and final assessment and testing of autistic students could be carried out through videos.

Recommendations

Finalizing the following study, several practical recommendations have been marked by different prominent researchers, in particular: educational institutions in China, especially international schools, should pay much attention to the needs of autistic students. The latter is possible through modifying curricula, cooperating with Western special needs centers, training teachers, and providing differentiated educational programs to autistic learners. International schools should also sincerely cooperate with parents. At the same time, students with autism spectrum disorders should be encouraged to spend more time interacting with their peers through electives or extracurricular clubs and social activities. The latter will enable autistic students to be accustomed to interacting within society, which will reduce the amount of anxiety they possess.
The last recommendation stresses the fact that Chinese international schools should change their traditional way of teaching and seek innovative teaching techniques that will satisfy the needs of both autistic and general learners.

Future Research

The following study could be conducted on a larger group of students and at different educational institutions within China and outside of China to alleviate the methodology and strategy of teaching English as a second language to young learners with autism spectrum disorder. The latter can influence learners' language performances positively. Besides, it is highly suggested to conduct this kind of survey on determinants of different ages. That will provide an opportunity to thoroughly and accurately evaluate the language performances of autistic Chinese of different ages.

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Appendix

Table one: Summary of the demographic information about the teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>ElectronicMail</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shenyang, Fushan (Chinese-American international School)</td>
<td>Ashleigh Maritz</td>
<td>England</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ashleigh.maritz01@outlook.com">ashleigh.maritz01@outlook.com</a></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Mongolia Gonglama Elementary School</td>
<td>Thabo Mofokeng</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td><a href="mailto:thabo01mofokeng@gmail.com">thabo01mofokeng@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanchang Limai International School</td>
<td>GervorgGrigor yan</td>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gevorg.grigoryan93@gmail.com">gevorg.grigoryan93@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin, BIBA international School</td>
<td>LilitAntinyan</td>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td><a href="mailto:antinyan-lilit@mail.ru">antinyan-lilit@mail.ru</a></td>
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<td>Jining, Shandong Confucius International School</td>
<td>Mary Williams</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td><a href="mailto:williamsm45@yahoo.com">williamsm45@yahoo.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nord Anglia International School</td>
<td>Ernest Asare</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ernestasare63@yahoo.com">ernestasare63@yahoo.com</a></td>
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</table>
### Table two: Summary of the demographic information about the students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Age/Grade</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>School/Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Male-Chinese</td>
<td>Six years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
<td>Shenyang, Fushan (Chinese-American international School)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Male-Hong Kong Citizenship Holder</td>
<td>Eight years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
<td>Inner Mongolia Gonglama elementary school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Male-Chinese</td>
<td>Seven years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
<td>Nanchang Limai International School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Female-Chinese</td>
<td>Seven years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
<td>Tianjin, BIBA international School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Male-Chinese</td>
<td>Nine years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
<td>Jining, Shandong Confucius International School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Male-Chinese</td>
<td>Six years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
<td>Nord Anglia International School</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>Female-Chinese</td>
<td>Eight years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
<td>British School in Shanghai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Male-Chinese</td>
<td>Eight years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
<td>Jining, Shandong Confucius International School</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Male-Chinese</td>
<td>Nine years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Female-Chinese</td>
<td>Six years old (primary school)</td>
<td>Mild Symptoms</td>
<td>Xi’an Liangjiatan International School</td>
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</table>
An Investigation of Thai University EFL Students' Ability to Notice English Idiomatic Expressions

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Abstract
The main aims of this research were to investigate Thai EFL students' level of ability to notice English idiomatic expressions and variations in their ability to notice the idioms in terms of idiom types, academic disciplines, and perceptions towards their idiom noticing ability. The participants were 162 English as a foreign language students (99 females, 63 males) selected through a purposive sampling method from a university in Northeastern Thailand. The data was collected through an Idiom Noticing and Identifying Test. The results revealed that the students had a low level of ability to notice English idiomatic expressions. The type of idioms the students had reported as the most noticed were transparent idioms, and the opaque idioms as the least noticed. The students were not different in their ability to notice idiomatic expressions regarding their academic disciplines, and they were not sure about the idiomaticity of the idioms they claimed to have noticed.

Keywords: English idioms, EFL learners' ability, idiomatic expressions, Noticing, Thai EFL students

Introduction

English idiomatic expressions, or simply put idioms, are generally accepted as one important aspect of the English language because they come up all the time in both spoken and written English (EF Education First, 2022). They pose difficulty to English learners because most of them cannot be made sense of literally (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2016; Na Ranong, 2018). Many EFL learners, not only those in Thailand and other Southeastern Asia but also in other parts of the world, find it difficult to distinguish ordinary English and idiomatic English when they get involved with day-to-day English materials written or spoken. This is tantamount to the fact that these learners fail to distinguish what normal or ordinary English is and what idiomatic English is. For example, it's a piece of cake is an idiomatic expression, but it's very easy is an ordinary English.

Dokchandra (2015) pointed out that noticing is the first element of the four-element cycle of vocabulary acquisition, and when it comes to vocabulary per se, idiomatic expressions form a large part of it. To teach Thai EFL students to acquire more vocabulary and of course idiomatic expressions, the point to start with is to teach them to notice language. Schmidt (1990) posits in his theory known as the Noticing Hypothesis that a learner cannot continue advancing their language abilities or grasp linguistic features unless they consciously notice the input. In the simplest terms, people learn about the things that they pay attention to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, a dearth of research has been carried out to investigate Thai EFL learners' ability to notice English idiomatic expressions when they deal with authentic English texts. In particular, the distinction between ordinary English and idiomatic English has not been investigated in the context of a Thai university EFL setting. To fill out this gap, the researchers of the present study were therefore inclined to investigate if the Thai university EFL students were able to distinguish between English idiomatic expressions and ordinary English phrases. Specifically, they wished to explore to what extent the students could notice idiomatic expressions in use and the type(s) of idioms they would be able to notice the most. Furthermore, the students' perceptions in terms of their level of certainty about their ability to notice idioms in use were also investigated.

English idioms, no matter what they are differently called such as idiomatic phrases, expressions, and phrases, are an important part of everyday English. They appear now and again in both written and spoken English. Because the meaning of an idiom cannot always be derived literally, English learners need to familiarize themselves with its meaning and use. This study investigated if Thai learners of English as a foreign language recognized English idioms in use or not while interacting with English texts, and the fact that they did so could be verified by their noticing and exactly identifying the idiomatic expressions. The findings of the present study would contribute to the wealth of literature on English idioms and phraseology, and especially uphold the notion that because of the paucity of ability in English idioms, Thailand's English language proficiency lags behind other countries within the Asian region and even the whole world. Given the fact that most of the students of Kasetsart University are underachievers in their English tests—the ones administered by the university and other standardized tests such as Test of English for International Communication—TOEIC, the lack of awareness of English idiomatic expressions could be attributed as a cause for such phenomenon or not, based on the hypothesis that idiomatic inability to notice which part of language is an idiom and which is not affects the students' ability to receive and produce language.

To investigate the extent to which Thai university EFL students noticed English idiomatic expressions, the relationship between their idiom noticing ability and academic disciplines, and
their perceptions towards their own idiom noticing ability, the researchers generated the following questions as a guideline:

1. What is the level of Thai university EFL students' ability to notice English idiomatic expressions while reading English texts?
2. What types of idioms are reported as the most and least noticed English idiomatic expressions?
3. How do Thai university EFL students vary in their ability to notice English idiomatic expressions based on their academic disciplines and idiom types?
4. How do Thai university EFL students perceive their ability to notice English idiomatic expressions?

**Literature Review**

*Idiom: its meaning*

What is an idiom? In a nutshell, an idiom is a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words (idiom, 2002). Also called idiomatic expression, an idiom is a special kind of phrase with a different meaning when used together from the meaning it would have if the meaning of each word were taken individually (HarperCollins, n.d.) This meaning is different from the literal meaning of the idiom’s individual elements. In other words, idioms don’t mean exactly what the words say. They have, however, hidden meaning.

*Importance of Idiomatic Expressions*

Idiomatic expressions or multiword expressions are an essential part of language and they serve as fundamental aspects of language use, processing, and acquisition (El-Dakhs, Khan, & Al-Khodair, 2022; Schmidt, 2010). Martinez and Schmidt (2012) posit that idiomatic expressions are important in language because of four reasons. In the first place, they are widely used in language, representing roughly 20-50% of discourse (Erman & Warren, 2000). They also convey meanings and functions in written or spoken communication. For example, the phrase "on the other hand" means in an opposite way/manner whereas the phrase "watch out" performs as a warning sign. The third reason is that idiomatic expressions have processing advantages which aid successful communication because they are, by and large, processed faster and more accurately than language attempted to create by a user (Conklin & Schmitt, 2008; Underwood, Schmitt & Galpin, 2004), or improved communication skills (De Caro, 2009). Lastly, idiomatic expressions lead to the enhanced impression of L2 learners' language production (Ohlrogge, 2009). With sufficient knowledge of idioms, L2 learners stand to gain a repertoire of advantages, one of which is the improvement in communication skill (De Caro, 2009).

*Types of Idioms*

Moon (1998) used the word metaphors to classify idioms based on semantics into the following sub-categories: transparent metaphors, semi-transparent metaphors, and opaque metaphors. The first type refers to idioms with a meaning that can be easily discovered because of their clear and literal image in the reader. Examples of such idioms include to feel like a fish out of water and a stab in the back. With our world knowledge, we easily understand that feeling like a fish out of water means feeling uneasy, or that a stab in the back is an action that hurts or betrays someone. The second type refers to idioms where the link between the literal and the figurative meaning is not very direct. For example, the idiom break the ice falls into this category. Finally,
opaque idioms are the ones whose meaning cannot be derived without knowing their history or etymology. *To kick the bucket* and *to spill the beans* are examples of this category of idioms.

Mäntylä (2004) has also classified idioms into three types according to their transparency though the level of transparency is sometimes arguable. They are either *transparent idioms* where the literal and figurative meanings are linked to each other, *semi-transparent idioms* where there is a relation between literal and figurative meanings but not transparent, or *opaque idioms* where the literal and figurative connotations are completely different. From this categorization, it can be inferred that English language learners are anticipated to be capable of using some less common idiomatic expressions.

In addition, Fernando (1996) categorized idioms into three sub-groups: pure idioms, semi-idioms and literal idioms. Pure idioms are conventionalized, non-literal multiword expressions whose meanings cannot be understood by adding up the meanings of the words that make up the phrase. For example, the expression *spill the beans* is a pure idiom because its real meaning has nothing to do with beans. Semi-idioms, on the other hand, have at least one literal element and one with a non-literal meaning. For instance, *foot the bill* (pay) is a semi-idiom, in which the word *foot* is the non-literal element, whereas the word *bill* is used literally. Literal idioms such as *on foot* or *on the contrary* are semantically less complex than the other two. Therefore, they are easier to understand even if one is not familiar with these idiomatic expressions.

An argument has also been advanced as to whether a phrasal verb is an idiom. Phrasal verbs are idiomatic expressions (Siefring, 2004) because sometimes when meeting combinations of verb and particle, learners can find it impossible to guess the meaning in the context from the meaning of the verb and the meaning of the particle. Examples of these phrasal verb idioms are *fall through* (meaning 'not happen') and *put up with* (meaning 'accept').

For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on these four types of idiomatic expressions: phrasal verbs, transparent idioms, semi-transparent idioms, and opaque idioms.

**EFL students’ Ability to Notice Idiomatic Expressions**

It seems difficult to confirm whether idiomatic expressions are noticed by L2 learners or not while they are engaging themselves with spoken or written language. However, most research has revealed that L2 learners tend not to notice idiomatic expressions because they are accustomed to treating individual words, but not multiword expressions, as the basic unit of meaning (Anjarini & Hatmanto, 2021; Tran, 2013); that is their ignorance of the holistic nature of English idioms — hence the word-centered conceptualization of vocabulary rather than the chunk-centered one (Alali & Schmitt, 2012; Boonnoon, 2020).

**Importance of Noticing for Language Learning**

Noticing or awareness is a means that relates input to the memory system. Schmidt (1990) posits that it is an important tool for learning a foreign language. Without noticing, the acquisition does not take place. Lewis (2000) also underscores the important role of noticing as a basic starting point for teaching formulaic sequences such as collocations and idioms. From the perspective of the Lexical Approach, noticing is observational activities that learners perform with the support of conscious attention (Schmidt, 1990). If learners are not directed to notice language in a text, there is a danger that they will see through the text and consequently fail to achieve intake (Lewis, 2000). Therefore, the learners’ attention to notice expressions should be directed by using as various activities and exercises as possible. For more than 30 years now, the importance of noticing...
still holds true, echoing Schmidt's (1990) strong position that "those who notice most learn most" (p. 237). It makes a great deal of sense to teach non-native speakers to recognize idioms in a text and to work out their meaning (Mäntylä, 2004).

**Relevant Past Research**

Past research about EFL learners' knowledge of idiomatic expressions pointed out the poor level of ability to notice idioms among EFL learners (e.g. Boonnoon, 2020; Dokchandra, 2019; Na Ranong, 2018; Tran, 2013) and the relationship between idiom familiarity and transparency and the learners' ability to identify them (e.g. Al-Houti & Aldaihani, 2020; Tilmatine, Hubers & Hintz, 2021; Xie, 2017). Most of the studies seem to conclude that the more familiar and transparent the idioms are, the better will EFL learners understand them. The more the learners are exposed to idiomatic expressions, the more developed their figurative language use is (Nippold & Taylor, 2002; Zuo, 2021).

However, few research works were conducted to investigate Thai EFL learners' ability to notice and identify English idiomatic phrases as used in authentic settings (Boonnoon, 2021; Buasuwan, Tokiaw, & Nindya, 2021). In particular, when idiomatic expressions appear in ordinary English, no research has been conducted to verify to what extent the learners single out those idioms and identify their types. Additionally, when it comes to the extent to which the learners are sure about the fact that the phrases are idioms—idiomaticity, the researchers found no relevant research in the literature.

Past research also investigated to what extent individual differences in terms of age, gender, and proficiency were related to idiom understanding ability (Rungsripattanaporn & Na Ranong, 2018; Tabley, & Hermilinda, 2021), but scant research has been carried out to examine if academic discipline affects EFL learners' ability to notice English idiomatic expression.

**Method**

**Population and Sample**

The population of the study was 220 students who enrolled in the course Technical English, an elective course on offer at Sakon Nakhon province campus of Kasetsart University, in northeastern Thailand, in the second term of the academic year 2023.

With the known population size, the researchers determined the sample size by using a ready-made sample size calculator available at [https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html](https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html) The calculator makes it convenient for determining the sample size of a known population size. In this case, the population size was 220, with the confidence level set at 95%, the margin of error or confidence interval at 4%, and the population proportion at 50%. Therefore, the calculated sample size of this study was 162. The researchers randomly selected 162 students out of 220 as the samples in this study. They were from four faculties—Liberal Arts and Management (LAM), Science and Engineering (SE), Public Health (PH), and Agricultural Studies (AS). 99 students were female (61%) and 63 male (39%) respectively. All the selected students filled out consent forms to indicate their willingness to take part in the study. Table One below summarizes the demographic data about the samples.

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63</td>
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</table>

Table 1: *Number and percentage of students based on their faculty and gender*
An Investigation of Thai University EFL Students' Ability

Dokchandra & Boonnoon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female (9.87%)</th>
<th>(13.58%)</th>
<th>(8.02%)</th>
<th>(7.40%)</th>
<th>(38.88%)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28 (17.2%)</td>
<td>24 (14.81%)</td>
<td>30 (18.51%)</td>
<td>17 (10.49%)</td>
<td>99 (61.11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44 (27.10%)</td>
<td>46 (28.39%)</td>
<td>43 (26.54%)</td>
<td>29 (17.90%)</td>
<td>162 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: LAM = Liberal Arts and Management Science, SE = Science and Engineering, PH = Public Health, AS = Agricultural Studies

Research Instrument
Idiom Noticing and Identifying Test (INIT)

The INIT was an all-inclusive data collection tool the researchers developed to gather data about the students' ability to notice idiomatic expressions in use and to identify them. The INIT comprises two parts: Part I is a demographic section containing four items that draw out personal information about the participants in terms of age, gender, and academic discipline, and year of study. Part II is a 20-item set of idiom noticing tests and idiom certainty questionnaire. Each item contains a reading selection of 1-3 sentences in length. Following each selection, there are two statements requiring the students to identify an idiom in use in the text. To identify the target idiom, they had to write it in the space provided. At the same time, they were required to rate their level of certainty about the extent to which they were sure that the identified part was an idiom, ranging from "5 = Extremely sure", "4 = Slightly sure", "3 = Moderately sure", "2 = Not sure", and "1 = Not at all sure".

In this test, four types of idiomatic expressions are embedded in each selection—phrasal verb idioms, transparent idioms, semi-transparent idioms, and opaque idioms. Of the 20 items in the test, five items (items 1-5) are meant to test the students' ability to notice and identify phrasal verb idioms, five items (items 6-10) transparent idioms, five items (items 11-15) semi-transparent idioms, and five more items (items 16-20) opaque idioms, respectively.

For the selections used in the test, the researchers drew on a variety of authentic English resources. These resources included past versions of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), news stories and editorials from online newspapers such as the International Business Times (IBT), and leading universities' informational sections like the ones found on the Harvard University website. For example, the text in Figure One was drawn from the reading comprehension part of the TOEIC test released in 2021. The purpose of drawing on authentic texts was to ensure the texts were not purposively created which would not reflect natural-sounding English. Figure One below illustrates what an item in the test looks like.

1. For many, the start of a new year represents a moment of transition. It's an opportunity to reflect on the past and to **look ahead** to what the future might hold.

Please identify an idiom used in this text.

How sure are you that it is an idiom?

( ) 5 extremely sure
( ) 4 very sure
( ) 3 moderately sure
( ) 2 slightly sure
( ) 1 not at all

Figure 1: An example of the Idiom Noticing and Identifying Test

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To evaluate for the reliability and construct validity of the test, the INIT was piloted with a group of 20 students undertaking English for Career, a compulsory English course for third-year students at the site of this research. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.84, a satisfactory reliability of the instrument. With the informed consent of the participants to take part in the study, the finalized version of the test, in paper format, was administered during the first term of the academic year 2023 at the campus. The students were asked to submit the test whenever they were finished and could go at their own pace.

**Data Analysis**

The rightly identified idiom received "1" and the wrongly identified one received "0". An unanswered item was given "0" as well. The researcher used SPSS for Windows (Version 21) to analyze the data for descriptive statistics—percentage, mean, and standard deviation, and statistical tests—-independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA.

**Research Procedures**

The data collection started in July 2023, the first week of the first term of the academic year 2023. They contacted the teachers who taught three sections of Academic English to seek their cooperation in administering the INIT and informing the students in their classes of the research project. The students were asked to sign a consent form to take part in the study. Subsequently 170 students gave their consent and were administered the INIT which took approximately 45 minutes. The researchers collected the tests and checked for completeness before entering the data from the test for analysis. Finally, 162 tests were kept for the analysis while 8 tests were discarded for lack of completion. The scores from the INIT were computed to obtain the means; The mean scores from the INIT were interpreted to determine the noticing ability of the students based on these criteria: low (0-7 scores), moderate (8-13 scores), and high (14-20 scores). One-Way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run to compare the mean scores derived from the test.

**Results**

The participants' ability to notice idiomatic expressions was categorized into three levels based on the mean scores they managed to get: low (0-7 scores), moderate (8-13 scores), high (14-20 scores). As indicated in Table Two, the average score for noticing ability of 162 participants was only 5.90 (36.2%) out of the total score of 20. This clearly indicates that the students from across four academic disciplines at KUCSC had a low level of ability to notice English idiomatic expressions. The minimum score was 3, while the maximum score was 12.

Table 2: The participants' overall level of ability to notice English idiomatic expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>162</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.28</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To further investigate the type(s) of idioms noticed by the students, computation of the mean scores for each item containing targeted idioms was run and the results were revealed as presented in Table Three.
Table 3: The participants' ability to notice the types of English idiomatic expressions (n=162)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idiom Type</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrasal verbs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-transparent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opaque</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table Three, the type of idiomatic expressions most noticed by the participants is transparent idioms (M = 2.80, S.D. = 0.92), followed by semi-transparent idioms (M = 2.04, S.D. = 1.09) and phrasal verbs (M = 1.69, S.D. = 0.85) respectively. The least noticed type is opaque idioms (M = 0.74, S.D. = 0.77). In detail, it was found that there were 72 students (45%) who could not identify this type of idioms in the selection, while the number of those who could correctly identify this idiom type was only 90 (55%). However, in greater detail, it was found that, off the total correct number of identification, only 63 students managed to get 1 correct answer, 24 got 2 correct answers, and three students managed to get 3 correct answers. No one managed to get a total score of five.

To determine whether the students were different in their ability to notice English idiomatic expressions regarding their academic disciplines, one-way analysis of variance (One-way ANOVA) (F-test) was used to analyze the means. The results of the analysis showed statistical significance at the 0.05 level, as indicated in Table Four.

Table 4: F-Test results for the differences of the students' ability to notice English idiomatic expressions by academic disciplines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>5.366</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.789</td>
<td>.550</td>
<td>.649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>513.572</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>3.250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>518.938</td>
<td>161</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table Four, the P-value (Sig.=.649) is larger than the alpha value (0.05), the conclusion was drawn that the students from across four academic disciplines at KUCSC were not significantly different in regard to their ability to notice English idiomatic expressions at the 0.05 level.

To determine how the students perceived their ability to notice English idiomatic expressions; that is to what extent they were sure about the idiomaticity of each idiom they had identified, the scores from the part of INIT that required the students to indicate their level of certainty about the idiom noticed in each selection were computed. Their level of certainty is therefore interpreted as their level of perceptions, based on these mean interpretation criteria: 0.00-1.00 = very low, 1.01-2.00 = low, 2.01-3.00 = moderate, 3.01-4.00 = high, 4.01-5.00 = very high. The results are presented in Table Five (See Appendix A).

Table Five reveals that, on the whole, the students perceived their ability to notice English idiomatic expressions to be moderate (M = 2.78, S.D. = 0.60). This indicates that the students at KUCSC from across four academic fields were not sure about their ability to notice English idioms. That is, they were not certain if the idiom they noticed in each selection was correct or not. To be...
precise, they made a guess rather than being sure about their decisions on the identification of idioms.

However, in detail it was found, on the whole, that the group of phrasal verb idioms gained the highest level of certainty (3.52), followed by the transparent idiom group (3.49), semi-transparent idiom group (2.31) and the opaque idiom group (1.79), respectively. Details of the certainty level of each group of idiomatic expressions appear in Table Six below.

Table 6: The students' level of certainty about their noticing ability based on idiom groups (n=162)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group of idioms</th>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrasal verbs</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparent idioms</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-transparent idioms</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opaque idioms</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total mean</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conclusion drawn from Table Six is that the students perceived their ability to notice phrasal verb idioms as moderate, the transparent idioms as high, and the last two groups of semi-transparent and opaque idioms as low.

**Discussion**

This part is organized as per the research questions generated earlier, and the discussion is organized based on the main findings as follows.

Regarding Research Question One: What is the level of Thai university EFL students' ability to notice English idiomatic expressions while reading English texts?, the results for the first research question show that the Thai university EFL students in this study had a low level of ability to notice English idiomatic expressions when they dealt with English texts. The finding here is consistent with Boonnoon's (2020) and Dokchandra's (2019) conclusions that idiomatic expressions were difficult for Thai EFL learners. A plausible explanation regarding this result could be that the learners are not exposed to sufficient real English outside of the classroom and acquiring idiomatic expression ability is a process that takes enormous time. The learners' lack of systematic teaching of idiomatic expressions could also explain the low proficiency rate of idiom knowledge among the students in this study. To address this problem, Dokchandra (2019) suggested teaching more idiomatic expressions to the learners, "the teacher should urge the learners to do more self-study on the idiomatic expressions that are mostly associative with basic vocabulary" (p. 783).

As to Research Question Two: What types of idioms are reported as most and least noticed English idiomatic expressions?, it was found that transparent idioms were the most noticed type, with semi-transparent idioms as the second most noticed type. The least noticed type of idiom was opaque idioms. To be precise, the students could barely notice this type of idiom. It came as no surprise that the students in general could notice the transparent idioms, but they could barely notice the opaque idioms. Other research works (e.g. Al-Houti & Aldaihani, 2020; Dokchandra, 2019; Na Ranong, 2018) also found that EFL students had a low level of ability to recognize and understand idioms especially even the most frequently used ones (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2016). However, in detail, idioms that are more familiar and transparent proved more understandable for the learners. In this study, the students managed to identify more transparent and frequent idioms than the ones
that are opaque. A plausible explanation in this regard could be that this type of idioms is of high transparency and familiarity, making it easier for the learners to understand, hence noticing them when in use in authentic texts. Past research (Na Ranong, 2018; Nippold & Tylor, 1995; Xie, 2017) confirmed that idioms that were higher in familiarity and transparency were easier for students to understand than those that were less familiar and more opaque. The students in this study managed to notice the idioms with more frequency of use than the others. For example, the idiom above all shows 2,470,000 results by Google search engine, while the idiom on average, has 782,000 results. Item 8, the idiom no idea had the highest score among the transparent idioms. This clearly indicates that transparency has more influence on the students' ability to notice idioms.

In addition, research shows that learners found it less difficult to understand idioms when they are used in contexts than when they are used individually (Liontas, 2001). Relying on contexts and literal interpretation are exactly learning strategies found to be employed by Thai EFL students of elementary and intermediate proficiency levels for helping to derive the meanings of idioms (Na Ranong, 2018) and such findings partially support the results of this study because by indicating that they noticed transparent idioms the most clearly indicated the students drew on these learning strategies. However, the fact that the students in this study, on the whole, were of limited ability to identify idioms could be attributed to their being unfamiliar with the move from individual words to chunks (Tran, 2013), or to put it another way, the students could not distinguish between idioms and ordinary English phrases (Anjarini & Hatmanto, 2021). The students were basically familiar with words used individually, and they got their wires crossed when having to identify those words used as one phrase.

Regarding Research Question Three: How do Thai university EFL students vary in their ability to notice idiomatic expressions based on their academic disciplines and idiom types?, the students from four different academic disciplines were not significantly different in their ability to notice idiomatic expressions. This result could be interpreted that individual differences in terms of major fields of study do not influence idiom noticing ability. However, past research (e.g. Rungsripattanaporn & Na Ranong, 2018; Tabley & Hermilinda, 2021) confirmed the positive relationship between individual differences in terms of gender, age, and proficiency level, but no research was carried out to investigate if academic discipline as an aspect of EFL learners' individual differences affects the learners' idiom noticing ability. The researchers of the current study could, therefore, conclude that an academic discipline does not affect EFL learners' ability to indicate or notice English idiomatic expressions.

Finally, regarding Research Question Four: How do Thai university EFL students perceive their ability to notice idiomatic expressions?, the results showed that the students in this study reported, on the whole, that they had a moderate level of certainty about the English idiomatic expressions they had identified. This could be possibly interpreted as the students' being quite unsure about the idiomaticity of the expressions they had noticed in the selected texts. To be precise, they noticed the idioms based on an act of guessing rather than their confidence. This indicates the sincerity of the students in this study because they expressed what was really in their minds. This finding is in contrast to what Tran (2013) opined as a paradox in her study which revealed that the students claimed to be eager beavers in learning idiomatic expressions, but in reality their learning behavior, as indicated by their poor performance in the idiomatic text, contradicted with what they claimed they wanted to learn.
Research Implications

1. By and large, the Thai university EFL students in this study were able to notice English idiomatic expressions only at a low level. This clearly indicates that there is an urgent need for them to be taught to notice the difference between ordinary English and idioms. Teachers of English at the tertiary level should take it seriously in teaching the students to be alert to any idiomatic expressions that emerge in the materials they are reading or listening to.

2. To enhance the EFL students' English idiomatic competence through noticing, authentic English materials, written or spoken, should be drawn on, and in so doing, the teacher should take a leading role in demonstrating to the students how ordinary English is different from idiomatic expressions. Authoritative dictionaries and aggregators that highlight this aspect of language must be particularly capitalized on. For instance, the Oxford Learner's Dictionary puts it in a salient category of *Idioms* when a word is used as an idiom.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Future research should investigate the level of proficiency in relation to the ability to notice or identify idioms

2. It was found in the current study that students from across four academic disciplines did not differ in terms of their ability to notice idiomatic expressions. Future research should investigate if a major field of study as an individual difference affects EFL learners' idiomatic competence or not.

Limitations

This study was carried out to investigate Thai university EFL students' ability to notice only four types of idioms—phrasal verbs, transparent idioms, semi-transparent idioms, and opaque idioms. Other types of idiomatic expressions were not included such as proverbs. Also, the participants in this study were at a higher education institution in northeastern Thailand, circumspection should be exercised in generalizing the findings of this research to other parts of the country or any larger geographical settings.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the level of Thai university EFL students' ability to notice English idiomatic expressions, the types of idioms reported as most or least noticed, the relationship between their ability to notice the idioms and academic disciplines, and the students' perceptions towards their ability to notice the idioms. According to the results, the conclusion can be drawn as follows:

1. The ability to notice English idiomatic expressions of Thai university EFL students from across four academic disciplines in the study was found at a low level.

2. Transparent idioms were reported as the most noticed type, followed by semi-transparent idioms, phrasal verb idioms, and opaque idioms respectively.

3. Regarding the students' academic disciplines, there was no difference in their ability to notice English idiomatic expressions.

4. The students were not sure about their ability to notice English idiomatic expressions.
An Investigation of Thai University EFL Students' Ability

Dokchandra & Boonnoon

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References


### Appendix A

**Table 5. The students' perceptions towards their idiom noticing ability (n=162)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sure1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.525</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>.626</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.646</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.861</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>.452</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.643</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.529</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>.512</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>.540</td>
<td>Very low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.576</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>.627</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>.501</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>.712</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>.526</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>.685</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.555</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>.641</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total mean | 1.7 | 3.9 | 2.78 | 0.603 | Moderate |
Competency in occupational English is crucial among university graduates in Malaysia. Nevertheless, there have been constant concerns regarding the graduates' need for English communication skills. In order to overcome the challenges and become competent, they need to employ strategies that would assist them to remain relevant and sustainable during their internship. This paper presents the challenges and strategies in workplace English Communication among undergraduate accountant internships. Attempts undertaken by the accounting interns in overcoming the challenges in English language communication during their six-month internship experiences at respective companies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, are also discussed. The study employed a qualitative research method using face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with five (5) interns from the Faculty of Economics and Management of a public university in Malaysia. Interviews with two managers and a supervisor who were the persons in charge of the interns were also carried out. The interview data was transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis. The interns' data was triangulated with the supervisor and managers' views and later validated by three independent coders using Cohen's Kappa Reliability Test. The strategies employed by the accounting interns in overcoming the English language communication challenges included speaking English with non-Malay colleagues, seeking help from the supervisor, consulting colleagues or seniors’ expertise, and reading work-related documents. The implications of the findings focus on university administrators to strengthen the teaching and learning of the English language and help undergraduates improve their communication skills in English are also discussed in this paper.

**Keywords:** accounting interns, communication skills, communication challenges, English, strategies, experiences, accountant internship

Introduction

Social learning theory places a strong emphasis on learning through communication and participation. Most learning occurs from work challenges and through social interaction. Therefore, working and learning cannot be separated (O’Donovan, 2018). Internship plays an essential role in providing a learning environment to undergraduates, and managers play a vital role in controlling knowledge resources regarding how and what knowledge is emphasized. Their learning orientation is crucial to workplace learning (O’Donovan, 2018).

The internship has long been recognised as a valuable learning experience that connects an undergraduate with the real world of employment. A practical and meaningful internship would help undergraduates become knowledgeable and skilful in their future jobs. The importance of structured training or internship at the tertiary level to professionally prepare undergraduates before they enter the job market is indicated in findings from the World Bank and Talent Corp Survey (2015). Most companies surveyed stressed firms’ collaboration with universities and the importance of providing more practical training for undergraduates. Thus, companies play a crucial role in helping to develop interns’ knowledge and skills in their field of study during their internship. The internship experience provided by the university has exposed undergraduates to the real business world. They did not feel strange when offered a permanent position in the company (Chiew, 2018).

Previous studies have investigated and reported studies on the causes of Accounting graduates’ English communication challenges in the workplace. These include a lack of English communication skills, barriers to communication, and a lack of confidence. Heang et al. (2019) conducted a study to gauge the technical and soft skills accountants deemed to need to improve while performing their jobs. The respondents believed their communication skills needed to be improved, affecting them while performing their jobs. Some of the interviewees in the study stressed that mastering communication skills would boost their confidence and improve their networking skills. The study by Lee et al. (2013) revealed that many newly hired accounting graduates in Malaysia need better verbal and written English language skills.

A study by Monster.com in Malaysia revealed that over one-third of Malaysian fresh graduates quit their first job in less than a year (Azahar, 2017). One of the significant obstacles faced by these new graduates was their need for industry knowledge. The study also blamed the universities for their excessive emphasis on theories and the lack of provision of industry collaborations as some of the factors that contributed to the fresh graduates’ deficiency. Mastracchio (2017) asserted that formal accounting education provided by universities is often criticised for being bloated, inefficient, obsessed with research, and inadequate in preparing students for the workforce. Heang et al. (2019) affirmed Mastracchio’s (2017) statement because universities put in tremendous effort and resources in producing large numbers of research and publications to improve their ranking in the academic industry.

According to Chiew (2018), the data from the Global Limelight Work Readiness Survey showed that 73 percent of the employees in the survey were equipped with the necessary skills and capabilities before securing a job. However, when they started working, their confidence dropped as they discovered that the skills and knowledge learned from the university courses did not keep them up-to-date with the latest industry practices. Chiew (2018) reported that some of the Global Limelight Work Readiness Survey employees stated
that they needed to prepare or prepare for their first job. The reasons for their lack of work readiness were unfamiliarity with the actual work environment and the fact that what they learned from the university differed from the real-life situation. They also feared that the skills acquired in university might not be compatible with what was expected by their employers. They believed they needed to equip themselves with sufficient practical skills to perform well in their workplace.

Despite the English classes the interns had undergone during their study period, they faced challenges in dealing with communication skills at the internship workplace. Thus, this study was carried out to identify the challenges faced by the interns and how they overcame the challenges they faced in their workplace English language communication during their internship. It addresses the questions of (i) what were the challenges in their workplace communication and (ii) what were the strategies the interns had employed to overcome the challenges. The findings should contribute significance to English language practitioners' syllabus and material to prepare accounting students during their internship. The interns share and reflect on their challenges and relate their strategies.

Literature Review

Challenges in English Language Communication

In a study by Mahbub and Hadina (2021), environmental, psychological and linguistic factors have contributed to the poor oral performance of English learners. The environmental factors include learners’ passiveness, demotivation and mixed abilities. The psychological factors were related to anxiety, shyness, self-efficacy, confidence, emotions, and reluctance. Linguistic factors include lack of language knowledge, accuracy, fluency, and low vocabulary. The environmental, psychological and linguistic factors outlined were considered in this study to determine the factors that affect the accounting interns’ challenges in workplace English communication.

In the context of Nepal, Chand (2021) found that Nepalese students, in general and university students in particular, face many difficulties in speaking English fluently. Some could not speak even a little English after completing their graduate degree. He explored the causal factors and suggested the need for a favourable environment, maximising learner autonomy, changing teaching practices, revising courses, and conducting speaking activities repeatedly. When graduates attempt to communicate in English with their counterparts from foreign companies, language barriers occur. Warren and Lee (2020) described the complexities involved in understanding language and culture in the workplace. These include the dynamic norms, values, and behaviors of professionals, the nature of the professional contexts and workplaces where intercultural communication occurs, and the context in which each interaction occurs.

Ways to overcome English Communication Challenges

Some students in Heang et al.'s (2019) study believed that they had acquired sufficient technical and soft skills through the various activities organised by the university, such as
presentations, public speaking and training. The class presentations made them confident to speak in front of an audience. The training enabled them to maintain conversations with colleagues and clients and to share ideas with their employers. Using English on the university campus enabled the students to improve their English language proficiency. Social activities and competitions helped them acquire soft skills such as communication, leadership, and time and stress management skills (Heang et al., 2019).

Previous research identified that L2 students may employ diverse strategies such as repeating, paraphrasing, speaking more clearly, writing down, and spelling out to compensate for communication breakdowns (López, 2011). Little is known about the communication strategies employed by L2 international university students or the effectiveness of their strategies. Park et al. (2017) investigated the communicative strategies that L2 learners employ to enable them to sustain interaction with others and resolve communication breakdowns.

The most effective strategy was related to pronunciation, followed by paraphrasing and clarity of speech. The ability to paraphrase is closely linked to communicative success, given the participants' evaluation of its frequency of use and its perceived effectiveness. As already addressed in previous work (López, 2011), paraphrasing is one of the popular strategies among ESL and EFL speakers, regardless of their language proficiency. Participants seemed to be aware of the significance of pronunciation and its effectiveness in overcoming challenges caused by their accented English. Other studies have also explored pronunciation, finding that many L2 students indicated pronunciation-related perceptions of difficulties (Derwing & Rossiter, 2002). Further, they were concerned that other English users might not understand their English without improving their accents.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research method using a multiple-case study design to investigate the experiences of the accounting interns in their workplace communication. The primary data of the present study comprised face-to-face semi-structured interviews with five accounting undergraduates, two managers, and a supervisor from the company involved in the internship. The interview data was verbatim transcribed, and using the thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006), we analysed the data and coded it in different themes and sub-themes. The researchers administered The Cohen's Kappa Reliability Test and validated the data using three independent integrators with vast qualitative research experience.

Participants

The researchers utilized the snowball sampling strategy to select the participants and sites. We asked the participants to recommend other individuals to be interviewed. This study employed the multiple-case study tradition in gathering data through interviews and
observations involving five accounting interns and three HR officers. The experiences and challenges faced by the accounting interns in their English communication at the workplace were explored through the semi-structured interviews with the five interns at their workplace and later followed by the manager's and supervisor's interviews. The researchers also observed the workplace site and environment in the presence of the interns and their manager or supervisor. The five final-year undergraduates undergoing their six-month internship were the main participants in this study. They were from the School of Accountancy, Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The interns were labelled as Int L, Int K, Int N, Int R and Int A. Two managers and a supervisor were also interviewed to triangulate findings from the interns' data, and they are referred to as Mgr Int L and Mgr Int A and Spv Int A, respectively. This study included three Chartered Accounting companies, CA1, CA2 and CA3 and one oil and gas company (O&G). The participants' demographic data is presented in Tables 1 and 2 below. Table 1 below illustrates the profiling of the interns.

Table 1. Profile of interns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interns</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>MUET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Int L</td>
<td>CA1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int K</td>
<td>CA2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int N</td>
<td>O&amp;G</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int R</td>
<td>O&amp;G</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int A</td>
<td>CA3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table, Table 2, illustrates the profiling of the managers and supervisors.

Table 2. Profile of managers and supervisor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR Officers</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mgr Int L</td>
<td>CA1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mgr Int A</td>
<td>CA3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Ten years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spv Int A</td>
<td>CA3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Three years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Instruments**

In order to study the related issues and to unravel the graduates’ competency, experiences and challenges in their English language and communication skills, two research tools methods are employed. This includes interviews and observations, enabling the researchers to triangulate the data.
The Research Procedures

The first step involved was the preliminary study, the informal interview with two interns. It was conducted to understand better the actual tasks and experiences of an accounting intern before the real interviews and field trip visits to companies were conducted. The preliminary study was undertaken to understand the real environment of the workplace setting of accounting interns. The observation was carried out in the first phase of the data collection—the observations aimed for the researcher to understand the actual workplace situation for the accounting interns. Through the observations, the researchers became aware that the interns’ workplace was not confined to their office only but also included the clients’ office. The next step involved the interview with the participants of the study, namely the interns, the managers and the supervisor. Semi-structured interviews with the managers and the supervisor were conducted after the interns from the respective companies had been interviewed. The interviews enabled the researcher to obtain the manager's and supervisor's perspectives on the English communication skills of the accounting interns.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for the findings utilized the qualitative method. The transcribed interview data was analyzed and coded using the NVIVO 12 software. The responses from the participants were individually selected and analysed before they were entered and coded using different themes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data. A content analysis of the interview responses was categorised based on several aspects, such as the different skills of listening and speaking, reading, and writing in the workplace, English communication needs and other experiences in English communication at the workplace. These different categories of codes and themes were analysed, interpreted and later validated by three independent coders using Cohen's Kappa Reliability Test.

Findings

Challenges in English Language Communication

The interns faced several challenges in their English language communication at their internship workplace. The challenges faced by the Accounting interns are summarised in Table 3 below. Excerpts from the interviews with the interns and their manager and supervisor exemplify the challenges.

Table 3. Challenges in English communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Challenges in English Communication</th>
<th>Int A</th>
<th>Int N</th>
<th>Int R</th>
<th>Int K</th>
<th>Int L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Limited knowledge of the accounting terms in English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Limited technical knowledge</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Lack of business writing skills</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Difficulty in understanding business slang</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Limited Knowledge of the Accounting Terms in English

Int R relayed the difficulty she faced during her communication in English because of her unfamiliarity with some words used at her workplace. She explained, “Maybe there are some words that I’m not familiar with.” (Int R). In another situation, Int L shared his experience of learning new Accounting terms in English, where he narrated an unfamiliar word. He explained, "I was given the task to readjust the account. I find a bit awkward like, 'liabilities' because we were using the Malay terms in Accounting. So it is different from English.” (Int L). The interns faced some difficulties because they needed to familiarise themselves with some accounting terms in English. After all, the Accounting courses at their university were mostly taught in Malay. Int K reported that it was rather challenging for him to understand the words uttered by the foreign Indian officers at his workplace, and they also could not decipher Int K’s utterances. This could be because he had never heard some of the words used by the foreign Indian officers. He explained, "Maybe from me also. Because sometimes I don't understand the words they use. Sometimes, I, I never hear the words. What is that?” (Int K).

Limited Technical Knowledge

Int. A faced several problems during the first two months of his internship due to needing more technical knowledge on the assigned tasks as an auditor. He could not conduct the audit interview with his clients as he found it demanding to deliver his message in English, “I think when a difficult situation that I had to, I find hard to, hard to deliver my message ” (Int A). He further illustrated the situation he had to face when he first joined the audit team in the following excerpt: “I think at the workplace since I think uhh when we talk about the company when we talk about activities of the company, the problem, the situation is quite complicated to explain. So I find that there is the challenge.” Int A found it difficult to communicate with his company’s clients and staff due to his limited technical knowledge and language skills. Consequently, Int A needed to have appropriately executed his assigned workplace tasks.

His supervisor supported the problem faced by Int A in communicating in English. Spv Int A explained, “…we will ask the client for any information or documents. So first, I think he’s not really, not really comfortable, to ask the guy. Let's say he didn’t know, well, what to ask from clients.” (Spv Int A).
Lack of Business Writing Skills

Int N narrated the difficulties he faced in the writing task he assigned, “writing, maybe, because we do not easily use the type to write the formal business writing in our university. That's quite challenging for me” (Int N). Another writing challenge he faced was using legal terms as he explained, “Uhhh legal terms and err yeah because the legal way of writing is quite complicated.” (Int N). Int N was assigned to write a Board Paper using legal terms he had not learned before his internship. He further explained, “We never learn that thing even though it's related to our finance. but its something new that we need to use the legal terms like very, very legal.” (Int N)

Lack of Exposure to Business Slang

Interns also needed help delivering a message in English due to the need for more understanding of the language or the business slang used in the Accounting profession. Intern A explained that one of the reasons for this difficulty was because the language used at the workplace was different from what he learnt at the university, as he maintained, “I mean the language, it’s quite - it’s quite different with the campus” (Int A).

Int L mentioned, "Because most of the auditors, most of the accountants are Chinese, so the slang is quite uh hard for me to understand especially in several terms, specifically in Accounting" (Int L). He elaborated that it took him some time to understand and interpret the message his Chinese clients were trying to convey.

Lack of Exposure to Malaysian Accent

The interns seemed unfamiliar with the local English dialect used by their clients. This may be due to the need for more exposure to Malaysian English dialects. The interns had to comprehend the local English dialect with its highly accented words used by some Malaysian non-native English speakers. The accent of the local variety of English also posed challenges for some of the interns, as shown in this excerpt: "I mean. I don’t think so it's standard English. It's something like, this is easy ma.” (Int A). Interestingly, Int A claimed he could not understand his clients' language because most of them could not communicate well in English. It was difficult for him to understand their speech, "I mean, uhh... maybe I think, but most of the client’s ah. maybe they also cannot communicate well in English so that’s why we find difficulties to understand.” (Int A).

Difficulty in Understanding Foreign Accents

Three of the interns, namely Int N, Int K and Int A, shared their experiences of not understanding the accents of their interlocutors, including their company's foreign executives. As for Int N, it was his first experience communicating with foreign executives who were Cuban, Portuguese and Spanish, "I think because, like I said earlier, to understand the accents from other foreign countries" (Int N). Int K also faced a similar
problem in understanding the accents of his executives from India, which he was unfamiliar with, often resulting in communication breakdowns. Int K illustrated his problem in understanding the pronunciation of his Indian executive in the following excerpt:

_Sometimes, we don't know how they speak to us. Sometimes like I say uhm "a", we uh from us, we talk "a", and then they-say uh," in "e" like that. So sometimes (chuckles), I don't understand uh._ (Int K)

**Lack of Oral Communication Skills**

Int A faced a challenge when asking questions and understanding the information he received from his clients. He explained, _“One of the challenges I face is to deliver the message. How to ask the questions, understand what the clients want, and explain about the increase that I point to them.”_ (Int A). Int A was worried about how to ask questions and if he could understand the client's requests for an explanation during the audit session. Int K also faced some difficulties in understanding the communication of his colleagues due to his limited oral skills and vocabulary as he explained, _"So I can understand, but when I don't understand what he talks, what we uh, what word that he uses, so I just say, uh sorry."_ (Int K)

**Strategies to Overcome the Challenges in Communication**

This section reports the ways and strategies employed by the interns to overcome the challenges they faced in their workplace communication. The strategies employed by the accounting interns to overcome the challenges they faced in their English language communication at the workplace are summarised in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for overcoming communication challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking in English with non-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>L</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Speak in English with non-
### Challenges and Strategies in Workplace English Communication

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Malay colleagues</th>
<th>Consult their colleagues/seniors</th>
<th>Seek help from the supervisor or mentor</th>
<th>Read related documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Speak with Colleagues

For Int A, he could practice his verbal skills by communicating with non-Malays in English. He made attempts to engage himself in his workplace interactions. He explained, "I think during an internship, I tried to communicate in English, especially with my Chinese colleagues. So I think that’s the one thing that I try to improve my English” (Int A). Int N initiated informal conversations with colleagues to enable him to practise his speaking skills at the workplace. He said, "Yeah. Yeah, I try to, you know, like, speak to my colleagues. Yeah, but it’s not work-related things. More like gossip” (Int N). Int N knew that creating opportunities to communicate, even though unrelated to work, would help him gain the confidence to speak English with his colleagues and others. Another intern, Int K, also tried to improve his communication skills by speaking with his non-Malay colleagues in English despite knowing they could understand and speak the Malay language; as he explained, "actually have er..., they can speak Malay. So they tend to speak in English, it’s not like uhh the foreigner.” (Int K)
Seek Assistance from Colleagues and Seniors

When faced with communication problems, the interns consulted their seniors for help in understanding what the interlocuter was trying to tell them, as mentioned by Int L and Int A in the excerpts below:

“...sometimes I just uhm ask my seniors la.” (Int L)
“... and sometimes I ask my senior. Yeah how to explain this, how to. What- what are they trying to talk about.” (Int A)

The supervisor to Int A agreed that Int A asked questions if he had problems during the audit field as he was learning from his seniors who had more experience, "Learning, uhh, learning from the seniors” (Itv Spv Int A). Mgr Int A also supported Spv Int A’s statement that interns would refer to their seniors when they faced problems in their workplace communication, “they will refer to the HOD (Head of Department) or the senior that lead them” (Itv Mgr Int A). Int R also consulted her senior in clarifying certain things she was unsure of. She would pick on some points and then ask her senior to check if it was the correct information she had received. She explained her way of consulting her superior as follows:

"Sometimes we just like to take key points from what they were trying to explain. Err, from their lah okay we: so and then like to make sure what we understand. I try to ask like, okay, this is what I understand. Is it, is it like this this?”(Int R)

As for Int K, he asked his colleagues to help him when he faced communication problems to understand the information relayed by his company's executive from India. Int K sometimes could not understand the accent used by the Indian executive and had to rely on his colleagues for help. Ink K's colleague would translate what his Indian foreign executive was trying to inform him from Tamil to Malay. He related his experience, “Hmmm: maybe sometime I have a problem. So from that I just how I, I try to overcome that. I asked them to talk Tamil with my colleague. so they just talk to me in Malay.” (Int K)

Seeking help from colleagues helped interns overcome some of the challenges they faced in workplace communication.

Consult Supervisor

The interns also consulted their supervisors when they needed help understanding specific writing skills that they were required to do. For example, Int R referred to her supervisor when unsure of her email writing. Sometimes, I seek my supervisor's help in writing an email. Err, before I send the email, I… show her, is my, is my sentence correct? Is it professional enough? (Int R). Int R knew of her inadequacy in writing formal business emails and chose to seek advice from her supervisor to improve her professional email
writing skills. Her supervisor would check and later comment on her email to ensure it was written in the correct business format and tone.

For intern Int N, his supervisor spotted his difficulty communicating in English when she noticed him code-switching using English and Malay when he started his internship at the company. She helped him by giving him samples of emails as guidelines to improve his written communication skills. She also encouraged him to read English materials and speak with his colleagues to gain the confidence to communicate in English. Eventually, Int N consulted her when he was not sure of the specific writing tasks he was assigned, as he explained in the following excerpts:

*I got help from my SV. She tries to say, you know, okay, you got... err, I send you some email, you can read it, practice it, and they can also err.. maybe talk to some colleagues.* (Int N StEC/CsSpv-CqCm)

Other interns also sought help from their supervisors when they needed clarification on what they were required to do by their managers or directors. Int N stated, "Err other than that, maybe I ask my supervisor to: what my bosses need me to do" (Int N).

*To Read Related Documents*

Int A chose to read related documents to overcome some of the communication challenges he was facing. According to Int A, “I think to overcome is, I, I need to get used of it. I need to read a lot about the report, what is the, what is the situation that they want to talk to me” (Int A). By reading the relevant materials, Int A could improve his vocabulary and knowledge and, thus, perform the tasks assigned to him at the workplace well and understand what others were communicating. In a similar situation, Int R reported that she opted to read sample emails to write good professional emails to which she had been assigned. She learned from the sample emails how to write professional emails and the steps she could follow. By reading other emails, she was able to improve her email writing skills.

Yes:: So umm .. for me, like sometimes for me err, I wanted to write just a simple email, I have to refer to other emails for me to write. This is how they write their emails. So I have to, like, okay ni first, something like that. (Int R)

In addition to reading email samples, Int R sought help from her supervisor to ensure what she had written was a professional email; as she explained, “So like, sometimes like, she err... correct me the wording” (Int R). She learnt from her mistakes and consequently used the right words taught by her supervisor and her reading sample emails, which eventually helped her improve her email writing skills.
Discussion

The findings generate a discussion on the challenges faced by the accounting interns in terms of their use of English at their workplace and the strategies they adopted to improve their knowledge and skills during the internship.

Challenges

Learning new words or Accounting terms that the interns had not heard before was a challenge they faced during the internship. This supports a study by Mahbub and Hadina (2021), which identified linguistic factors contributing to English learners’ poor oral performance. One of the linguistic factors is low vocabulary levels. The interns were unfamiliar with some words as they learnt the words and terms in the Malay language and found that they needed to gain familiarity with the English words and terms used in the actual Accounting workplace. Facing difficulties of not knowing how to ask clients questions during their audit interviews is a skill that needs to be given training. This would affect the efficiency of audit interview sessions when interns could contribute little during the audit interviews. When interns face the challenge of writing business emails and other workplace written tasks, it amplifies their incompetency in Business writing skills. They found it a challenge due to the need for more experience in business writing.

Understanding non-native English speakers’ slang is a challenge in the interns’ communication at the workplace. Hayat (2009) claimed that this is another difficulty that English learners face in learning the language because it is often challenging to cover all slang and colloquial expressions in their learning of English at the university. This also relates to the interns' difficulties when communicating with non-native English speakers at their workplace. Derwing and Munro (2015) mentioned that the accent varieties might cause problems for learners because the accents would confuse the learners and hamper their understanding, making it hard for them to decipher the intended meaning. Understanding foreign accents is an aspect that needs attention in the interns' undergraduate training. They need to gain exposure to listening to English of foreign accents, thus impeding understanding or managing interaction with foreign employees, for instance. Warren and Lee (2020) described that the complexities in understanding language and culture in the workplace align with Mahbub and Hadina’s (2021) environmental factors influencing English learners’ poor oral performance.

Most interns faced challenges in their written and oral communication at the workplace, especially in understanding the English words and terms used in their Accounting profession. This may relate to the fact that they were exposed to the terminologies in Malay, primarily when lectures are delivered in the national language, Malay. Similarly, interns also needed help understanding the slang and accents spoken by non-Malay clients and foreign executives who are non-native speakers of English as they had never been exposed to such actual tasks or workplace situations. Their limited
vocabulary due to their weak English language proficiency and lack of communication skills hindered them from communicating well at the workplace.

**Strategies**

Concerning previous studies where students employed diverse strategies such as repeating, paraphrasing, speaking more clearly, writing down, and spelling out to compensate for communication breakdowns, the findings highlight other strategies identified by the interns to overcome challenges they faced at the workplace. These included seeking help from colleagues and their supervisor's advice to improve themselves in certain aspects and skills they lacked. This is in line with the findings of Chan (2021), who reported that her graduate respondents used various strategies to learn workplace communication and solve language-related problems in their communication. These communication strategies, also known as analytical strategies, are regarded by Walker and Leary (2009) as highly pivotal for successful problem-solving in communication.

The interns felt that the internship was the best platform to improve their English communication skills as it specifically allowed them to speak in English. The finding in Mat Saad supports this et. al’s (2014) study as she reported that her participants were excellent in finding and even creating opportunities to speak or to practice the language. Similar experiences were narrated in this study. Seeking assistance from seniors when faced with communication challenges at the workplace is a viable strategy. This is because the interns regarded the seniors as those with years of experience as certified accountants. On the same note, managers and supervisors play an essential role in the internship duration. O’Donovan’s (2018) study confirmed that managers or supervisors are vital in controlling knowledge resources regarding how and what knowledge is distilled. Such learning orientation has also been considered a key determinant in influencing learning among employees at Workas Int. N conveyed that it had improved his email writing skills. Consulting their supervisors was one of the ways employed by the interns not only to overcome the communication challenges they faced but also to learn the required communication skills.

When faced with challenges in English communication, the interns were able to identify what communication skills they needed to improve. They tried to improve their weaknesses by motivating themselves to take the necessary actions to reduce the problems they faced in their English communication at the workplace.

**Conclusion**

As this paper aims to present the challenges and strategies to overcome the challenges faced by the accounting interns at their internship workplace, several challenges were identified, and the university undergraduate accounting interns attempted to overcome the challenges in English language communication during their internship. University accounting
The curriculum must be practical and in line with the current development of the industry so that students can obtain relevant and up-to-date knowledge in the field while at the same time possessing the relevant skills they need to be equipped with to meet the expectations of the employers. It is thus crucial for both accounting and language educators to work together in identifying the communication needs of graduates. The findings highlight the need for work readiness among interns despite the teaching and learning they had undergone at the university. They indicate the actual language and communication skills needed or those that we language practitioners need to be made aware of or put emphasis on in the course syllabus.

Nonetheless, the findings prove that internship is a valuable learning experience as it allows undergraduates to experience the workplace as a rich learning environment. It also plays a significant role in shaping and facilitating learning opportunities that are meaningful and relevant for undergraduate students' future employment. The interns in this study were positive in overcoming the challenges. They sought help in improving their communication skills at the workplace from the experienced members within their community of practice.

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A Prospective Study for Exploring Saudi EFL Learners' Strategic Listening Skills through Netflix from Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract
The future of technology use in EFL classrooms is an important subject to investigate in future study because Saudi Vision 2030 is a shift toward modernity and openness to the rest of the world; as English is a global language, the effective use of English is essential to achieving this purpose, and it is by developing its skills with a significant emphasis on listening proficiency. The study aimed to explore how Netflix will impact Saudi EFL learners' strategic listening skills in the future from the teachers' perspectives. This research's significance lies in its alignment with the evolving educational paradigms and the increasing reliance on technology for language instruction; the study specifically sought to understand how the incorporation of Netflix might influence learners' SLS in the future. To achieve this aim, the study involved ninety-six male and female faculty members from Saudi EFL university departments, selected based on their experience in teaching English and familiarity with digital educational tools. A mixed-methods questionnaire was designed and applied to collect the participants' views on how Netflix will enhance the students' SLS in the future. The study revealed high expectations about the role of Netflix in promoting learners' SLS in the future.

Keywords: Netflix, prospective study, Saudi EFL learners, strategic listening, teachers' perspectives

Introduction

The Saudi Vision 2030 is a move toward modernity and openness to the rest of the world. There are no plans to enhance English education or incorporate technology into the Vision. Nevertheless, Saudi Vision 2030 reflects the development of English education. In addition, among the interpretations of the Vision's aims are greater exploitation of the digital curriculum and the development of online learning/training platforms (Alzhrani & Alkubaidi, 2020). As a result of the Saudi government's efforts to prepare the younger generation for the changing economy and increasing labor market demands, English is being increasingly used as a medium of communication and instruction (Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2017). As English is a universal language, its practical use is crucial for accomplishing this aim. Therefore, teachers and students are expected to develop language skills, primarily listening skills.

This study explored how Netflix will impact learners' Strategic Listening Skills (SLS) in the future from the teachers' perspective. Promoting students' SLS is a challenge in teaching. In our experience as faculty members, students are passive and feel bored while listening in their classes. They tend to listen to the audio several times and then answer simple tasks. Furthermore, there are few opportunities for students to implement their repertoire of strategies. Consequently, they need to be able to use their repertoire of listening strategies to become strategic learners.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to enhance the integration of modern technology in English language instruction, aligning with the evolving educational requirements in the digital era. The research objectives include understanding teachers' perceptions of using Netflix for language instruction and identifying the anticipated impact of this method on learners' SLS development. The primary research question is: What are EFL learners' future expectations regarding using Netflix to enhance their strategic listening skills?

Literature Review

According to Ellis (1997), listening is one of the four fundamental language-learning skills and plays a significant role in daily communication. In comprehending spoken language, listeners absorb it and interpret it based on prior knowledge and experiences (Maharani, 2021). In addition, successful listening requires a range of skills, such as activating prior knowledge (Ghahri & Zarei, 2022), adjusting to changing speech speeds and accents, processing various text forms (Serrano & Pellicer-Sánchez, 2022), listening to main ideas and specific details (Huy, 2015; Low & Aryadoust, 2023), and predicting and guessing the content of audible text (Alutaybi & Alsowat, 2020; Ghahri & Zarei, 2022). Hence, students should use listening strategies to facilitate their listening process.

Vandergrift (2007) maintained that listening strategies are strategies that listeners use consciously or subconsciously to comprehend, evaluate, and interpret texts. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) identified metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective listening strategies as common student strategies. Using metacognitive strategies, students must devise a strategy for listening, analyze the listening process dynamically, and evaluate the results through listening exercises.
With a metacognitive strategy, students may know specific techniques and when and how they are applied (Daskalovska et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2020). Cognitive strategies facilitate acquiring and integrating new knowledge within a linguistic framework (Müller & Višić, 2023). According to Vandergrift (1997), socio-affective strategies assist students in interacting with their peers and gaining attention and explanations from their instructors. When students understand these strategies, how and when to use them, and how to monitor and evaluate their effectiveness, they become strategic listeners (Alutaybi & Alsowat, 2020).

Enhancing learners' strategic listening skills could be an EFL objective in the future, and educators need to update their methods of instruction to align with the times. According to Burner (2018), there are three reasons for the importance of change and development in education: growing globalization, technological innovations, and research into teaching and learning approaches. Classroom EFL learners are not exposed to adequate hearing input and must find other exposure possibilities, such as incorporating technology (Coşkun & Marlowe, 2020). One of the goals of incorporating new technologies into English language classrooms is to improve student learning by providing more effective means of instruction and communication (Al-Shehri, 2020). Multimedia can be utilized as a technology-based educational tools. According to the theory of multimedia learning, dual channels (verbal for text and visual for images and video) best help students understand information. English learning is promoted by the simultaneous use of these two channels, which permits both verbal and visual input processing (Brünken et al., 2002). Thus, EFL teachers must use tools like Netflix to promote English language skills. Netflix contains several unending movies and series that can be used for advanced language learning and extensive listening (Maharani, 2021). The role of movies and platforms like Netflix in enhancing listening skills in language learning has been extensively studied, revealing a complex and multifaceted impact. Research by Alm (2019, 2021) and Ananda et al. (2021) highlights the positive effects of informal exposure to Netflix series, showing improvements in students' willingness to listen extensively and their listening comprehension abilities. Türkmen (2020) further emphasizes the contribution of controlled usage of Netflix to second language competence, echoing the structured approach to subtitle usage studied by Dizon & Thanyawatpokin (2021). The Innovative Language Learning with Netflix Chrome extension, discussed by Alm (2021), represents another dimension of how technology can aid language learning. However, Metruk (2019) offers a crucial perspective by noting no significant improvement in listening skills among EFL learners despite extensive exposure to English movies and TV programs. These findings collectively indicate that while platforms like Netflix can be instrumental in language education, the effectiveness largely depends on factors such as the type of exposure, learner engagement, and the structured application of these digital resources in language learning contexts. Therefore, this study aims to explore the future impact of Netflix on learners' strategic listening skills (SLS) from teachers' perspective, addressing a gap in the current research regarding Saudi EFL students' expectations and experiences with using Netflix for language learning enhancement.
Methods

This prospective study adopted a mixed-methods design, utilizing a questionnaire to explore the strategic listening skills of Saudi EFL learners as influenced by Netflix from the teachers' perspective. The questionnaire combined quantitative elements, a 16-item Likert scale, with qualitative aspects through open-ended questions. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of teachers' perspectives on using Netflix to enhance SLS in EFL learners. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyze the quantitative data from the Likert-scale items, while thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data derived from the open-ended question.

Participants

The study involved ninety-six male and female faculty members from various educational institutions in Saudi Arabia. These participants were selected based on their experience teaching English and familiarity with digital educational tools, including platforms like Netflix. The selection aimed to encompass a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives in utilizing digital resources for EFL teaching. This diverse group of faculty members provided a representative sample to explore the use of Netflix in enhancing strategic listening skills among Saudi EFL learners. All participants were ensured anonymity and confidentiality, and their involvement was voluntary, with informed consent obtained before the commencement of the study.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants (n=96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table One showed that 49% of the instructors were male, and 51% were female. The participants' experience varied: the majority had between six and ten years (35.4%), and the fewest number had between 11 and 15 years of experience teaching (15.6%).

Research Instrument

The principal instrument employed in this study was a mixed-methods questionnaire meticulously designed to capture a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions regarding the use of Netflix in developing strategic listening skills among Saudi EFL learners. This questionnaire included a 16-item Likert-scale section that quantitatively assessed teachers' perceptions of Netflix's effectiveness in developing strategic listening skills, such as planning, monitoring, inferencing, and evaluating. Additionally, the second section of the questionnaire contained an open-ended question to identify participants' views on how Netflix will enhance students' Strategic Listening Skills (SLS) in the future. The questionnaire was developed based on
related studies in strategic listening (e.g., Amin et al., 2011; Alutaybi & Alsowat, 2020; Nguyen, 2020). Experts in the field checked the validity of the questionnaire by examining the correlation between the items and dimensions, and its reliability was measured using Cronbach’s alpha, which yielded a score of .80.

**Procedures**

After obtaining ethical approval and permission from the EFL instructors at all Saudi universities, an electronic version of the questionnaire was sent to them. They completed the questionnaire, providing quantitative and qualitative data on their perceptions. The quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify teacher perspective trends and patterns. In contrast, the qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to extract deeper insights and understandings from the open-ended answers. This mixed-methods analysis offered a well-rounded view of the role Netflix plays in enhancing EFL learners' strategic listening skills in the future from the teachers' perspective.

**Results and Discussion**

The three dimensions of the strategic listening questionnaire were used to explore the EFL instructors’ perceptions of how Netflix as a technological tool will impact learners' SLS in the future. Instructors’ perspectives on planning, organizing, monitoring, inferencing, analyzing, and evaluating skills varied. The responses were arranged in decreasing order using descriptive statistics.

Table 2. Descriptives of instructors' perceptions of how Netflix will impact learners' planning and organizing skills (n=96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners connect prior knowledge to existing knowledge.</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners record key events.</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners guess the main idea through suitable tools.</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners focus on key events.</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners set steps for how they are going to listen.</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table Two, the overall mean of the instructors' perceptions of how Netflix will impact learners' planning and organizing skills in the future was 3.57 (.82). Item 2 indicated that watching Netflix allows learners to activate their prior knowledge and connect it to existing knowledge, with the highest mean at 3.68 (1.03). It is consistent with the findings of (Alm, 2021;
Alm, 2019), which indicated that engaging in Netflix can serve as a beneficial instrument for language acquisition, enabling learners to stimulate their preexisting knowledge and establish connections with their current information. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that simply passive viewing of videos is insufficient; learners must actively interact with the material to augment their learning (Zhang, 2022). Items 4 ($M=3.66, SD=1.07$), 1 ($M=3.63, SD=.90$), and 5 ($M=3.59, SD=1.06$) were among the highest perceptions, indicating that EFL learners can take notes and focus on key events as well as guess the main idea of the movies or series. The third item was found to be at a moderate level with a mean of 3.31 (1.09), which indicates that watching Netflix movies/series might not help learners set plans on how they are going to listen. Existing research on the application of Netflix and YouTube in the context of language learning indicates that although these platforms have the potential to enhance learners' motivation and engagement (Alm, 2019; Zhang, 2022), their potential to increase listening skills is not substantial (Metruk, 2019).

On the contrary, Fadillah (2023) revealed that students can enhance their listening comprehension by observing YouTube videos. Although these results suggest that these platforms may need explicit assistance in organizing listening plans, they remain beneficial resources for language acquisition. These findings confirm that EFL learners' planning strategies will be enhanced over time through Netflix tools, such as dual subtitles and controlling playback speed.

### Table 3. Descriptives of instructors' perceptions of how Netflix will impact learners' skills related to monitoring, inferencing, and analyzing (n=96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners connect the words with the characters' gestures.</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners infer the relationships among characters/events.</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners infer the meaning of situations/events.</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners check their guesses about characters/events.</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners summarize the plot.</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners find out specific details.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Three shows that all items related to monitoring, inferencing, and analyzing skills were found to be at a high level, with an overall mean score of 3.73 (.85). The first item indicated that while watching Netflix movies/series, students could make connections between the characters' gestures and the words they heard; this item obtained the highest score ($M=3.94$, .95).
This result goes in line with the studies of Shabani and Zanussi (2015), and Tajgozari (2019), in which that the combination of audio and visual cues, including physical actions and facial expressions, enhances comprehension and vocabulary acquisition for EFL learners. Items 4 and 5 had the same mean of 3.76 (1.00), indicating that movies and series enabled students to use inferencing strategies to identify the relationships among characters/events and the meaning of events. Similarly, Item 6, "Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners check their guesses about characters/events," obtained a high mean score of 3.72 (1.01). Conversely, Items 2 (M=3.65, SD=1.09) and 3 (M=3.57, SD=1.08) had the lowest scores, indicating that watching Netflix might not enable EFL learners to discover specific details and summarize the plot of a movie/series. This result is consistent with the result of Rodgers (2016), who indicated that engaging in Netflix may not inherently empower EFL learners to discover specific details and summarize the plot of a movie or series. One potential explanation for this finding is that some instructors believe that the English language on Netflix is complex for learners to grasp, even with dual subtitles. However, they generally thought watching Netflix movies/series would help promote learners' monitoring, inferencing, and analyzing skills.

Table 4. Descriptives of instructors' perceptions of how Netflix will impact learners' evaluating skills
(n=96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners judge the appropriateness</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of the strategies they have used (e.g., guessing the main idea,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recording the key events, summarizing the plot, finding out specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>details, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners determine if their</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>listening plans work or not.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners predict what the</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>end of the movie will be.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners criticize conversations</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in light of their previous experiences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners distinguish the</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>movies/series' strengths and weaknesses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Table Four, the findings reveal that the overall mean of teachers' perceptions of how Netflix will impact learners' evaluation skills in the future was 3.42 (.86). Item 4 indicated that watching Netflix movies/series will help students evaluate the effectiveness of the planning, organizing, inferencing, monitoring, and analyzing strategies they have used; this item obtained the highest mean at 3.51 (1.10). Items 5 (M=3.45, SD=1.18) and 2 (M=3.45, SD=1.09) indicated that Netflix will enable students to evaluate whether their plans developed before watching the movies/series will work and guess the end of the movies/series. Similarly, Item 3 refers to the idea that watching Netflix movies/series will enable learners to criticize conversations in light of their
prior experiences and had a high mean score of 3.42 (1.08). On the other hand, Item 1, "Watching Netflix movies/series helps learners distinguish the movie’s/series' strengths and weaknesses," was found to be moderate, with the lowest mean score at 3.27 (1.14). This result may indicate that some instructors consider this skill to be more advanced and believe only students with a high level of proficiency possess it.

The findings regarding the open question related to instructors' perspective of EFL learners' future expectations of using Netflix to enhance their SLS revealed that students' SLS would improve. Planning and inferencing strategies such as guessing main ideas or events and connecting events will be improved in the future. An example from P33 is as follows: "Students might be able to fine-tune their listening comprehension abilities to comprehend complex situations through following their dialogues using inferential and educated guesses and be conversant with the strategies of deducing meaning and overcome the foreign or alien aspects of the native language speakers."

Furthermore, some instructors have claimed that Netflix will help students practice cognitive strategies. P19 explained, "I think that Netflix can be developed in a way that helps the learners activate their minds because learning depends on what we call accelerated learning and differentiated instruction." P23 offers an alternative perspective: "Netflix has a good influence on the students' listening ability to listen and understand the main idea and events." Another instructor elaborated that by watching movies and series, students will practice strategies related to analyzing and organizing. As P27 commented, "Movies help analyze the events and improve their critical thinking. In addition, they help them recognize events and explain their occurrences." Thus, students need to be trained in how to use listening strategies and be aware of using them. P40 believed that "Netflix can be smartly used as a tool to enhance learners’ awareness of these strategies. This needs to be planned well by the course book designer or teacher."

However, 9% of participants had moderate-to-low expectations. They believed that watching Netflix movies/series would be more distracting. One participant (P2) asserted that "it would be difficult to focus on improving strategic listening because many things get along the way. For example, music and scenes are distractions while listening." Other instructors elaborated that students have been watching movies for a long time, and their listening level still needs improvement. P15 remarked, "I don’t think there will be any difference, change, or progress using the same method. Netflix and other similar platforms haven't been doing well for the last couple of years." P34 added, "Movies could help in a narrow circle but not as a tool for the learner. Students expect their listening to improve, but this is not always true." This is because some teachers think that the Netflix platform might help only advanced-level students and is unsuitable for beginners.

Building on these insights, the study recommends many courses of action for English language institutions and center administrators at Saudi universities, EFL instructors, and learners. Administrators should reduce the number of students in EFL courses, offer well-equipped language laboratories, and provide training sessions to promote students' strategic listening using
technological resources such as Netflix. English language teachers should ensure that students have a repertoire of listening skills and know when, how, and where to use them. In addition, instructors should stress the value of utilizing technological tools to enhance SLS using Netflix as educational material and control them by choosing specific movies/series and offering activities and projects to assess these skills. EFL learners should understand the importance of these skills and become strategic listeners to be effective listeners.

Future-oriented studies are essential to determine what improvements must be implemented now to avoid future issues. Consequently, the future of technology use in EFL classrooms is an important subject to investigate in future-oriented studies because Saudi Vision 2030 is a shift toward modernity and openness to the rest of the world; as English is a global language, its practical use is essential to achieving this purpose, and this requires developing English usage skills. Listening to English is a skill that requires more than just information comprehension; instead, it is complex and requires more than just information comprehension. Strategic listeners are effective listeners who can plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening processes, and technology will help them enhance these skills. Although we cannot determine how technology will be used in the future of EFL learning, a journey into the future may help identify the future of strategic listening for learners and overcoming issues related to EFL learning. These learners will be a part of the future and will have the opportunity to shape it. Prince Mohammad bin Salman said, "We will not look at what we have lost or what we lost yesterday or today, but we must constantly move forward."

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore Saudi EFL learners' strategic listening skills through using Netflix, as perceived by teachers. The findings revealed that EFL instructors showed high expectations regarding the role of Netflix in promoting learners' strategic listening, including planning, organizing, inferencing, monitoring, analyzing, and evaluating skills in the future. These outcomes highlight the growing significance of integrating technological tools like Netflix in English language education to foster effective listening strategies among Saudi EFL learners. Further studies should consider increasing the number of participants for greater generalization, examining the differences in participant characteristics such as years of experience, age, and level of education, and exploring the students' perspectives on how Netflix promotes SLS through interviews using mixed methods. It is preferable to employ pre-and post-tests to assess students' SLS and obtain a deeper understanding of their skills. Furthermore, a longitudinal design would allow for a better understanding of whether Netflix has a long-term impact on students' SLS.

Acknowledgments

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An Investigation on the Effectiveness of English Teachers Training Programs in Morocco: English Teaching Internship Initiative as a Case Study

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Abstract
Once they graduate, many students seek job opportunities in other domains such as engineering, medicine, management, etc. On the other hand, students with an interest in the field of teaching look for different training programs to develop their skills and knowledge. In Morocco, teachers undergo various sets of training before actually becoming teachers. Some of this training occurs in governmental institutions like Centre Régionales des Métiers de l’Education et de la Formation, whereas others opt for partnership programs like the English Teaching Internship Initiative. The English Teaching Internship Initiative (ETII) is an educational program that aims to provide potential teachers with a practical teaching opportunity. In this program, the involved participants receive real-world teaching experience and pedagogical training provided by experienced educators. As a result, trainees enhance their classroom management, lesson planning, assessment skills, and techniques. The beneficiaries, then are supposed to be immersed voluntarily in their local communities to gain valuable skills and experiences, enhance their resumes, and make a positive influence on their professional development and the student's learning outcomes. The aim of this article was to examine and evaluate the impact of the English Training Internship Initiative program on English Foreign Language teachers in Morocco.

Keywords: Internship, Initiative, Moroccan EFL Teachers, professional development, Training program

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol14no4.19
An Investigation on the Effectiveness of English Teachers Training

ADDICHANE & TAMIMI

Introduction

Education has always been a potent force in society and a crucial tool for bringing about positive change in the social, political, economic, and cultural lives of individuals. Numerous significant agents, including the teacher, influence the entire process. It is widely acknowledged that teaching occupies a crucial position in education. Since teaching is perceived as a challenging and important profession. It contributes greatly to the advancement of society in various fields. Thus, preparing instructors for the teaching profession has a vital role worldwide. Education, then is a significant factor in creating strong, developed societies, and teachers are among the key players in making that happen. For this reason, training and professional development programs for teachers must be offered, mentored, and regularly reviewed.

Being aware of the fundamental role that education plays in every community, teachers are expected not only to be proficient in their subject areas but also to be professionally developed. As a result, to achieve the high requirements and standards of quality education, they must have a wealth of knowledge and abilities concerning teaching and assessment procedures.

The main aim of this study was to explore the role and effect of the English Teaching Internship Initiative program on Moroccan English Foreign Language teachers. Another aim was to examine whether the English Teaching Internship Initiative program helped future teachers gain insights into teaching pedagogies and strategies. An additional aim was to elicit teachers' attitudes toward the program. The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What is the English Teaching Internship Initiative, and what it aims for?
- To what extent do English Teaching Internship Initiatives affect the professional growth of an educator?
- How can this initiative be further developed to meet the evolving needs of English language education in Morocco?

By using a mixed-method approach, the current research examined the role of internship initiatives among English teachers and investigated their impact on their professional development.

Literature Review

The Effectiveness of Teacher Training Programs

Teachers today participate in a variety of teaching training programs to enhance their pedagogical methods and skills. Therefore, the professional growth of teachers is closely linked to the training they receive and their ability to effectively apply the knowledge acquired in their classrooms. In this sense, teachers' professional development can be enhanced through various teaching training that focuses on equipping teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to start their teaching careers.

The impact of these programs extends beyond the individual teacher. It positively influences student learning outcomes and overall educational quality (Dange et al., 2020). By recognizing the components of effective training programs and addressing challenges in their implementation, educators and policymakers can promote continuous growth among teachers and foster a culture of excellence in the education system.

Recent research has focused on the significance of these teaching training programs and their potential to greatly influencing the effectiveness of teaching techniques and the outcomes of student learning (Bernard, 2022 & Ahmed, 2021). However, in the Moroccan context, only a few studies were conducted on teachers’ training programs and their role in enhancing their...
professional growth (Tamani et al., 2021). Internships within the Moroccan context, such as the English Training Internship Initiative (ETII) program, were not referenced in the literature review.

The Impact of Teacher Training Programs on the Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills of Teachers

According to the research in the literature review, properly designed teaching training programs play a substantial role in the advancement of teachers’ professional development and have positive effects on the teaching and learning process. In a comprehensive study conducted by (Tonya et al, 2021) on how teachers should be prepared effectively using different training programs, they insist on having programs that give teachers opportunities to make changes in school reforms as well as providing teaching training programs that deal with teaching as a team effort and include a range of techniques to train future teachers planning and problem-solving. In other words, novice teachers must work together and support each other in designing their lessons and implementing the curriculum, which will help them evaluate their teaching practices. As a result, such methods and preparations greatly help teachers develop their teaching skills and capacities.

Teachers do not only need support to develop their capacities and skills, but they also need the proper training that helps them evaluate and improve their teaching practices. Teaching training programs that affect positively the teacher’s pedagogical practices and equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to adopt evidence-based instructional practices. (Guskey, 2002) Johnson and Johnson (2019) argued that teachers who take part in cooperative learning training demonstrate more excellent classroom management skills and better student involvement.

For professional development to occur, teachers are introduced to teaching pedagogies and understand the substantial influence they exert on their instructional methods during training programs. In order to effectively link students with educational material, teachers must have an understanding of pedagogy that requires a diverse set of methods to engage learners proficiently and the ability to adjust and switch approaches based on students' needs (Ball and Cohen, 1999).

A Successful teaching training program should have mutual components that enhance its effectiveness. One of the most essential elements to include is an assessment to identify specific areas for teacher development (Feldman & Joseph, 2021). Training materials should be created with these needs in mind to enable focused professional development. Also, continuing assistance and coaching should facilitate using the acquired knowledge from the training sessions in classroom practices (Moran & Richard, 2004).

The Influence of Training Programs on Teachers' Confidence and Motivation

Teaching training programs are crucial in giving educators a chance to learn about the latest educational theories, instructional methods, and classroom management strategies. During such programs, teachers acquire new knowledge and skills that help them improve their understanding of effective teaching practices, enabling them to implement innovative approaches. When teachers acquire the necessary techniques and skills, they develop self-assurance to meet student needs and interests, and they also tend to feel more motivated to enhance student outcomes through their efforts. Therefore, teachers participating in these professional development programs gained confidence in their capacity to actively involve students, apply creative teaching methods, and handle classroom dynamics proficiently (Pountney, 2019).

Interestingly, teacher training programs do not only boost educators’ self-confidence but also contribute to leveling up their motivation in order to develop their teaching practices inside the
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classroom and outside continually. Tonya et al. (2021) pointed out that a well-designed training initiative inculcates a great sense of efficacy and self-assurance, which in turn empowers teachers' intrinsic motivation. New pedagogical approaches and the acquisition of updated content knowledge reignite teachers' passion for teaching (Muir & Geiger, 2019). As teachers witness the positive outcomes of implementing new strategies in their classrooms, their motivation to continue seeking professional growth is highly reinforced (Day et al., 2019).

Teachers, when they feel the power of the required skills and knowledge during the training, their confidence and motivation become reignited. When teachers are more confident and motivated to start their teaching journey with positive attitudes towards teaching that take into consideration students’ learning outcomes.

Teacher Training and Student Learning Outcomes

Programs for teacher training consider student learning outcomes as a priority, which are essential to the success of any educational reforms. Teacher training programs improve educators' abilities, expertise, and teaching methods that have a significant influence on student accomplishment. “There is a close relation between the teacher’s training, teaching methods and student's academic achievements. A trained teacher can apply multiple teaching methods and techniques in a better way” (Hafeez, 2021, p.5). Training initiatives provide a chance for teachers to build their sense of responsibility toward their teaching practices and toward students' learning outcomes.

Teacher training programs continuously foster teachers’ professional development by engaging teachers in an ongoing learning process. Beneficiaries get introduced to the latest teaching methodologies, educational research, and technological advancements. Consequently, this training impacts positively not only teachers but also student learning outcomes (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Therefore, teachers participating in training programs are more likely to adapt their practices to align with emerging students’ needs and teaching practices and ensure that students receive a high-quality education.

Black and William (1998) linked teacher training programs' effectiveness to assessment as it is considered a critical aspect of education that facilitates evaluating student progress and achievement. Teacher training programs that emphasize the use of formative assessment, as well as, the summative one to measure student understanding teachers trained in assessment techniques are better equipped to identify gaps in learning and provide timely interventions.

Moreover, teachers receive training to incorporate the introduced teaching strategies into their classrooms to help their students effectively benefit from more dynamic and interactive learning experiences, which in turn enhance their understanding and retention of subject matter (Abodeeb et al., 2016) and lead to improving student mastery of content and higher academic achievement.

Teacher Training

Teachers’ training is recognized as an essential strategy today and preparing educators is a crucial component in reaching a successful educational goal. Hence, societies work to provide high-quality educational opportunities for their citizens. In other words, the development of pedagogical abilities, the improvement of classroom management strategies, and the promotion of a profound awareness of the needs of varied learners are all parts of teacher preparation that go beyond transmitting subject information. This introductory overview delves into how teacher
training shaped the educational environment, its historical progression, and the contemporary principles that form its foundation, and so forth.

Teacher training is an essential strategy that empowers not only teachers but also students with the necessary skills. According to Thwala and Makoelle (2022):

Teacher training is a process through which policies, procedures, and processes are put in place to equip prospective and current teachers with skills, knowledge, and attitudes that could facilitate the process of knowledge acquisition in others. (p: 101)

Essentially, teacher training is a planned, ongoing process used to equip educators with the necessary skills to support students learning throughout their educational journey. Accordingly, training should include theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and the proper mindset and attitudes required for effective teaching.

Another primary definition of teacher training by Richards & Farrell (2005), who argued that “Training involves understanding basic concepts and principles as a prerequisite for applying them to teaching and the ability to demonstrate principles and practices in the classroom” (p. 3). That is to say, when teachers get the training, they can apply the learned strategies. Teacher training programs are fundamental in educational systems. They enable educators to generate meaningful and lasting learning experiences, support professional development, and ultimately help students develop holistically. Teacher training contains different kinds of educational activities that enhance teachers’ knowledge, including their teaching skills, and all the professional skills (Khine, 2022).

Types of Teacher Training

In Morocco, teaching training programs in the educational systems are provided by public and private institutions to help graduated students enhance their knowledge and improve their skills. This remains an essential step for those interested in teaching to look for programs that will help them promote positive educational outcomes.

Governmental Training Programs

A governmental teacher training program is an organization created and administered by the government to offer structured programs designed to prepare people to become competent educators, which refer to governmental institutions for teacher training. These institutions often offer comprehensive teacher training programs that encompass academic coursework, practical teaching experiences, and pedagogical guidance. Besides, they use standardized curricula that align with local or national educational standards. Additionally, they might provide many levels of teacher training, from initial certification programs for prospective teachers to professional development opportunities for seasoned educators looking to advance their abilities.

In Morocco, graduate students who want to be future teachers pass a written and oral test in order to benefit from one-year training and get a professional license. After that, they apply to the Centre Régional des Métiers de l'Education et de la Formation (CRMEF): CRMEFs are regional centers for education and training professions. These centers provide various teacher training programs and workshops for pre-service and in-service teachers (Motoe Takahashi, 2010). In other words, these centers, on the one hand, help teachers enrolled in teaching programs and are currently undergoing their official teacher training but have not yet begun their teaching careers. On the
other hand, educators working in the teaching profession can also benefit and get the chance to improve their knowledge and teaching skills.

**Internship Training Programs: ETII as an Example**

According to Fletcher & Fletcher (2011) “an internship is any official or formal program to provide practical experience for beginners in an occupation or profession” (p. 46). That is to say, teachers can gain valuable and in-depth experience in the classroom through an internship in teacher preparation, which is an essential part of educator preparation. Moreover, internships allow aspiring teachers to apply their knowledge of pedagogy, hone their classroom management abilities, and interact with students directly.

English Teaching Internship Initiative is an internship. The ETII is a nonprofit teacher training program supported by the American Cultural Association and American Language Centers for graduates of the English programs at the Moroccan Public University as the picture illustrates:

*Figure 1. ETII annual poster (English Teaching Internship Initiative, 2018).*

It was launched in 2015 in Rabat, Casablanca, Kenitra, Fez, El Jadida, Oujda, Meknes, Agadir, and Tangier to help graduates ease their understanding of the teaching profession and put their theory into practice. This training takes place in the American Language Center (ALC), where students get over 60 hours of classroom instruction and learn all about teaching languages. Additionally, they can take advantage of 12 hours of well-monitored microteaching activities and benefit from teachers there because they cooperate closely with seasoned ALC instructors and qualified English teacher trainers. All of these make trainees well-nourished and informed about teaching practices.

**Method**

A mixed-method approach was used to achieve the study’s goals. The study employed a quantitative method to gather and analyze numerical data in order to investigate how the ETII program contributes to improving the teaching skills of participants. On the other hand, the qualitative approach paves the way to provide a more in-depth explanation of the effectiveness of
the ETII initiative in the post-training period. Combining the two methods improved the data's validity and dependability and the results' quality.

**Participants**

In this study, the targeted population is reached using a non-random sampling technique. Fifty-nine participants are students enrolled in English Teaching Internship Initiative 2022 programs in various Moroccan cities aged between 20 to 35 years old. The program is launched nowadays in nine multiple cities. The study was able to reach other participants from different regions, as Table One below illustrates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fez</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meknes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangier</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casablanca</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oujda</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to data, a large portion of participants are from ETII Fez with a percentage of 30%. 20% are from ETII Meknes, 18% from ETII Tangier, 17% From ETII Casablanca, and 15% from ETII Oujda. The main reason behind this choice is to collect representative data from different cities.

Regarding the level of education, the vast majority of participants are MA holders, with a percentage of 40.68%. For BA holders, they represent 38.96%. At the same time, Ph.D. students represent only 20.34%. This population is chosen to examine and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the ETII initiative on the professional development of EFL teachers in Morocco.

**Research Instruments**

The research instruments used in this study are questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires help gather data from many participants despite the geographical distance and not necessarily face-to-face interaction. Besides, the study should use semi-structured interviews to delve deeply into the participant's experiences and perspectives on the topic. Both instruments meet the research objectives and provide a comprehensive understanding of the study.

**Research Procedures**

The primary data collection used in this paper is the questionnaire. This instrument facilitates collecting data efficiently and effectively from many numbers of respondents. The questionnaire contains two sections. The first section is about the general background information of the participants. The second section is devoted to eliciting responses related to the role and impact of the ETII training program. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are a qualitative instrument that enhances the collected data. This process helps the researcher obtain comprehensive information about the subject and gives respondents the space and time to express their views about the topic.
Results

Reasons behind Choosing the ETII Program

When asked why they chose to become ETII trainees, participants were allowed a chance to select the answer that best reflect them and express any added information under the section other. Table Two below shows a summary of the results.

Table 2. Reasons behind choosing the ETII program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because it is a free training</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To benefit from qualified trainers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get more knowledge in the field of teaching</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help me get a job</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help develop teaching skills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To start a teaching career with more confidence</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the findings, 23.7% of respondents chose to start their teaching career with more confidence. The results demonstrate that the respondents are seeking a teaching program that not only provides them with the knowledge and skills they need but also boosts their confidence, offers high-quality training, and supports their further professional development as educators. These motives align with the more general objectives of the teaching profession's professional development. To begin your teaching career with more confidence means that respondents think the program would give them the skills and knowledge they need to start their teaching careers with a higher sense of confidence. People who may be new to teaching and wish to feel prepared before joining the classroom would probably find this appealing.

About 20.3% of the participants specifically expressed interest in the teaching internship program as a way to get a job. The study highlights the practicality of the respondents’ decision to be part of the training and illustrates the attractiveness of the program's connection to potential employment opportunities. Some respondents mentioned, “This program allowed some of our friends to get a teaching job either in the public or private sector.” Most likely, the respondents see this program as a link between their academic interests and the practical requirements of the labor market. They want to receive valuable practical experience that will improve their teaching abilities and pave the way for them to land in the teaching field.

A percentage of 18.6% of the participants, chosen from the group who had been surveyed, showed a significant preference for the teaching internship project as a way to get more knowledge in the field of teaching. This response demonstrates their proactive attitude to developing their skills through practical application. Participating in a teaching internship allows these people to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world applications, enabling them to hone their teaching skills, classroom management approaches, and student engagement strategies. The focus on skill development indicates that being effective teachers is not just about having theoretical pedagogical knowledge, but also having the practical skills necessary to provide engaging learning environments.

As for the 4th choice, 15.3% of respondents selected to get more knowledge in teaching. This selection shows respondents' goals to learn more and develop their teaching abilities. Many people are aware that teaching is a field that is continuously changing and that continuing education is essential to be practical and current with new educational techniques. Moreover, 13.6% chose the
program that provides quality-based training. This selection shows respondents' goals to learn more and develop their teaching abilities. Being aware that teaching is a field that is continuously changing is essential to be effective and current with new educational techniques. There is a significant portion of students, 8.5% apply for internship training to become teachers, partly because the program is free of cost. For those who might otherwise encounter financial obstacles. Becoming educators is made more accessible thanks to this economic accessibility, which substantially influences their decision-making process. Individuals driven to pursue a teaching career but concerned about the financial consequences of more education and training find great appeal in a program that offers free internships.

**Attitudes towards the Enhancement and Development of the Teaching Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills**

The next question in the questionnaire is about whether the ETII helps enhance and develop their teaching pedagogical knowledge and skills. 74.6% demonstrates the overwhelming agreement among students on the profound influence of teaching training internships on the expansion of their knowledge and abilities. This significant level of approval attests to the program's success in providing worthwhile opportunities for experiential learning. The results show that the immersive setting of the internship, in which students interact with actual teaching situations, promotes a dynamic learning process that goes beyond theoretical notions. On the other hand, 22.0% of students reported that the teacher training internship somehow influenced their knowledge and skills. Highlighting a more nuanced view of the program's success. Although this number may be lower than in the preceding case, it reveals a sizeable portion of students who acknowledge the importance of the internship to their academic development. The responses from this subset indicate a degree of hesitancy or a lack of solid confidence regarding how much the internship has helped them further their studies. Finally, a small percentage of participants acknowledged that the training program has not impacted their knowledge and skills 3.4%. As illustrated below:

**Table 3. Attitudes towards the enhancement and development of the teaching pedagogical knowledge and skills during the training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somehow</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attitudes towards the Post-training Period**

Participants’ attitudes towards the post-training program are considered to be the primary concern of trainees in the whole in-training phase.
Table 4. Attitudes towards the post-training period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above-stated results reveal that 84.4% of the respondents have positive attitudes towards the after-training period, which is previously mentioned data related to the development of the teaching skills, and pedagogical knowledge of the trainees. 15.6% preferred to stay neutral as there might be some trainees who want to experience and use what they have been introduced to to be able to reflect on the program’s effectiveness and aspirations. At the same time, none of the participants reported having a negative attitude toward the post-training period. As an interviewee stated when asked to elaborate more on how they describe the training now after they have benefited from it. For example, respondent four said: “We cannot deny the importance of the training and how it paved the way for us to get more knowledge in teaching. Yet, when you get involved in real situations, everything seems very challenging.”

Moreover, a vast majority of respondents representing 84.7%, support having more initiatives like the one they are part of in the future. Respondent Five claimed that “the initiative was a great opportunity for me to learn a lot of things. I wish there were more provided chances for in-service teachers for continuous training.”

Based on the study findings and the previously mentioned studies in the literature review (Tonya et al., 2021; Day et al., 2004; Muir & Geiger, 2019). Training programs for teachers have a significant influence on improving and enhancing educators' teaching skills, practices, pedagogical strategies, and self-confidence. Respondents in this study have confirmed the positive influence the ETII training program has on them as the majority of participants, whether in the questionnaire or the interviews, have shown that such initiatives are essential in providing priceless insights to Moroccan EFL teachers and how they foster their professional development and innovation concerning teaching.

Discussion

The study’s findings reveal that the English Teaching Internship Initiative is a program that gives teachers practical experience in the subject of teaching English. Its goal is to provide theoretical information and practical training for teacher trainees. This effort intends to give teachers a set of efficient teaching techniques, improve their capacity for student engagement, and foster adaptability in order to meet the requirements of individual students, as it was elaborated in different studies mentioned in the literature review (Guskey, 2002; Johnson & Johnson 2019; Tonya et al, 2021). Moreover, the study proves that ETII has a profound impact on both teachers’ trainees and in-service teachers who have benefited from the training. They hold positive attitudes towards the training as it helped them develop specific teaching skills and enhanced their pedagogical knowledge. A big portion of respondents highlighted the importance of the movement and its effectiveness as it facilitates the way they approach teaching. It is believed that more initiatives like the one they are enrolled in should be created and encouraged. The industry also played a significant role in shaping the educational experiences for both students and teachers. It implies that it played a crucial part in determining what students learned and how teachers taught.
in the classroom. Although, as many respondents argued, real classroom situations are still challenging and can only be dealt with when you have gained enough experience in the field. Interestingly, the current study's outcomes are consistent with what has been observed or reported in similar research previously.

The study also demonstrates that some trainees opt for the program because they assumed that it’s an excellent opportunity for them to get free training and to help them get a job. Thus, it is crucial it is to highlight how these initiatives offer high-quality training. This involves experienced trainers imparting knowledge and skills to equip trainees with the confidence to apply for teaching positions effectively. As evidence, Smith, A. et al. (2018) stated:

> Just as a seed thrives when nurtured by skillful hands, so do the minds of learners flourish under the guidance of well-trained educators. Previous studies have demonstrated that effective teacher training not only enhances the quality of education but also cultivates an environment where the seeds of knowledge grow into forests of understanding." (p. 211)

This reinforces the effectiveness of teacher training not only on teachers’ development and knowledge but also on learners' outcomes and aspirations as it was previously confirmed by different studies.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, the study proves that the English Teaching Internship Initiative program contributed effectively to enhancing teachers' teaching, pedagogical knowledge, skills, and practices within and outside the classroom. Moreover, the program was an opportunity that provided critical hands-on essential experiences for establishing effective teaching techniques and narrowing the gap between theoretical knowledge and real classroom dynamics.

The training has paved the way for future teachers to develop a profound awareness of pedagogical methodologies, student relationships, and classroom management strategies by being part of real teaching contexts. Along with boosting confidence and motivation. This immersive learning experience sharpens adaptability and problem-solving skills, qualities for teachers to succeed in the challenging and constantly evolving teaching methods and techniques.

The English Teaching Internship Initiative had a transforming effect because it equips people with the skills and knowledge necessary to design meaningful and engaging learning experiences, enabling them to become more than just instructors but also influential figures in the lives of their students.

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Potential Benefits of Enhancing Motivation on English Language Learners’ Performance

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Abstract
This research aims to gain a better understanding of the critical role that teachers play in explaining why pupils are motivated to learn. This can help students explore information and new concepts in settings in which they feel competent and motivated. The term motivation according to Gardner and Lambert (1972) indicates motivation as a “desire to achieve a goal, effort expended, and attitudes to learning a language”. Therefore, their motivation has a direct influence on the effort they put in and on their academic outcome. Understanding what motivates students well could encourage teachers to decide the best methods to educate their students and how to put those methods into practice. This study provides insight into how English teachers who have been teaching for several years see the impact of motivation on language learning and what they think they can do as language teachers to motivate their students. The main aims and focus of this study were to find out what motivates EFL students and factors that affect their motivation.

Keywords: affiliations, belongingness, connected, cumulative assessment, descriptive statistics, differentiation, formative assessment, negative feedback, translanguaging.

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Introduction

This research aims to gain a better understanding of the critical role that teachers play in explaining why pupils are motivated to learn. This can help students explore information and new concepts in settings in which they feel competent and motivated.

The term motivation according to Gardner and Lambert (1972) indicates motivation as a "desire to achieve a goal, effort expended, and attitudes to learning a language" (p. 2). All learning activities are filtered through students' motivation. Therefore, their motivation has a direct influence on the effort they put in and on their academic outcome. Abbass et al. (2012) referred to motivation as "the neglected heart of language teaching" (p. 2).

Understanding what motivates students well could encourage teachers to make decisions about the best methods to educate their students and how to put those methods into practice.

This study provides insight into how English teachers who have been teaching for several years see the impact of motivation on language learning and what they think they can do as language teachers to motivate their students. And how motivation can be used as a technique to encourage students to learn in general.

Literature Review

The word motivation in education means to set up conditions that lead to start or stop a certain behavior. This concept of motivation is linked to a wide range of pedagogical and psychological concepts such as attention, goals, needs and interests.

This research refers to "barriers" as the elements prohibit or restrict adult learners from engaging in certain activities, especially English language learning. Interaction, collaboration, belonging, and connection are all important factors in the development of adult learners' English skills, according to the theoretical foundation for this research. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of creating an appropriate learning environment for an effective learning process. It states that it is necessary to provide a comfortable and positive climate for adult learners and to support the role of the teacher (Alhasov et al., 2020).

There are several methods related to the atmosphere in a classroom that affect student motivation. The role of the teacher is important, and it can have a positive or negative impact on learner motivation in several ways through the selection of exercises and communication tactics. For example, Gardner and Lambert (1972) explain that one can have integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, or a mixture of these. This means that the learners', teachers', or parents' attitudes towards the language can have a positive or negative impact on how much effort the learner will put into learning a language (Gardner, 1985).

Closely related to motivation and language learning in general is Leontiev's (1978) activity theory. This theory interprets activity as action prompted by either a biological need, such as hunger, or a culturally constructed need, such as the need to be literate in certain cultures. The theory assumes that an activity has three levels: the motivation level, the action level, and the condition level.

This can help understand the learning process in a language class when looking at the learning process as an activity. Thus, a learner's motivation affects the level of action, such as participation in class, which in turn affects outcomes, such as the extent to which the learner has learned the subjects covered. In Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) there is the aspect of an expert who helps the beginner to learn a language. However, the interaction between an expert and a novice is not the only way to understand ZPD. The main idea of the theory is that...
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a learner already has some skill or knowledge on a subject and then learns something new, but not too far from their current skill or knowledge.

Another aspect that can be linked to activity theory and ZPD is the learner's self. Van Lier (2004) explains it as one's own life experiences, especially social and cultural ones. The self in this sense can influence the language learning process and whether the learner feels motivated and to what extent.

The main theory that I am adopting in this research is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1920s). Another motivated method is translanguaging which is a teaching strategy that encourages learners to use all their languages when learning the target language (Garcia, 2014). The concept of translanguaging is introduced, followed by a description of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1920s) and the zone of proximal development and how this perspective has been applied to translanguaging (Harris, 2021).

Translanguaging as a strategy could help teachers create an environment where learners are stimulated at an appropriate level. Within the sociocultural framework, Garcia and Li Wei (2014 & 2018), who look at translanguaging from a sociocultural perspective, emphasize that not only teachers can provide a scaffolding for learners, but also learners with different abilities, since translanguaging occurs through interaction with others' work, therefore, students of all levels can work together, and more advanced learners can support the other learners (Harris, 2021).

The zone of proximal development, cognitive constructivism and socio-constructivism were chosen as theoretical foundations (Likoski, 2015). According to Vygotsky (1978; 1982), the zone of proximal development refers to the distance between the student's actual level of development and the potential level of development. In other words, the exercises and problems that are in the zone of proximal development are of the kind that students cannot solve on their own but need the teacher's support and guidance. The zone of proximal development is related to differentiation in such a way that differentiation seeks to map students' actual developmental levels and embraces instruction in a way that presents a challenge for each student (Likoski, 2015).

Cognitive-constructivist learning theory is learner-centered because it is interested in what goes on in the learner's mind. Thus, learning can be defined as information processing in which a person actively selects, interprets, and summarizes information related to their prior knowledge, expectations, goals, level of cognitive development, cultural background, etc. In other words, this approach sees learners as individuals. Therefore, rather than injecting knowledge into the students, the teacher provides the necessary resources and guides the learners as they assimilate new knowledge to old and adapt the old to the new. The teacher must consider the current knowledge of the learners and thereby shape the lesson (Berkeley Graduate Division, n.d.). Otherwise, Students might have lost interest because they would need tasks that require more self-direction and autonomy.

In addition to considering individualism in differentiation, the social character of language learning must not be neglected. According to the approach, learning takes place in specific sociocultural contexts. Therefore, the importance of community and cooperation in learning is emphasized, as social interaction is seen as necessary for learning and information construction. In other words, learning is both an individual and a communal construct. Furthermore, according to Vygotsky, language first develops as a tool for social interaction and from there gradually becomes a tool of thought (Likoski, 2015).

However, Chen and Su (2011) suggest that although time, money and native speakers for real-world language learning are not available for all language classrooms and learners, the 3D virtual
worlds could be an option, to provide a viable complement to traditional textbook instruction to create experiences that help students better understand places, people, language, and processes. Because when learners have a good understanding of the language and its nature and live it through virtual reality as well as their real world, will lead them to learn and absorb this language better (Blomberg, 2014).

Methodology
To achieve the present study aims, a survey descriptive study design was utilized to gather data from thirty-eight faculty members at Taif University. The data for this study were collected using a quantitative method. English teachers were given a questionnaire to explore their attitudes and perceptions regarding the impact of motivation in language learning and what they think the teacher can do to motivate them. The faculty members (about 38 members) at Taif University were given a Google Form to answer twenty multiple-choice questions divided into four main axes. And all participants filled out an online consent form agreeing to participate in this study.

The 20-items questionnaire was subdivided based on six domains namely a) Autonomous motivation, b) Identified orientation, c) Controlled motivation, and Introjected orientation, d) External orientation.

The terms autonomous and controlled motivation stem from the idea that different types of orientations can be distinguished by varying degrees of self-determination or relative autonomy, which can be described as personal or impersonal. Furthermore, the various forms of motivational orientations can reveal learners' motivation and approach to, completion of, and completion of L2 activities. Learning a second language may be pursued because it is interesting, fun, and delightful in and of itself (intrinsic orientation), that is, the practice is pleasurable in and of itself. Alternatively, an individual may believe that acquiring an L2 complements their other life goals and ambitions. The action is considered worthwhile and vital to achieving (identified orientation). And because they imply human volition, these two orientations can be defined as autonomous motivation.

Language learners, on the other hand, can study a second language in a structured manner. Learning involves some external source(s) that push one to behave in a certain way, even if the reason is relatively internal (introjected orientation). An individual may also learn an L2 to be rewarded for participating in learning tasks and/or to avoid punishment or rejection from others (external orientation); for example, the motivation for learning could be to pass course exams or possibly get a job at a prestigious organization in the future. Because they are based on external influences, these two factors can be classified as controlled motivation.

And by considering previous domains and their effects on learner motivation and their performance I built this questionnaire.

Research Setting and Study Sample
The study involved a total of thirty-eight EFL English teachers at Taif University's Faculty of Arts who volunteered to participate in the study by responding to an online survey using Google Forms.

The participants were divided into three groups Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate holders of both genders who have been teaching for several years.
The questionnaire was administered to 30 faculty members at Taif University in the second term of 2022. They volunteered to participate in the study by responding to an online survey using Google Forms. The participants had approximately 5-10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

**Data Collection and Data Analysis**

The data for this study was collected using a quantitative method and the participants' answers varied between strongly agree, agree, uncertain/not applicable, disagree, and strongly disagree.

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 26) was used as a research software for the quantitative evaluation of the data. For the data analysis, the data from the questionnaires were entered into a data matrix in SPSS for statistical processing. To examine the answers to the last open-ended question, the data was qualitatively analyzed to identify recurring patterns and later create categories.

**Findings**

The analysis included responses from 38 participants whose demographic details showed that 17 (44.7%) had bachelor’s degree, 10 (26.3%) had more than 10 years of experiences and 35 (92.1%) were females.

Table 1. Sociodemographic details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate (PhD)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;=2 year</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 20-items questionnaire was subdivided based on four domains namely a) Autonomous motivation, b) Identified orientation, c) Controlled motivation, and Introjected orientation, d) External orientation. The responses of each item were recorded using a five-point Likert scale as follows: Strongly agree-5, agree-4, neutral-3, Disagree-2 and strongly disagree-1.

The scores of items in this section were added where the mean was found to be 20.65 ± 1.97. When these scores were compared between different qualifications of the participants, there were no statistically significant differences observed (p=0.302).

Table 2. Frequency distributions for Autonomous motivation items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.63 (0.82)</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.63 (0.91)</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teacher's personality, attitude, and way of speaking affects the learner's motivation either in a positive or negative way. 0(0%) 0(0%) 0(0%) 3 (7.9%) 35 (92.1%) 4.92 (0.27) 1st

The enjoyment learners experience when they achieve a new goal in learning and the positive feedback, they receive from their teacher affect positively and directly their educational attainment. 0(0%) 0(0%) 1 (2.6%) 10 (26.3%) 27 (71.1%) 4.68 (0.53) 2nd

Students might have lost interest because they would need tasks that require more self-direction and autonomy. 0(0%) 2 (5.3%) 11 (28.9%) 18 (47.4%) 7 (18.4%) 3.79 (0.81) 3rd

**Autonomous motivation (items 1-5)**

There were 5-items that measured the perception of participants about Autonomous motivation. All the participants (100%) agreed for item 3 (“The teacher's personality, attitude, and way of speaking affects the learner's motivation either in a positive or negative way”) with a mean of 4.92 ± 0.27. So, if the mean score is less, it’s negative and if the mean scores is more, it’s positive. The next items that had maximum agreement (97.4%) was for items 5 (“The enjoyment learners experience when they achieve a new goal in learning and the positive feedback, they receive from their teacher affect positively and directly their educational attainment”) that had a mean of 4.68 ±0.53 The item that had more disagreement was Item 2 (“EFL learners feel satisfied when they use English”) (15.8%) with a mean of 3.63 ± 0.91

![Figure1. Frequency distributions for Autonomous motivation items](image-url)
Table 3. *Frequency distributions for Identified orientation items.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>16 (42.1%)</td>
<td>22 (57.9%)</td>
<td>4.58 (0.50)</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>9 (23.7%)</td>
<td>29 (76.3%)</td>
<td>4.76 (0.43)</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>6 (15.8%)</td>
<td>7 (18.4%)</td>
<td>17 (44.7%)</td>
<td>8 (21.1%)</td>
<td>3.71 (0.98)</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.9%)</td>
<td>23 (60.5%)</td>
<td>12 (31.6%)</td>
<td>4.24 (0.59)</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Identified orientation (items 6-9)**

There were 4 items that recorded participants’ perceptions about Identified orientation in teaching students. The most agreed item was Item 7 (“The teaching methods used during the lessons like games, discussion, and working in groups have a positive impact in their motivation.”) that had mean of 4.76 ± 0.43. The least agreed item was item 8 (“The lessons do not always have to be new and innovative; they can be more of the ‘traditional’ type as well.”), which had a mean of 3.71 ± 0.98

![Figure 2. Frequency distributions for Identified orientation items](image-url)
Table 4. Frequency distributions for Identified orientation items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Learning under stress positively affects learners' achievement.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.82 (1.37)</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Positive feedback can help support students' efforts to communicate and try out what they have learned.</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>13(34.2%)</td>
<td>25(65.8%)</td>
<td>4.66(0.48)</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Blended learning and homework increase their motivation to learn.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4(10.5%)</td>
<td>9(23.7%)</td>
<td>13(34.2%)</td>
<td>10(26.3%)</td>
<td>3.66(1.15)</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Direct feedback discourages learners to take risks.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10(26.3%)</td>
<td>5(13.2%)</td>
<td>18(47.4%)</td>
<td>3(7.9%)</td>
<td>3.26(1.11)</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Learners are aware that you are trying to use indirect feedback to correct their use of English.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4(10.5%)</td>
<td>9(23.7%)</td>
<td>23(60.5%)</td>
<td>1(2.6%)</td>
<td>3.50(0.83)</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were 5 items that recorded participants’ perceptions about Controlled motivation and Introjected orientation in teaching students. The most agreed item was Item 11 (“Positive feedback can help support students' efforts to communicate and try out what they have learned”) with a mean of 4.66 ± 0.48. The least agreed item was item 10 (“Learning under stress positively affects learners' achievement.”) with mean of 2.82 ± 0.48
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Figure 3. Frequency distributions for identified orientation items

Table 5. Frequency distributions for identified orientation items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>One way to ensure learners are offered the optimal learning conditions to develop their language skills is to encourage them to use all their linguistic resources by using translanguaging in English classrooms.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>EFL learners’ age and the level of proficiency affect your attitude and perception toward the use of ‘translanguaging’ in the English classroom.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The instructor must understand and appreciates student differences.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The instructor must adjust content, process, and product in response to student readiness, interests and learning profile.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While most language classrooms are taught by using written exercises and chapter translations, having games incorporated to the curriculum could nicely give the language lessons a motivating boost.

A balanced equation of needed theoretical grammar with optional, practical games can be assumed to be the most useful method of teaching and learning foreign languages.

4.4 External orientation (items 15 - 20)

There were 6 items that recorded participants’ perceptions about External orientation in teaching students. The most agreed item was item 17 (“The instructor must understand and appreciates student differences”) with a mean of 4.76 ± 0.49. The least agreed item was item 15 (“One way to ensure learners are offered the optimal learning conditions to develop their language skills is to encourage them to use all their linguistic resources by using translanguaging in English classrooms”) with a mean of 3.71 ± 0.77
Table 6. Comparison of scores based on qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bachelor's Mean</th>
<th>Bachelor's SD</th>
<th>Masters Mean</th>
<th>Masters SD</th>
<th>Doctorate (PhD) Mean</th>
<th>Doctorate (PhD) SD</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous motivation</td>
<td>20.88</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>20.87</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>19.50</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>0.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified orientation</td>
<td>17.76</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled motivation</td>
<td>18.24</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introjected orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External orientation</td>
<td>25.35</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>25.83</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>0.785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scores of items in this section were added where the mean was found to be 20.65 ± 1.97. When these scores were compared between different qualifications of the participants, there were no statistically significant differences observed (p=0.302).

Table 7. Comparison of scores based on experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&lt;=2 year Mean</th>
<th>&lt;=2 year SD</th>
<th>3-5 years Mean</th>
<th>3-5 years SD</th>
<th>6-10 years Mean</th>
<th>6-10 years SD</th>
<th>&gt;10 years Mean</th>
<th>&gt;10 years SD</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous motivation</td>
<td>21.33</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>21.33</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>19.10</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified orientation</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>16.44</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>17.70</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>0.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled motivation</td>
<td>18.67</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>18.44</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>17.60</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>0.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introjected orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External orientation</td>
<td>25.89</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>25.22</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>25.70</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>25.90</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.945</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But there were statistically significant differences seen with experiences where participants with 3-5 years and <=2 years showed significantly higher scores (p=0.028).

Table 8: Comparison of scores based on gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female Mean</th>
<th>Female SD</th>
<th>Male Mean</th>
<th>Male SD</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous motivation</td>
<td>20.63</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified orientation</td>
<td>17.11</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>19.33</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled motivation</td>
<td>17.97</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introjected orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External orientation</td>
<td>25.91</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whereas male participants showed significantly higher scores compared to females (p=0.027).

The mean score for the sum of all 5 items was found to be 17.89 ± 2.08. There were no statistically significant differences observed for qualification, experience, and gender (p>0.05).

Discussion
The study findings of the study showed that the majority of the teachers had a high agreement with the fact that Saudi students are highly motivated to learn English as a foreign language. It is the responsibility of the teacher to stimulate the interest of students and assist them in achieving their academic objectives since motivation has been shown to have a significant impact on student learning. In the study findings, all the participated teachers agreed that a teacher's personality, attitude, and way of speaking have a strong influence on the learner's motivation. Students' motivation in second language learning has been studied in the past, and it has been found that some students are more motivated in classes with certain teachers and less motivated in classes with other teachers (Montalvo et al. 2007). In this study, there is no significant differences in agreement for the items based on teachers' experiences except for autonomous motivation, which showed higher scores among teachers who had more experience (> 10 years). Also, there is no significant differences in agreement between teachers based on qualification and gender.

According to Eryilmaz (2014), teachers with admirable qualities such as extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and transparency were more favored by students than those with negative characteristics such as introversion, suspicion, hostility towards others, and emotional instability. In addition, it is also reported that students' enthusiasm and academic success are said to be boosted when teachers and students have a good relationship, which will help the students to deal with the demands of school and show more positive learning attitudes and practices (Bouras & Keskes, 2014; Lamb, 2017; Wubbels et al., 2016). The other aspect that showed high agreement among teachers was that students enjoy learning when they face a new goal achieved and when they get positive feedback. Goal clarification and process feedback are seen to be beneficial in a structured learning environment from a motivational perspective (Aelterman et al., 2019; Ryan and Deci, 2017). As an outcome of this structure, students' most volitional forms of motivation, such as the need to feel competent and more in control of their own learning (autonomy) and a positive classroom climate, are all strongly correlated (relatedness) (De Meester et al., 2022).

One of the highly agreed items in the domain of Identified orientation was the positive impact of teaching methods used (games, discussion, and working in groups) on motivation. Numerous researchers have demonstrated that games are more effective than non-gaming teaching tools for students (Liu et al., 2014; Moreno, 2012; Papastergiou, 2009). Students' behavior and learning can be influenced by game features, which include excitement, quick feedback, mastery, progress markers, and challenges. It's not clear whether gamified learning can enhance intrinsic motivation in language learning. However, those findings showed that these types of teaching methods have a positive impact on enhancing the students' motivation in English language learning. Gamified learning tools should have a special meaning for the learner, the ability to inspire the user to master the topic and should be autonomous by giving a sense of individual choice (Yıldırım & Şen, 2021). Also, games have been shown to be motivating because of their impact on the cognitive, psychological, and social areas of students (Karakoç et al., 2020). Games that are suited to students' age, cultural background, and interests should also be considered by teachers. Activities where children can succeed, should also be considered (Lightbown and Spada,
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1999). This game learning approach has also been employed in German classrooms with high school students, and the study's focus was on vocabulary and word understanding. The findings showed that students were able to understand and produce and learn new phrases while playing the game (Kuchenbecker, 2013).

One of the items that had a unanimous agreement by the teachers was "the instructor must understand and appreciates student differences." Teachers need to be aware of students' learning differences and how they perform in the classroom. In order to better prepare their students, teachers must first gain a clear understanding of their own learning preferences and how these affect their assumptions about what makes for good learning and teaching. Secondly, teachers must understand the learning preferences of their students and the most successful teaching methods and instructional practices for meeting these preferences. Teachers who have a better awareness of themselves and their students' learning preferences are better able to develop lessons for the whole class and work more effectively with individual students (Bargar et al., 1994). The next item that showed high agreement was "the instructor must adjust content, process, and product in response to student readiness, interests and learning profile." Adjustments of learning content based on the learning environment and student preferences are more likely to be improvised or motivational than planned or proactive content (El-Sabagh, 2021; Hootstein, 1998).

One of the limitations of this survey was its sample size. The survey was conducted among 38 English teachers from a single institution. Thus, there is a need to increase the sample size, involving teachers from multiple institutions, thereby highlighting more reliable results.

From the findings of this, we have gained a better understanding of the critical role that teachers' personality traits play in explaining why pupils are motivated to learn. To further aid student growth, competitive learning and assignment options may help students explore information and new concepts in settings in which they feel competent and motivated. Students' self-confidence in their academic skills and their appreciation for the value of learning English as a second language can both be strengthened by the findings of this research. This could encourage teachers to make decisions about the best methods to educate their students and how to put those methods into practice.

Implications

Future research should investigate if elements such as school atmosphere, teaching and learning approaches, and peer relationships have any influence on students' motivation. Since motivation has been proven to have a substantial impact on student learning, this study aims to explore the teacher's responsibility to stimulate students' motivation and assist them in achieving their educational objectives. Thirty-eight EFL English teachers at Taif University's Faculty of Arts from whose demographic details showed that 17 (44.7%) had bachelor’s degrees, 10 (26.3%) had more than 10 years of experience and 35 (92.1%) were females were participated in this descriptive-analytical study. They responded to a questionnaire that contain 20 items subdivided based on six domains namely a) Autonomous motivation, b) Identified orientation, c) Controlled motivation, and Introjected orientation, and d) External orientation. The results of this study show that students' self-assurance in their academic accomplishments and their appreciation for the value of learning English as a second language can both be strengthened by the findings of this study. That could inspire teachers to put those methods into practice. However, increasing the sample size which means involving teachers from multiple institutions and investigating more motivational elements will emphasize more reliable and broaden results.
Conclusions

Since motivation has been proven to have a substantial impact on student learning, this study aims to explore the teacher's responsibility to stimulate students' motivation and assist them in achieving their educational objectives. Thirty-eight EFL English teachers at Taif University's Faculty of Arts from whose demographic details showed that 17 (44.7%) had bachelor’s degrees, 10 (26.3%) had more than 10 years of experience and 35 (92.1%) were females were participated in this descriptive-analytical study. They responded to a questionnaire that contain 20 items subdivided based on six domains namely a) Autonomous motivation, b) Identified orientation, c) Controlled motivation, and Introjected orientation, and d) External orientation. The results of this study show that students' self-assurance in their academic accomplishments and their appreciation for the value of learning English as a second language can be strengthened by the findings of this study. That could inspire teachers to put those methods into practice. However, increasing the sample size which means involving teachers from multiple institutions and investigating more motivational elements will emphasize more reliable and broaden results.

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References
Potential Benefits of Enhancing Motivation on English Language Learners

Asiri

**Edutainment Technologies: Educational Games and Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality Applications** (pp. 46-53). Heidelberg: Springer.


Appendix:

**SECTION 2 – The Questionnaire Statements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 1: Autonomous motivation</td>
<td>1 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners enjoy learning English.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners feel satisfied when they use English.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 The teacher's personality, attitude, and way of speaking affects the learner's motivation either in a positive or negative way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 The enjoyment learners experience when they achieve a new goal in learning and the positive feedback, they receive from their teacher affect positively and directly their educational attainment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Students might have lost interest because they would need tasks that require more self-direction and autonomy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2: Identified orientation</td>
<td>6 It is important to formulate objectives in a way that can be measured and observed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 The teaching methods used during the lessons like games, discussion, and working in groups have a positive impact in their motivation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The lessons do not always have to be new and innovative; they can be more of the ‘traditional’ type as well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A student’s educational attainment affects his motivation to learn.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Learning under stress positively affects learners’ achievement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Positive feedback can help support students’ efforts to communicate and try out what they have learned.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Blended learning and homework increase their motivation to learn.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Direct feedback discourages learners to take risks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Learners are aware that you are trying to use indirect feedback to correct their use of English.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>One way to ensure learners are offered the optimal learning conditions to develop their language skills is to encourage them to use all their linguistic resources by using translanguaging in English classrooms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>EFL learners’ age and the level of proficiency affect your attitude and perception toward the use of ‘translanguaging’ in the English classroom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The instructor must understand and appreciate student differences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The instructor must adjust content, process, and product in response to student readiness, interests and learning profile.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>While most language classrooms are taught by using written exercises and chapter translations, having games incorporated to the curriculum could nicely give the language lessons a motivating boost.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>A balanced equation of needed theoretical grammar with optional, practical games can be assumed to be the most useful method of teaching and learning foreign languages.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of a DMGA Scaffolding-Based Module on Improving the EFL Speaking Skills among Vietnamese ESP Learners

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Abstract
This paper aims to investigate whether the scaffolding model named “Diagnosing, Modelling and Sharing, Guiding, and Applying” enhances the EFL speaking skills among ESP learners at public university in Vietnam. It also attempts to explore these ESP learners’ perceptions towards this scaffolding-based module. The study employed a mixed method research approach with an explanatory sequential research design. The participants were a total of 50 first-year undergraduate students of the ESP Department at a public university in Vietnam, who were equally divided into two intact groups, namely the intervention group and the control group. The scaffolding model was implemented in the teaching module during the 16-week intervention. The results of the Wilcoxon test of the pretest and post-test of the intervention group revealed a significant difference in the EFL speaking performance among the Vietnamese ESP learners with a p value of 0.00, and an increase in the mean score of the pre-test from 5.5 to 6.7 in the post-test, and with a large effect size (r = .42). On the other hand, no significant result was reported from the control group (p=0.20, the pretest mean score= 5.80, and the post-test mean score=5.89). It is hoped that this study could provide a scaffolding framework that is compatible with the emerging needs of teaching innovation. This research also suggests a long-term strategy for innovating English teaching and learning, which is a core goal of Vietnam National Foreign Language Project 2030.

Keywords: ESP Vietnamese learners, DMGA scaffolding model, speaking skills, Speaking Test Performance, Vietnam

Introduction

Speaking is regarded as one of the most important language skills in second language acquisition and also the most challenging skill for teachers to help students with (Brown & Yule, 1983; Rao, 2019). In countries like Vietnam where English is not the official language, teaching EFL speaking has been becoming increasingly essential in the education sector, especially at the tertiary level. However, despite the efforts of the Vietnamese government and educators, as well as certain improvements in English language teaching, many Vietnamese EFL students perceive speaking as one of the most challenging language skills (Nguyen & AlSaqqaf, 2022; Vo et al., 2018; Nguyen & Pham, 2016). Most recently, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has issued the National Foreign Languages Project 2030 on English teaching innovation, with a special focus on developing oral communicative competence. (MOET, 2008). Hence, as a teacher of English in the Faculty of ESP, at the University of Foreign Language Studies-The University of Danang (UFLS-UD), the first co-author of this study was motivated to identify strategies to provide effective support and assistance, which is the so-called scaffolding, to boost students' speaking performance. The current research attempts to investigate whether there is any impact of the Diagnosing, Modelling and Sharing, Guiding, and Applying (DMGA) scaffolding-based module on the English-speaking performance among ESP Vietnamese learners at UFLS-UD. To achieve this aim, this study analysed the student's speaking performance through the English-Speaking Performance Test (ESPT) to answer the research question:

RQ1: “To what extent does the DMGA scaffolding-based module help improve the speaking skills of the Vietnamese ESP learners at UFLS-UD?”

H1: There is no statistically significant difference in the English-speaking performance among the Vietnamese ESP learners at UFLS-UD in the control group before and after the experiment.

H2: There is a statistically significant difference in the English-speaking performance of the Vietnamese ESP learners at UFLS-UD in the Intervention group before and after the intervention.

RQ2: “What are the perceptions towards the DMGA scaffolding-based module among the Vietnamese ESP learners at UFLS-UD?”

Literature Review

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in teachers' scaffolding in language classrooms, as linguistic help is fundamental to students' language development (Kayi-Aydar, 2013). Scaffolding originated from the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, which is claimed to play a significant role in assisting a child's progression into his ZPD. It was then adopted by Wood et al., (1976), who defined scaffolding as adult support that can assist learners in problem-solving activities, highlighting the difference between what students can do with and without scaffolding. Thus, scaffolding is seen as an important instructional method that contributes to the learning process since it allows students to solve their learning problems (Poorahmadi, 2009). In a classroom environment, scaffolding plays a vital role since it appears as a "metaphor for teaching and learning" (Renshaw, 2013, p. 56). Khaliliqdam (2014) suggested that because learning and development interaction serves as a mediator for language acquisition, scaffolding could be used to help adults learn foreign languages more quickly and effectively. Scaffolding has also been shown to have a positive influence on speaking skills, and it is an appropriate approach to use in speaking classes because it can improve
students’ speaking achievement (Anggraini, 2018; Naibaho, 2019; Basco et al., 2019; Razaghi et al., 2019; Helali & Rabia’s, 2020; Gustina, 2021; Jafarigohar, 2021; Farida & Rozi’s, 2022).

Particularly dedicated to the tertiary level, Basco et al., (2019) compared students’ speaking abilities before and after instructional scaffolding to determine the most effective scaffolding technique for students. The findings indicated that students' average scores increased following the instructional scaffolding sessions, concluding that instructional scaffolding is an effective way to improve students’ speaking skills. In another experiment, Abdelshaheed (2019) examined the efficacy of various types of instructional scaffolding as a corrective treatment to improve students' speaking skills with poor oral English output. Results demonstrated that instructional scaffolding tactics offered excellent temporary assistance for experimental group students and helped them acquire higher levels of knowledge and mastery of the topic than those of the control group. In the action research conducted by Naibaho (2019), the findings demonstrated that the use of a variety of scaffolding strategies in speaking class can increase student learning motivation, students' positive responses to learning activities, the quality of students' ideas, and ultimately improve students' speaking skills and achievement. Similarly, Helali and Rabia’s (2020) study indicated that teachers’ scaffolding improves freshmen students’ speaking skills and reduces their oral issues.

There is also a lot of research on the efficacy of various scaffolding techniques in EFL-speaking classes. In Farida and Rozi’s (2022) study, the findings analyzed from teacher interviews and classroom observations showed that some functions of scaffolding talk, particularly engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate, could help students become more autonomous speakers and better express themselves. Similarly, Anggraini (2018) identified that more than half of the students were happy with the scaffolding techniques used in the speaking classroom, such as inquiring, explaining, providing a conclusion, and instructing. Meanwhile, Saienko and Nazarenko (2021) carried out experimental research to determine the efficacy of using speaking frames as scaffolding tools for enhancing the speaking abilities of ESP students. The findings revealed that speaking frames, which relate to modeling in the scaffolding stage, “enabled a significant increase in the number of students who demonstrated a sufficient level of speaking competence.” (p.99).

In the context of Vietnam, several studies, such as Dinh (2016), Pham (2017), and Hong and Nguyen (2019), demonstrated the effectiveness of scaffolding on students' EFL learning. Specifically, focusing on speaking skills at the tertiary level, Vo's (2020) study findings revealed that students gain benefits from interacting with their peers while using various scaffolding techniques, and the study suggested that teachers should provide guidance for students on how to accomplish speaking activities, with a particular emphasis on the procedures and strategies of scaffolding and mediation.

However, the result of reviewing the literature reveals that some gaps need to be filled. Firstly, very little research has incorporated scaffolding models into language instruction. In fact, most teachers use scaffolds in their classes, but few of them are aware of the specific scaffolding tactics they are utilizing. One of the causes could be the limitations of the scaffolding model’s research, as well as the fact that only a small number of teachers are familiar with the scaffolding theory or scaffolding model. Thus, the scaffolding model “Diagnosing, Modeling, and Sharing, Guiding, and Applying” (DMGA) proposed in this study could be introduced as a realistic and practical suggestion for EFL teachers in the long run. Moreover, very few studies have adopted scaffolding models in experimental research or have incorporated different aspects and components of the scaffolding models proposed in the literature to be used as guidance for the
intervention to enhance learners’ speaking performance. In addition, while some studies on scaffolding have been done on the effects of scaffolding on learners’ speaking skills in an EFL or ESL context, not many studies have been conducted on ESP learners in Vietnam. As the implementation of scaffolding depends so heavily on the context, it is of great importance that the context be specified in great detail (Van de Pol et al., 2010). The researcher's workplace, ESPD, UFLS-UD, has several specific characteristics that may lead to different interpretations and applications of scaffolding intervention. Hence, the question of how scaffolding influences the speaking skills of ESP learners in Vietnam is left unanswered. Fulfilling this gap, therefore, is one of the main goals of this study.

**Method**

**Research Approach and Design**

The study aimed to examine the impact of a scaffolding model named "Diagnosing, Modelling and Sharing, Guiding, Applying" (DMGA) on the improvement of Vietnamese ESP students’ speaking performance. The study employed a mixed method research approach with an explanatory sequential research design (Creswell, 2018) where the quantitative data represented by the quasi-experiment obtained from the pre-test and post-test were collected first, followed by the findings received from the interview session after the implementation of the module. The collection of quantitative and qualitative data was conducted independently, and their results were brought together for an overall interpretation.

**Participants**

The study utilized the convenience sampling technique in the intervention stage because of its convenient availability and simple accessibility. The participants were first-year undergraduate students of the ESP Department at UFLS-UD who were assigned to two groups: the intervention group (IG) and the control group (CG). There are 25 students in each group with a total of 50 participants. For the interview session, 10 students from the IG were involved in the interview discussion.

**Research Instruments**

In this study, the ESPT was employed as a measurement tool in both pre-test and post-test to evaluate the participants’ EFL speaking performance and to determine whether their speaking skills would improve after the intervention with the scaffolding treatment. The ESPT in the pre-test served as a placement test conducted prior to the implementation of the module intervention to identify the initial students’ speaking performance level in IGs and CG before the intervention. The ESPT post-test, on the other hand, was given to both groups in the last week of the intervention stage to determine if there is any change in the learners’ speaking performance. The questions in the post-test alter in form or wording from those in the pretest, but the level of difficulty and the tested content remain the same, as suggested by Cohen et al., (2018). In addition, the interview was carried out with IG immediately after the completion of the intervention module to explore the students’ perceptions towards the DMGA scaffolding model.

**Research Procedures**

This study was conducted in two phases: intervention and evaluation. Although both CG and IG were subjected to the ESPT pre-test and a post-test, only IG received the treatment and
participated in the interview after the posttest. Intervention/treatment refers to the application of the DMGA scaffolding model in the module intervention. The interview serves as evidence-informed teaching and learning, while the ESPT acts as evidence-based. The intervention lasted for 16 weeks and consisted of 17.5 hours of instructional time. The timeline for intervention is illustrated in Table One.

Table 1. Timeline for intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>• Pre-test (ESPT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2 to 15</td>
<td>• Intervention teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 14 sessions in 14 consecutive weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 75 minutes per session, i.e., 17.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 16</td>
<td>• Post-test (ESPT) and interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Module Development

To implement the intervention, the researchers designed a teaching and learning module that consists of three main components: the module content and materials; scaffolding strategies; and lesson plans. The module content and materials guide the research into what knowledge and skills should be covered in the intervention, while the scaffolding strategies implemented in the DMGA model aid in the achievement of the intervention's success, and the lesson plans help to ensure that the module content and scaffolding model are delivered most appropriately. The lesson plans outline the instructional activities that the researchers intend to provide throughout the intervention. Specifically, the lesson plans contain information on the module content, the design-in scaffolding strategies, which are based on the DMGA model, and the learning activities that students were required to complete during the lesson.

DMGA Model Adaptation

The DMGA scaffolding model is derived from the six teaching strategies described in the "Gradual Release of Responsibility" (GRR) model (familiarizing, analyzing, modeling, sharing, guiding, and applying), which was designed by the Department of Education of Western University (2013). It is also adapted from the “Model of Contingent Teaching” (MCT), developed by Van de Pol (2014). The four stages of DMGA have provided exposure to the key scaffolding characteristics, which are listed as contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility. The focus of DMGA is on the teacher’s degree of control and prioritizes the transfer of responsibility for learning and task completion to students, which may facilitate the implementation of a student-centred approach in educational settings (Nguyen et al., 2022). The application of the DMGA model is believed to contribute to enhancing the efficiency of speaking teaching and learning in particular and in the EFL context in general.

Figure 1. The adoption of “DMGA” model (Nguyen, AlSaqqaf, & Said, 2022, p.12).
Scaffolding Strategies

Stage One: Diagnosing Prior Knowledge

When this stage is introduced at the beginning of the lesson, it has the primary purpose of ensuring that students are motivated and engaged in acquiring new knowledge. The teacher will use a diagnostic strategy to predict the students’ current content knowledge and their speaking proficiency. To discover and activate students’ existing understanding and speaking competency, as well as to attract their interests, teachers could employ a variety of strategies, such as reviewing students' previous lessons, using diagnostic questions, or engaging in an ongoing conversation, in order to build a knowledge base.

Stage Two: Modeling and Sharing New Knowledge

At this stage, the teacher introduces the new task through modelling and sharing ideas or experience. The goal of this stage is to have students become familiar with the language use, the speaking skills, or the domain-specific knowledge and the cultural knowledge identified and recognize what to do and how to do the tasks given. The groundwork for whole-class participation will be laid during these first two stages.

Stage Three: Guiding and Providing Scaffolding

Scaffolding instruction by guiding students through the process of learning, providing appropriate support, and giving feedback are key roles of the teacher during this stage. The goal of this stage is to help students get a deeper understanding of the given task. Once the teacher has gathered and verified information regarding a student's knowledge, he or she might proceed to provide contingent help. At this stage, students gradually take on more responsibility for using the new language, and they will have more opportunities to work in pairs or in groups to complete the task. The learning activities during this stage are designed at a more complex level. This stage allows for the application of a variety of scaffolding strategies, such as instructing, explaining, questioning, giving feedback, prompting, providing hints or clues, and observing.

Stage Four: Applying Knowledge Independently and Teacher’s Feedback

In the final stage, students can independently apply skills and knowledge to their own contexts and complete the task without assistance. They are also encouraged to recognize how the newly acquired knowledge enhances their speaking performance. During this stage, the teacher can determine when the scaffolding should be removed based on the level of the students' speaking performance. The teacher can, in particular, check students’ internalization of his or her new information, get feedback from students’ reflections, invite students to participate in peer or self-assessment, or provide feedback that includes little suggestions on how they can improve their speaking performance.

Validity of the Research Instruments and the Intervention Module

As part of the study's validity enhancement efforts recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018) was conducted. "Content validity” and "face validity" are the two primary categories of validity addressed in this study (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 246).
Content Validity

In this study, a panel of five experts was appointed to determine the validity of the teaching modules and the research instruments: two experts validated the ESPT and the interview protocol, while three other experts validated the intervention module. All the experts were PhD holders with at least 10 years of English teaching experience: four of them have PhDs from well-reputed universities, which are the University of Queensland in Australia, the University of Wollongong in Australia, and Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand; one is a senior lecturer at the University of Malaysia Sabah; and one is the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of ESP at UFLS-UD. Their experience and expertise in the related field, including TESL, TESOL, and Applied Linguistics, gave more concerted views on the applicability of the research instrument and the teaching modules, which were of a great value. Certain items had been revised and edited based on the experts' scores and suggestions.

Piloting the Research Instruments

Pilot Teaching

A pilot study is a preliminary investigation conducted on a smaller sample than the main study and used to assess the feasibility and workability of the research (Creswell, 2014; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; & Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Firstly, the pilot teaching was conducted with a group of 18 students, referred to as the "piloted group" (PG). This phase allowed researchers to test the appropriateness and effectiveness of the modules before the intervention began. Two units from the module were selected for the pilot session, during which all the data acquired from notes and video recordings enabled the researcher to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the module draft for improvement.

ESPT Pilot Test

A pilot test for the ESPT was conducted, as recommended by Creswell (2014), to confirm its reliability. Four students of the PG were invited to perform the full ESPT. It is important to mention here that these PG students had taken the IELTS test within the last six months and at the same time their English proficiency was quite convergent to the participants of the real study in this research. They were also asked to give feedback on the ESPT, specifically whether the two parts of the test were comprehensible and if they could grasp each question well. Results from the ESPT pilot test were compared to their IELTS speaking scores. The results showed that the PG students’ ESPT score and IELTS score were comparable in that those student who scored higher on the IELTS test also scored higher on the ESPT, and vice versa. This indicated that the intervention module and the ESPT were successfully validated and were ready for the next step of the data collection whose results are reported below.

Results

RQ1. “To what extent does the DMGA scaffolding-based module help improve the speaking skills of the Vietnamese ESP learners at UFLS-UD?”

Demographic results

Since the participants in both groups were first-year students, they were between their 18s and 19s. 25 students took part in the CG with 21 females (84%) and four males (16%). Likewise, the IG consisted of 25 students but with 23 females (92%) and two males (8%).
Descriptive Results

ESPT was used as the pre-test and post-test and was analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to examine whether there was any statistically significant change in students’ EFL speaking skills for both groups. The Wilcoxon test is used with repeated measurements, i.e., when the same group of participants are tested on two separate times or under two distinct sets of circumstances (Pallant, 2016). It is used as a non-parametric alternative to the paired samples t-test since the T-test is recommended to be utilized with a sufficient sample size (for example, 30 or more), but the current study involved 25 students in each group.

Firstly, the CG’s pre-test mean score was 5.8, and the post-test was 5.9, with a significance value of 0.20 (see Table Two below). Thus, there was no statistical difference between the pre-test and post-test of in CG. Accordingly, H1 is accepted. It could be said that the normal traditional teaching method did not significantly enhance the students’ speaking performance.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Control Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre_CG</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post_CG</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Post_CG - Pre_CG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-1.29b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

In contrast, an obvious improvement was seen in the IG group as shown by the statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test, with a significant value of \( p = 0.00 \) (lower than 0.05). Additionally, there was an increase in the mean score of the ESPT from the pre-test (M = 5.5) to the post-test (M = 6.7) with a large effect size (\( r = .42 \)) based on Cohen’s (1988) guidelines (see Table Three below).
Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the Intervention group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre_IG</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post_IG</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test Statistics\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Post_IG - Pre_IG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-4.58 (^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

\(^b\) Based on negative ranks.

Therefore, based on the result reported above, \(H_2\) is accepted. It is fair to say that there was a big improvement in students’ speaking performance over the 16-week intervention period with the application of the DMGA scaffolding model. Accordingly, the DMGA scaffolding-based module helped improve the speaking skills of ESP students at UFLS-UD.

**RQ2. “What are the perceptions towards the DMGA scaffolding-based module among the Vietnamese ESP learners at UFLS-UD?”**

The interview’s qualitative results were consistent with the ESPT analysis findings, which gathered from a total of 10 responses. When asked, "Do you find your English speaking improving after the intervention?" 9 out of 10 informants agreed that their speaking skills had significantly improved, whereas one informant said that their speaking did not change that much. A significant proportion of participants expressed that their level of self-confidence was greatly enhanced, which resulted in fewer hesitations and pauses while speaking, and thus their fluency had improved. Besides, many of informants said that their speaking skills were enhanced week after week, particularly in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation. Some of their responses are listed below.

**Informant 1:** “Đã có, kỹ năng nói của em tốt hơn nhiều so với đầu khóa học, em sử dụng cấu trúc câu và từ vựng trong các tình huống thích hợp hơn.”

“Yes, my speaking has improved a lot in terms of using more appropriate language structure and vocabulary in different contexts, compared to the beginning of the course.”

**Informant 3:** “Đã có, kỹ năng nói của em được cải thiện hơn sau mỗi tuần, đặc biệt là về từ vựng và cách phát âm.”
Impact of a DMGA Scaffolding-Based Module on Improving the EFL

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“Yes, my speaking skill is enhanced every week, particularly in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation.”

Informant 4: “Đã có, khả năng nói của em đã tốt hơn rất nhiều, nói trôi chảy hơn.”
“Yes, my speaking is much better, more fluent.”

Informant 6: “Đã có, vì em tự tin hơn nên em nói tốt hơn.”
“Yes, since I’m more confident, I speak better.”

Informant 9: “Đã có, em có nhiều ý tưởng hơn và trả lời nhanh hơn, điều này giúp em nói trôi chảy hơn.”
“Yes, I have more ideas and can respond more quickly, which helped me become more fluent.”

Informant 10: “Đã có, khả năng nói lưu loát của em đã được cải thiện rất nhiều, em nói trôi chảy hơn nhiều.”
“Yes, my fluency is much improved and more fluid.”

The interview also explored students’ reflections as to the scaffolding stages of the DMGA model that they found most beneficial for their speaking development, including Stage One: Diagnosing; Stage Two: Modelling/Sharing; Stage Three: Guiding; and Stage Four: Applying. Among these, Stages Two and Four were mostly chosen by most informants, with eight respondents preferring Stage Four (28.5%), and nine respondents enjoying Stage Two (32.1%). They cited that the modelling stage provided them with a variety of vocabulary, useful language structures, and expressions that facilitate their speaking fluency. Meanwhile, it was noted that the encouragement they received from the teacher in Stage Four allowed them to be independent in their knowledge application in speaking practice as well as recognize their mistakes from the teacher’s feedback.

The following are some of their reflections on the DMGA stages:

“I like stage three. There were certain things about which I was unclear, but I didn’t feel comfortable asking the teacher about them. But she recognized that, and she approached me with explanations to help me understand and remember details in greater depth and cope with difficult tasks.”

Informant 4: “Đối với em, em thấy bước một là hữu ích nhất vì nó giúp em nhớ lại những kiến thức đã học ở trường cấp hai, cấp ba mà em đã quên.”
“For me, I find stage one to be the most useful one because it helps me recall prior knowledge that I had learned in secondary and high school but forgot.”

Informant 5: “Em thích bước bốn vì em có cơ hội tự luyện nói với những bài tập thuyết trình cá nhân, cặp hoặc nhóm mà cô giao vào cuối mỗi tiết học. Ngoài ra, cô luôn cho em nhận xét chi tiết giúp em cải thiện kỹ năng nói của mình.”
“I prefer stage four because it gives me the chance to practice speaking on my own by requiring me to give an individual, pair, or group presentation at the end of each. Besides, my teacher always gave insightful feedback that could help me improve my speaking skills.”

Informant 6: “Em thích bước thứ tư. Ở hoạt động cuối cùng trong mỗi tiết học, có cho em được lựa chọn và làm nội dung cho bài thuyết trình của mình, điều này giúp em chủ động, linh hoạt và tự ý thức hơn trong bài nói của mình.”
“Stage four is my favourite. The teacher allowed me to select the content for my presentation, and I have complete control over what and how I speak in the final activity, which seems to help me be more flexible and self-aware.”

Informant 9: “Em thấy bước hai là bước hữu ích nhất. Cô đã cung cấp nhiều cấu trúc và mẫu câu hữu ích mà em có thể áp dụng vào việc luyện nói của mình.”

“I find stage two to be the most useful stage. The teacher provided a variety of language structures and useful expressions that I could apply to my speaking practice.”

Informant 10: “Em thích bước hai. Em thích học ngôn ngữ và từ vựng mới qua các bài mẫu của cô. Nó giúp em cải thiện vốn từ vựng, cho phép tôi nói với đa dạng từ và mẫu câu hơn mà không bị lẫn lộn, và giúp em nói trôi chảy hơn.”

“I like stage two. I am enjoying learning new languages and vocabulary through my teacher’s model. It improves my vocabulary, allowing me to talk with more variety and without repetition and to speak more fluently.”

To sum up, the interview analysis revealed that students showed a positive attitude toward the DMGA scaffolding model used in the intervention. Furthermore, it was shown that students were aware of their speaking improvement. Consequently, the findings suggested that the DMGA scaffolding model did have a positive influence on the students' speaking performance. The results will be discussed in the following section.

Discussion

Results reported above showed the mean score of the IG (M= 6.7) was greater than that of CG (M= 5.9). Additionally, there was no statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-tests of CG, whereas a large-sized effect was demonstrated in IG. This demonstrated that the DMGA scaffolding-based module was successful in improving the EFL speaking performance among Vietnamese ESP learners at UFLS-UD.

The present study’s findings are consistent with those of Helali and Rabia (2020) that revealed that teachers’ scaffolding improved freshmen students’ speaking skills and reduced their speaking issues. In addition, the results of the current research are in line with those obtained by Abdelshaheed (2019) and Basco et al., (2019) who found that the use of instructional scaffolding at the tertiary level was effective in increasing the oral production abilities of English majors. The significant differences in the mean scores of the experimental group between the pre- and post-test (using the oral production test) indicated that the improvement in the oral productive skills was the result of the experimental treatment and, consequently, of the contribution of instructional scaffolding strategies.

Similarly, by focusing on the ESP setting, this study could confirm the findings of Saienko and Nazarenko (2021) who discovered that when scaffolding techniques, specifically speaking frames, were used within an ESP speaking instruction, the experimental group had better dynamics in the development of the ESP speaking skills than the control group. Besides, Naibaho (2019) and Gustina (2021) also pointed out that the use of a variety of scaffolding strategies in speaking classes can improve students’ speaking skills and achievement.

The findings of this study indicate that the application of the DMGA scaffolding model could enhance EFL speaking skills among ESP learners. In this study, the sociocultural theory (SCT) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) of Vygotsky were employed as theoretical lenses for developing the scaffolding intervention. Based on this theory, development arises from
learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), implying that instruction has provided necessary support at different stages throughout the ZPD (Swain et al., 2011). According to this viewpoint, the teacher employs scaffolding techniques, specifically the DMGA scaffolding model, through intervention modules to assist learners in gaining targeted knowledge and improving their speaking skills, and then withdraws their assistance when students are independently responsible for their own learning process. In addition, the SCT is reflected in the DMGA scaffolding model, which is based on the notion that: since scaffolding is dependent on the social and linguistic frameworks within which their learning environment is situated, the types of support that teachers provide in the classroom are significantly crucial to their students' educational progress (Gibbons, 2002).

Furthermore, in the SCT, learners depend on the more experienced individuals to perform specific tasks at the first stage, and over time they take on more responsibility for their own learning and carry out the activity independently. This is consistent with the four stages of the DMGA model (Diagnosing, Modelling & Sharing, Guiding, and Applying), which have exposed the key scaffolding characteristics, including contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility (Wood et al., 1976; Van de Pol et al., 2010; Gonulal & Loewen, 2018). Besides, some of these four tactics have been examined in previous studies, with comparable findings demonstrating their effectiveness in speaking training. Firstly, it is parallel to the study that Farida and Rozi (2022) conducted, which demonstrated that scaffolding talk, in particular engaging (also similar to sharing), explaining (included in guiding), and evaluating (a part of applying), assists students in better expressing themselves and improving their own speaking skills. Besides, identical scaffolding tactics as were addressed in Anggraini’s (2018), such as inquiring, explaining, providing a conclusion, and giving instructions, proved to be well-received by the students. Furthermore, Saienko and Nazarenko (2021) found that the modelling step in scaffolding might assist students in getting better outcomes in speaking tests and developing speaking skills. It could be claimed that the level of students’ interest in learning language skills, particularly the speaking proficiency, is correlated with the learners’ engagement and suitability of materials used for the speaking instructions (AlSaqqaf, Zhang & Sharif, 2023; Dahliana, 2019; & Jiwandono, 2021). Additionally, effective teaching, in general, would expectedly lead to positive learning (Taat et al., 2020).

To sum up, according to the findings of this research, ESP learners' speaking skills increased considerably after receiving the intervention that used the DMGA scaffolding model. Besides, the DMGA scaffolding model proposed in this study could be considered a viable strategy for communicative teaching and, thus, could assist teachers in incorporating it into their teaching practice to achieve success. As a matter of fact, proactive teachers can synthesize the diverse means to reduce the tedious learning effects (Thakur, 2015; Joannes & AlSaqqaf, 2023). In this regard, the study outcomes may suggest a long-term strategy for innovating English teaching and learning, which is a core goal of our National Foreign Language Project 2030 in Vietnam.

Conclusion
The current research attempted to implement an intervention to examine the impact of the DMGA scaffolding model on improving the EFL speaking performance among Vietnamese ESP learners at UFLS-UD. Results demonstrated the EFL learners’ speaking skill positively improved in the ESP setting involved in this study. Furthermore, the focus on the gradual transfer of responsibility among the learners embedded in the DMGA scaffolding model could help the
learners gain confidence in coping with their learning process independently and become autonomous learners.

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References


**Appendix**

**Interview Questions**

**Q1.** What do you feel/think about the activities in the learning modules?
Q2. Did your teacher assist you in:
- recalling your previous knowledge (Diagnosing)? If yes, how useful is it?
- approaching a good language model or exchanging knowledge about the language being learned (Modelling and sharing)? If yes, how useful is it?
- understanding unclear parts in the prescribed language or assigned tasks (Guiding)? If yes, how useful is it?
- acquiring independence in applying what you've learned to a real-world task at the end of the lesson (Applying)? If yes, how useful is it?
- noticing errors and figuring out how to improve (Guiding/Applying)? If yes, how useful is it?

Q3. In your opinion, what is the most useful scaffolding techniques among the ones listed in Q2? Why? Is there anything that needs improving to help you learn to speak English?

Q4. Do you find your English speaking improving after the intervention? If yes, how do you know that it is?
Writing Assignments Difficulties, Factors, and Solutions: ESL Teachers’ Perspectives

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Abstract
Writing assignments have been considered challenging for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Several studies have investigated writing difficulties, primarily focusing on lexical and grammatical problems. However, few studies have explored challenges at various stages of writing. This research examines teachers’ views on the challenges ESL tertiary students face when writing descriptive essays in the three primary stages: pre-writing, during writing, and post-writing. It also explores the factors contributing to these challenges and provides suggestions for overcoming them. Explanatory research was conducted by collecting quantitative and qualitative data from a web-based questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and analyzing those datasets separately. Fifteen English teachers participated in the online survey, and five teachers underwent individual interviews. This research reveals the problems ESL tertiary students encounter at the different stages of writing essays. In the pre-writing stage, students struggled most with outlining. During writing, they worked most on avoiding plagiarism, writing well-structured sentences, and linking between sentences. In the post-writing stage, they worked most with editing and revising. The teachers identified a lack of knowledge and creativity, over-dependence on teacher feedback, and unawareness of the writing process as the main factors behind these difficulties. The teachers suggested numerous solutions to overcome the challenges, including continuous writing training, teacher guidance, and increasing students’ awareness about writing stages by applying different digital techniques.

Keywords: editing and revising, lack of knowledge, over-dependence, outlining, three primary stages of the writing process

Introduction

Writing is an essential productive skill ESL students need to learn. Writing well-structured paragraphs requires ESL students to acquire numerous skills (Tseng et al., 2019; Toba et al., 2019). For ESL students, writing is considered a demanding skill as it involves the processes of thinking, composing, and expressing ideas in language. Writing is complicated and challenging as it involves different sets of competencies and involves understanding, thinking, planning, and revising (Winatro, 2015). Writing has several stages: (1) selecting suitable sources, (2) reading texts, (3) taking notes, (4) planning and outlining, (5) combining various sources, (6) organizing paragraphs and (7) rewriting and proofreading (Bailey, 2015). Students need to be aware of these stages to write well.

Several factors are connected to writing difficulties, with learners' writing strategies and learning processes playing significant roles in shaping their writing abilities (Bakry & Alsamadani, 2015; Winatro, 2015). Teachers' teaching methods and involvement in writing instruction have also been considered essential factors influencing students’ learning (Akhater et al., 2019; Tseng, 2019). Most importantly, students’ emotions, motivation, and interest in writing are crucial factors in enhancing students’ writing skills (Al Fadda, 2012; Moses & Mohammed, 2019).

ESL students encounter various obstacles when writing. The obstacles are products of such factors as students’ vocabulary and diction (Fareed et al., 2019; Toba et al., 2019), understanding of grammatical features (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Toba et al., 2019), processes for exploring and generating ideas (Ceylan, 2019; Pablo et al., 2018), organization (Toba et al., 2019) and training (Ceylan, 2019). Previous studies have shown that ESL students’ significant difficulties are linguistic and that they struggle with vocabulary and grammar.

Saudi students encounter various writing challenges, as evidenced by studies conducted by Al Fadda (2012), Al Khairy (2013), and Alghammas (2020). These challenges predominantly revolve around vocabulary, grammar, and writing cohesion. Alkubaidi (2019) demonstrated that the teacher-centred approach in the Saudi educational system results in students memorizing passages and encountering challenges in constructing well-structured paragraphs. She claimed that depending on communicative writing methods would inspire students more than focusing on form. Alghammas (2020) identified several factors that affect Saudi students’ writing: lack of English writing practice, the negative impact of the Arabic language, instructors’ focus on syntactic rather than semantic forms, ineffective teaching methods, and teachers’ unwillingness to teach writing courses.

Significance of the study

A rapidly growing body of research has examined essay writing difficulties in many different settings. There is limited research on teachers' perspectives regarding the challenges students face at various stages of the writing process: pre-writing, during writing, and post-writing. The present study contributes to filling this research gap by surveying English language teachers at a Saudi University. It also explores the factors contributing to these difficulties and solutions to overcome them. This study will provide a basis for designing or applying appropriate teaching strategies for essay writing courses for tertiary students. Moreover, identifying factors contributing to writing difficulties will provide valuable insights for refining language curricula. The findings can be used to enhance language programs, ensuring they address the specific needs of ESL students, ultimately improving overall language proficiency.

Research Objectives
This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

a) to investigate teachers' perspectives on ESL tertiary students' writing difficulties at the pre-writing, writing, and post-writing stages
b) to delve into the factors contributing to writing difficulties
c) to explore potential solutions to writing difficulties
d) Research Questions

RQ1: What do teachers perceive as Saudi tertiary students’ primary difficulties with writing essays?
RQ2: What are the reasons behind those difficulties?
RQ3: What solutions offered by teachers could address those difficulties?

Literature Review

Essays are the most popular type of writing assignment in ESL universities (Van Geyte, 2013). An essay is a written composition that explores a specific topic, typically structured into distinct paragraphs, each dedicated to a significant point (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). The essential components of an essay include (1) an introduction paragraph designed to engage readers, (2) body paragraphs that elaborate on each sub-topic related to the central theme, and (3) a conclusion paragraph summarizing the key points of the essay.

In their systematic review of the writing challenges ESL elementary students face and the challenges encountered by their teachers, Moses and Mohammed (2019) explored two primary linguistic difficulties ESL students face in writing essays: lack of vocabulary and limited knowledge of grammar. Students and teachers regard language proficiency as the primary source of students’ difficulties with writing (Akhter et al., 2019; Al Khairy, 2013; Alkubaidi, 2019; Fareed et al., 2016; Moses & Mohammed, 2019). Clear and well-structured paragraphs can be written by students who have a sufficient vocabulary and are familiar with various English grammatical rules. ESL students have reported their lexico-grammatical problems when writing essays (Albadi, 2015; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Ceylan, 2019; Dhanapal & Agab, 2023), including their lack of appropriate vocabulary and misuse of grammar. Moreover, lack of ideas and difficulty organizing ideas also hinder students' writing (Fareed et al. 2016; Pablo et al. 2018). Teachers have agreed that poor linguistic proficiency is the main challenge for ESL writers (Aghammas, 2020; Tseng, 2019). Both students and teachers agreed on considering language proficiency as the main challenge for writing which is classified as a linguistic difficulty (Al Khairy, 2013; Alkubaidi, 2019; Fareed et al., 2016; Dhanapal & Agab, 2023).

Scholars have identified other sources of ESL students’ writing difficulties: cognitive difficulties, affective difficulties, pedagogical difficulties, lack of ideas, and difficulties with organizing ideas (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Fareed et al., 2016; Pablo et al., 2018). Cognitive problems affect students’ ability to transfer features of their native language to their English writing, and affective difficulties influence students’ and teachers’ attitudes toward learning and teaching writing (Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Pedagogical difficulties arise due to teaching methods (Fareed et al., 2016). Students’ readiness and motivation are also considered critical psychological factors. Teachers perceive students as struggling because students lack motivation and interest, are placed in classrooms with students of different levels, and lack professional experience.

Akhtar et al. (2019) summarised three main linguistic difficulties ESL learners encounter in their writing: grammar, coherence, and writing development. Psychological factors such as
learners’ attitudes, anxiety, and lack of motivation are major in creating healthy learning environments. Another major problem is students’ inability to recognize grammatical mistakes even when they focus on language more than content when writing. Most Arab university students have reported struggling with editing and revising their writing because they cannot detect their mistakes (Al Mukdad, 2019).

Lack of confidence and motivation, anxiety, fear of exams, and insufficient teacher involvement also result in students struggling with writing (Fareed et al., 2016; Tseng, 2019). Focusing on rubrics for assessment has been another crucial factor behind learners’ low writing proficiency (Alkubaidi, 2019). ESL university students tend to memorize passages to pass writing courses (Alkubaidi, 2019). Moreover, the educational system influences what teaching methods are applied. In Saudi Arabia, university students rely on their teachers for direct monitoring of their learning, particularly in writing, and seek feedback to edit their writing. As a result, teachers focus more on form and writing mechanics than on writing’s communicative aspect and the purpose of genre (Alghammas, 2020; Alkubaidi, 2019).

Applying various writing practices is instrumental in enhancing the writing skills of ESL university students. Adas and Bakir (2013) suggest that blended learning and online learning can inspire instructors to assign additional writing tasks to students, incorporating technologies like wikis. Participating in activities such as creating a class wiki not only encourages students to see writing as a step-by-step process but also promotes collaboration (Alghammas, 2020). These teaching methods may engage ESL university students and increase their motivation in writing classes (Alkodimi & Al-Ahdal, 2021). By integrating the comprehensive writing process, which includes prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, students not only improve their writing skills but also develop a profound understanding of the art of writing, leading to an overall enhancement in their proficiency as writers (Rashid et al., 2022).

Training ESL university students on basic writing strategies needed in the three main stages (planning, writing, and editing) may help novice writers focus on writing good essays (Al Fadda, 2012; Cylan, 2019). Teaching ESL university students to integrate different direct strategies, including cognitive and compensation strategies, and indirect learning strategies, including the meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies Winarto (2015) suggested, into their writing at the different stages can help them improve their writing skills. ESL university students need sufficient opportunities to practice writing continuously to overcome the difficulties they encounter and build their familiarity with varying writing processes (Al Mukdad, 2019). Improving students’ self-assessment skills is essential to enhance their self-monitoring and self-evaluation skills (Winarto, 2015).

Previous studies have reported teachers’ role in reinforcing learned writing skills and correcting problems by providing ESL students with effective feedback (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Cylan, 2019). Teachers must support their students with feedback to master writing techniques, improve self-editing (Al Mukdad, 2019), and learn autonomously (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Cylan, 2019; Tseng, 2019). Explaining linkers, citations, and references with suitable models may give students essential input for their writing development (Cylan, 2019). Additionally, teachers’ choice of essay topics significantly affects student motivation. Writing about topics that interest them motivates students to read and persist when they encounter difficulties (Al Murshidi, 2014).

Based on available studies, there has been no prior investigation into the specific writing challenges experienced by ESL university students at each stage of the writing process. Researchers have focused on students’ linguistic and psychological problems in their writing as a
whole rather than investigating problems at different writing stages. This study investigates teachers’ perceptions of the main difficulties ESL university students encounter before writing while writing, and after writing to identify the causes of those difficulties. The study also investigates suggestions to overcome those difficulties.

**Methodology**

The study design is mixed-method, explanatory, and sequential. It was conducted by collecting quantitative and qualitative data from a web-based questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and analysing those datasets separately. Fifteen English teachers participated in the online survey, and five teachers underwent individual interviews. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with five teachers to complement the quantitative findings.

**Participants**

A total of 15 Non-native female English language teachers at the English Language Institute at Umm Al-Qura University participated in the present study. They were all teaching tertiary medical students. The study took place in the second semester of the first year of the academic year (2022-2023). Table One presents the participants’ average age and years of teaching experience. The respondents at each level had different features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching rank</th>
<th>Mean age (SD)</th>
<th>Mean years of teaching experience (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers 10</td>
<td>39.60 (5.40)</td>
<td>15 (5.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors 5</td>
<td>42 (10.8)</td>
<td>12 (9.17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, tertiary students study General English Course for 16 hours a week. The course lasts for ten weeks. The writing class was scheduled for two hours per week, employing a genre-based approach to teach students how to write descriptive essays. This method involved presenting two models to help students practice and enhance their understanding of the schematic structure of descriptive essays. Subsequently, students were tasked with applying the practiced structure to write about a famous person (see Appendix A for more details).

**Research Instruments**

**Survey**

The survey questions were derived from 15 criteria in Elbow and Belanoff’s (2000) and Al Badi’s (2015) surveys. Teachers filled out the survey after the English course to ensure they had observed students' writing difficulties across all three stages. As the course was conducted in English, data were gathered in English. The questionnaire items were formulated to address the research questions and organized based on their relevance to the three primary writing stages: pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. The first two items were related to pre-writing skills. The following seven items were related to the writing stage, and the last six were associated with the post-writing stage. The researcher used a five-point frequency rating scale (never, seldom, sometimes, often, usually). For example, teachers are asked to rate how often their students brainstorm and write down their ideas when they start writing. Appendix B presents the survey items. The survey was sent to teachers at Saudi University’s English Language Institute via Google Forms. At the end of the survey, the teachers answered a few questions about their teaching
background and were asked to indicate if they would like to participate in a follow-up interview (by ticking a box in the online survey). A parallel questionnaire was distributed to students through a Google form; however, an insufficient number of responses were collected.

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers as a follow-up to uncover reasons behind difficulties that emerged in the quantitative analysis (For more details, see Appendix C). Five survey respondents (four professors and a lecturer, see Table One) consented to participate in the interviews. Separate sessions were held with each respondent. The recorded interview sessions, lasting 30–45 minutes, commenced with an overview of the leading writing difficulties identified from the survey results. Respondents then answered questions about the reasons behind those difficulties (RQ2) and possible solutions (RQ3). To preserve anonymity, the five teachers were assigned codes ranging from T1 to T5.

**Research Procedures**

The data were collected three weeks after the completion of the writing course. The questionnaire was sent to the participants by email, and they were asked to provide answers to an online semi-structured questionnaire. The purpose of the study was explained on the first page of the questionnaire, and it was clearly stated that participation in this study is voluntary. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to complement the quantitative results and to answer the second and third research questions.

**Data Analysis**

The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were assessed through a pilot phase, during which three teachers completed the survey to identify potential design issues and flaws. The collected responses were then input into SPSS 20.0 for analysis. Thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016) was employed to classify themes within the data.

**Results**

**RQ1: Writing difficulties encountered by students at different writing stages.**

To answer the first research question, the researcher calculated the frequency and corresponding percentages of responses, as shown in Table Two in Appendix D. Teachers reported several writing difficulties at different stages of writing. In the pre-writing stage, 59.9% of respondents identified outlining as the most challenging skill (criterion 2); contrastingly, brainstorming was 59.9% easy. While writing, students struggled most with avoiding plagiarism 79.9%, followed by linking between sentences correctly 79.9%, writing complete grammatical sentences 66.6%, writing topic sentences 59.9% and writing introductory paragraphs 53.2%. In the post-writing stage, they struggled with checking their vocabulary use 53.3%, use of grammar 46.6%, and use of proper mechanics (e.g., use of punctuation) 46.6%. Teachers reported that students find editing first drafts more complicated than final drafts.

**RQ2: Factors behind students’ writing difficulties**

Interview responses facilitate interpreting students’ writing difficulties more than multiple-choice responses do. In the semi-structured interviews, teachers explained three leading causes behind the identified difficulties.
Lack of previous knowledge and lack of creativity

Teachers emphasized that students may face challenges due to their limited understanding of critical writing terminology. It is worth noting that students faced significant difficulties with plagiarism because the term was new to them, and they were unaware of its meaning and consequences. T3 explained:

They have never been introduced to plagiarism. They were surprised when I told them not to copy and paste from available online sources.

Another prevalent challenge was writing outlines. Students lacked a proper understanding of how to structure and write outlines effectively. T4 highlighted:

When they start writing their outlines, they face challenges. They don’t know how to write notes because they were not taught how to do it before entering the University or during their earlier education. Some of them wrote complete sentences; others just tried writing words, but they did not know that they needed to write outlines, not a sentence with verbs, just some vocabulary, some nouns and adjectives.

Teachers reported that students could not write their topic sentences and introductory paragraphs. Even after receiving detailed instructions on constructing topic sentences and various types of paragraphs, students tended to mimic provided examples and felt reluctant to generate their sentences and paragraphs. Even though they were taught in detail how to construct topic sentences and introductory paragraphs, they were given the components of each paragraph in detail. T5 commented on students’ lack of creativity and confidence in composing their paragraphs:

They could not write creative topic sentences; they just copied what was in the model.

Similarly, T1 commented:

I think it is problematic because they follow the models. Yes, only four or five were very creative, and they were very good at writing. They have written things very interesting, but the rest they would copy the same, change one word, and it is the same. The model was supposed to be the perfect image, but it’s not. It is a concise paragraph. It is an old style of writing, but it’s still there. So they think it is ‘Okay’.

Complete dependence on the teacher’s feedback

Students struggled with editing their first drafts more than their final drafts due to poor peer review. When editing their first drafts, students depended on their teachers’ feedback rather than on reviews from their peers. T3 commented:

It depends on the level of the students. Students could not spot their peers’ mistakes as they were not advanced. Only three to four students have sharp eyes where they spot mistakes. And here’s why: those are the advanced level.

T1 commented:

They do check for each other, but they just keep saying, “Oh, that’s good. That’s good” without giving any corrections or any feedback. No, because they all have the same level and the same background of writing.

T4 did not have students provide one another with peer reviews and focused on giving individual feedback to satisfy students’ need to get high scores on their writing tasks and final exams. T4 provided a different explanation for why students struggle with first drafts more than with final drafts:

If you are unwilling to put in the effort now, it will not work out well later. I think it works. Last semester, my students did an excellent job on the final exam, except for the limited time, of course, and some of them couldn’t finish. But they wrote good sentences with
verbs and complete sentences with punctuation. They impressed me with the final exam, but some of them couldn’t finish it because of the time limit.

T3 agreed that peer review is unnecessary, arguing there is insufficient time for it. She preferred giving students her feedback rather than having them depend on peer review. She said:

I don’t think we have sufficient time. This is the problem. You know, this book is not easy. I would say, it is for a higher level. We need a lot of time for speaking, for vocabulary units, and for grammar. Of course, I like to do paperwork, but it takes a lot of time.

**Insufficient knowledge of the writing process**

Teachers highlighted students’ limited knowledge of the main stages of writing (pre-writing, writing, and post-writing) and the skills needed at each stage. Students tend to imitate the models given, produce the exact sentences, and use the same phrases and linking words. Students encountered the most difficulty in the final stage of the writing process, as they lacked awareness of their responsibilities in revising their first drafts and participating in peer reviews. T2 reported:

They have missed some grammatical mistakes and punctuation. They don’t know how to give positive or negative feedback; they skip that. They think that’s correct. They don’t know. They are unaware of how to edit.

Similarly, T1 commented:

They found grammatical mistakes for each other. They found some vocabulary mistakes for each other, but they didn’t care about the structure of the paragraph. Most of them didn’t get this. They didn’t understand the importance of this issue. I kept giving them individual advice that they needed to work again and rewrite, so they needed reminders. They think that this is unimportant.

Teachers highlighted the lack of correct use of grammatical rules and lack of coherence in students’ writing. They highlighted students’ inadequate use of vocabulary and proper grammatical mechanics as the main problems. T4 commented:

If they lack sufficient background knowledge in English grammar and punctuation, I cannot help them since I have already discussed the models with them, and I showed them: “Where's the full stop? Where is the comma? The letters are here. Capital! Is it the beginning of a sentence? Is it the name of a person? Is it a proper noun?” I’ve been on it since the start, but if they're not on board and we're already at the point of editing each other's work, it's a clear signal that there's a problem.

The shortage of writing classes and the limited time allocated to each class are crucial factors contributing to teachers having inadequate time to guide students through various writing stages. Teachers specified two hours weekly for writing practice, which was not enough for students to practice writing as T3 highlighted:

I faced the challenge of not having enough time to explain many concepts that my students were unaware of. They need to spend more time in writing, to make them aware of many writing mechanisms and strategies. Students must practice, but the time is so short, and they also complain about that.

**RQ3: Teachers’ Solutions**

Teachers suggested several solutions for the difficulties found in each writing stage.

**Pre-writing difficulties**

1. **Improving background knowledge.** Teachers emphasized the importance of providing adequate background information on grammatical rules and proper use of punctuation. This involves devoting more time during pre-writing sessions to discuss and demonstrate the correct use of grammatical structures and punctuation marks.
2. **Guiding students in pre-writing activities.** Teachers should encourage students to engage in activities that enhance their awareness of the pre-writing process. This includes providing visual aids, real-life examples, and interactive exercises that help students develop an understanding of the stages involved in writing.
3. **Fostering a supportive learning environment.** Creating a classroom environment that encourages students to ask questions and seek clarification regarding grammatical rules and writing mechanics.

**RQ4: Teachers’ Solutions**

1. **Peer review and feedback.** While teachers acknowledged the challenge of insufficient time, they stressed the importance of peer review as a valuable learning tool. They suggested implementing strategies that allow students to provide feedback to each other, thereby enhancing their understanding and awareness of the writing process.
2. **Guidance on revising and editing.** Teachers emphasized the importance of teaching students how to effectively revise and edit their work. This involves demonstrating the process of revising, highlighting common errors, and encouraging students to apply these techniques in their own writing.
3. **Enhancing writing mechanics.** Teachers recommended focusing on the mechanics of writing, such as proper use of punctuation, capitalization, and punctuation, to ensure that students develop a solid foundation in these areas.

**Post-writing difficulties**

1. **Providing individualized feedback.** Teachers highlighted the importance of giving individualized feedback to students, emphasizing the value of personalized advice. This involves tailoring feedback to meet the specific needs of each student.
2. **Encouraging peer review.** Teachers encouraged the use of peer review as a tool for assessing and improving writing skills. This involves creating a supportive environment where students feel comfortable providing and receiving feedback.
3. **Promoting self-reflection.** Teachers suggested incorporating self-reflection activities into the writing process, allowing students to evaluate their own work and identify areas for improvement.

**Conclusion**

Addressing the challenges faced by ESL teachers in teaching writing requires a multifaceted approach. Teachers need to focus on providing adequate background knowledge, fostering a supportive learning environment, and encouraging students to engage in self-reflection and peer review. By implementing these strategies, teachers can help students develop their writing skills and overcome the difficulties associated with the writing process.
Teachers considered teacher guidance and support important in preparing students to write. To help students write excellent and complete outlines, teachers discuss the main components of their writing and help students search for sources. T1 commented:

Allocating sufficient time for research, reading, and engaging with related examples to the target area. Explain it, give examples, and offer continuous support.

T5 commented:

Focus on pre-writing strategies, the “brainstorming technique.” We can employ five valuable strategies: listing, clustering, freewriting, looping, and asking questions. These strategies assist in generating and organizing ideas and facilitating the development of topics for writing.

During writing difficulties

Students need a lot of practice constructing complete grammatical sentences and coherent paragraphs. T2 highlighted the usefulness of using ready-made exercises:

Offering pre-designed exercises centred around constructing grammatically correct sentences related to the specific writing genre, may likely assist them in learning proper sentence construction and paragraph organization.

Students need to understand that writing is a process that involves different stages. T3 commented:

Understanding the idea that good writing needs time, and it involves editing, reviewing, and rewriting to achieve coherent results. It is essential to teach students the importance of editing and that writing should not be done within a single step.

T5 advised:

Draw their attention to the balance between content and punctuation. Make resources available for them and be open to support them.

T1 underscored the importance of students practicing writing complete grammatical sentences and coherent paragraphs in class:

Let them write in the class to implement the required skills and give them feedback while they write. Practice writing sentences like the ones they had mistaken and check their progress in learning the proper construction of similar sentences.

Most importantly, students need support and teacher feedback to navigate each step in the writing process. T3 recommended providing numerous valuable tips for writing first drafts:

Give plenty of tips and try to write more than a first draft. Also, there are helpful tips during writing: 1–Use simpler words and phrases. 2–Write shorter sentences but avoid choppiness. 3–Use important key terms consistently. 4–Balance the use of simple and sophisticated language.

Post-writing difficulties

Teachers commented on students’ lack of editing strategies. Teachers can help students improve their editing skills by using available online apps and programs, guiding them through peer review, providing individual teacher feedback, and most importantly, training them to check and revise their writing. T1 and T4 provided the following tips:

More peer review—using apps and programs for checking grammar/spelling mistakes. After writing, they can use their phones to check spelling. Also, give them accurate feedback individually. (T1)
1–Reread the story and make sure the sentences make sense. 2–Add phrases to make the story flow smoothly and eliminate unnecessary or redundant details. 3–Have a checklist to proofread for spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. (T4)

**Discussion**

The researcher explored teachers’ perspectives on the difficulties encountered by students during the three main stages of writing (pre-writing, writing, and post-writing) (RQ1), investigated the reasons behind those difficulties (RQ2), and suggested solutions for overcoming them (RQ3).

In answer to RQ1 and RQ2, the quantitative and qualitative data showed that students struggle with various writing skills for various reasons. The most challenging skill was avoiding plagiarism. Many students lack a comprehensive understanding of the meaning and significance of plagiarism. A considerable number of Saudi language teachers may not be guiding their students on how to ethically incorporate and build upon ideas and information while giving proper attribution to prevent plagiarism. This finding agrees with Pablo et al.’s (2019) conclusion that teachers struggle to guide their students in how to avoid plagiarism.

The results indicate that students do not receive adequate training in crucial pre-writing strategies such as drafting and outlining. Teachers reported that, in the pre-writing stage, students’ main difficulty was writing outlines because they were unfamiliar with the main techniques for writing outlines. Al Fadda (2012) concluded that novice writers would benefit from learning to prepare an outline before writing and to follow the three main stages of writing. These findings suggest that students need training in writing strategies. Such training can teach them to begin writing projects in ways that minimize stress later in the writing process (Ceylan, 2019).

The primary challenges students face in writing include constructing grammatically correct sentences, formulating effective topic sentences, and composing introductory paragraphs. Teachers explained that students depend on imitating models given and ignoring the importance of writing well-structured sentences. Students suppress their creativity to earn high scores on their writing tasks and final exams. This finding is consistent with Alghamms’s (2020) and Alkubaidi’s (2019) findings that Saudi students write to achieve specific grades. Even though Tseng (2019) argued imitation and exam-oriented pedagogy can help improve students’ writing, students and teachers should not rely on these approaches as they may cost students their creativity and enjoyment of writing.

Saudi students struggle to write well-structured sentences even though their teachers explain and enforce grammar rules applicable to their writing tasks. Similarly, Al Fadda (2012), Al Khairy (2013) and Dhanapal and Agab (2023) found that grammatical mistakes were among Saudi learners’ main writing challenges. Limited knowledge of grammar could lead to students’ anxiety about writing grammatically correct sentences (Fareed et al., 2016). This finding is consistent with Akhater et al. (2019) finding that 39% of ESL students struggle with grammar and coherency in their writing.

Teachers reported that, in the post-writing stage, students struggle most with editing. They struggle to check their vocabulary use, grammar, and writing mechanics. Students also lack training in reviewing their peers’ work and do not appreciate the importance of self-assessment. Saudi students regard writing as a finished product rather than a process. Writing instructors exacerbate this misconception if they do not teach their students to write multiple drafts. Alghammas (2020) found that Saudi students write and submit their writing for grading without...
making purposeful revisions. This finding confirms the importance of each writing stage in the process of writing as advised by Rashid et al. (2022).

Teachers claimed that students’ ignorance of peer review and dependence on teacher feedback were the main factors behind students’ difficulties with editing. These findings suggest that teachers should prioritize improving students’ ability to assess writing, as teaching them to correct mistakes themselves would benefit them and their peers. Teachers should evaluate their training strategies according to whether they improve students’ learning skills (Winatro, 2015).

Alkubaidi (2019) criticized the transmissive teaching system in Saudi Arabia, pointing out that it fosters excessive dependence on teachers among students. A suggested alternative, as proposed by one teacher, is to promote a practice where students independently edit their work before seeking feedback from teachers. Teachers would provide feedback after students had exerted effort to correct their mistakes. While teacher involvement with students’ writing is essential, it should be restricted as per Cylen’s (2019), Bulqiah et al.’s (2021), and Fareed et al.’s (2016) suggestions. They insist on the importance of teacher feedback for improving students’ writing. Teachers can provide written or oral feedback only after students edit their writing (Rashid et al., 2022).

Teachers mentioned numerous solutions for each writing stage. Teacher support and guidance are essential in all stages of writing. Teachers need to encourage students and motivate them to write about topics they are interested in. Additionally, teachers ought to offer students training in utilizing various techniques for brainstorming and revising their first drafts. This finding supports previous research conducted in the Arab world (Al Fadda, 2012; Al Mukdad, 2019; Alkubaidi, 2019; Alghammas, 2020). Using online technologies in writing classes can make students better writers. Alghammas (2020) reported using blended learning in writing and wikis to improve Saudi university students’ writing skills. Adas and Bakir (2013) reported that EFL students’ writing skills improved significantly as their use of topic sentences, paragraphs, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation marks, and capitalization improved.

While teacher feedback is essential, students need to practice giving peer feedback in class. Doing so could improve students’ awareness of their mistakes. This solution is consistent with Tseng’s (2019) conclusion that error awareness is vital for students to learn to correct themselves. In Al Khairy's (2013) study, Arab students also suggested peer feedback as a valuable method for enhancing writing skills. Writing continuously was considered crucial for improving students’ writing skills. Al Mukdad (2019) indicated that teachers dedicate more class time to writing activities and that universities assign extra classes to ESL students who need them. Students should have sufficient opportunities to practice writing. Al Mukdad (2019) recommended acquainting ESL university students with the writing process by providing opportunities for them to practice each stage of writing repeatedly. She insisted on the importance of knowing the writing processes (generating ideas, planning, drafting, and revising) from the beginning of the course so that students can write successfully.

**Conclusion**

This research investigated teachers’ views on the challenges ESL tertiary students face during the three main writing stages (pre-writing, writing, and post-writing) and the factors behind those challenges. The participants suggested various solutions to the difficulties students encounter at each stage. This research reveals the problems ESL tertiary students experience at the different stages of writing essays. In the pre-writing stage, students struggled most with outlining. During
writing, they worked most on avoiding plagiarism, writing well-structured sentences, and linking between sentences. In the post-writing stage, they mainly worked on editing and revising. The teachers identified a lack of knowledge and creativity, overdependence on teacher feedback, and unawareness of the writing process as the main factors behind these difficulties. The teachers suggested numerous solutions to overcome the difficulties, including continuous writing training, teacher guidance, and increasing students’ awareness about writing stages by applying different digital techniques.

**Limitations**

This study has several limitations. One limitation was the participants’ gender. All participants were female due to the separate classes for male and female students in the institution where the study was conducted. Future research should include male and female learners to explore the generalizability of the reported findings. Another limitation was focusing only on teachers’ views. The researcher distributed a questionnaire to students to compare their opinions with those of teachers, but the number of responses received was inadequate. Future studies need to examine students’ perspectives to compare what they regard as difficulties with those reported by teachers in this study.

The study results have significantly contributed to understanding Saudi tertiary students’ difficulties in writing essays and in offering better teaching practices to enhance writing instruction. The study would provide an initial base for continuing investigation writing pedagogy. This study carries a significant implication, as its findings could potentially have a positive impact on the English curriculum and educational policies within the Saudi higher education system. Writing challenges will likely be minimized by improving writing practices and integrating new technology in writing.

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A Review of Genre Analysis of Academic Writings

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Abstract
Genre analysis has emerged as a crucial tool in deciphering and delineating the linguistic features of scholarly research articles. This article presents a comprehensive review of genre analysis in relation to academic writings, with a specific focus on research articles. By scrutinizing the structural components and rhetorical conventions manifested in academic discourse, genre analysis offers a framework for categorizing linguistic characteristics and communicative strategies employed in diverse genres. This review explores the application of genre analysis to thesis abstracts and presents case studies showcasing its implementation across various disciplines. Additionally, it discusses the challenges encountered in applying genre analysis to thesis abstracts. The article concludes by highlighting future directions for genre analysis in the context of thesis abstracts, emphasizing the significance of continued research and development in this area. Overall, this review contributes to the comprehension and advancement of genre analysis in academic writing, particularly in the realm of research articles and thesis abstracts.

Keywords: genre analysis, academic writings, thesis abstracts, rhetorical conventions

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Introduction

Academic writing is a distinct genre that carries substantial significance within the realm of scholarly inquiry. Academic researchers employ a specific form of communication to communicate their results and make valuable contributions to the existing body of knowledge within their respective fields. Academic writing is characterised by a distinct set of standards and conventions that authors are expected to follow in order to create effective scholarly works. Norms and conventions play a crucial role in attaining respect within the academic community by means of disseminating research findings through publication.

Genre analysis is an essential method for comprehending and identifying the linguistic attributes of a genre in connection with its intended function and purpose. The aforementioned methodology offers a structural model for classifying the linguistic attributes and communicative strategies utilised in several genres commonly seen in scholarly communication (Manzoor, Majeed, & Munaf, 2020). The genre analysis approach has garnered considerable scholarly interest, focusing primarily on the examination of the structural components and rhetorical patterns displayed by many genres commonly seen in academic discourse (Casal & Kessler, 2023).

The primary objective of this study is to offer an in-depth review of the existing body of literature pertaining to genre analysis in the context of academic writing. The purpose of this review is to examine the structural components and rhetorical practices observed in academic writing, while also investigating the cultural and linguistic factors that influence this particular genre.

The adherence to a specified format or structure is a crucial aspect of academic writing, constituting one of its most essential structural features. The structure of this format encompasses an introductory section, a comprehensive review of existing literature, a detailed description of the methodology employed, presentation of the obtained results, and a thorough discussion of the findings. The introductory section plays a critical role in providing a comprehensive summary of the research problem, highlighting its significance, and clearly stating the research question(s) that will be addressed. The literature review section holds equal significance as it showcases the author's comprehensive understanding of prior research in the discipline and the ways in which their work adds to the existing body of knowledge. The methodology section provides a comprehensive overview of the research design, data gathering methods, and data analysis methodologies employed in the study. The findings of the study are presented in the results section, whereas the discussion part provides an interpretation of these findings and explores their implications for future research (Casal & Kessler, 2023).

An additional noteworthy aspect of academic writing is its utilisation of technical terminology and specialised lexicon. The usage of discipline-specific vocabulary serves the purpose of establishing credibility and authority within the respective academic field. Nevertheless, it might be a formidable obstacle for those without expertise or those hailing from diverse disciplinary backgrounds (Bondi and Cavalieri, 2012). Rhetorical conventions constitute a vital element within the realm of academic writing. The aforementioned conventions encompass the utilisation of arguments grounded in facts, logical deduction, and critical examination. According to Bondi and Cavalieri (2012), it is imperative for academic writers to effectively articulate their ideas in a persuasive manner, while simultaneously demonstrating an awareness and acknowledgement of counterarguments.
The utilisation of genre analysis as an instructional instrument has been employed to facilitate students' comprehension of the established conventions associated with certain academic genres, as well as to enhance their proficiency in composing well within these genres (Bondi and Cavalieri, 2012). According to Manzoor et al. (2020), research has demonstrated that this particular technique has the potential to enhance students' writing abilities. This is achieved by offering them a structured framework that facilitates their comprehension of the many structural components and rhetorical conventions that are characteristic of different genres. Nevertheless, certain scholars have expressed reservations over the potential for genre analysis to become excessively prescriptive, potentially impeding students' ability to exhibit creativity and originality (Kosasih, 2018).

This comprehensive literature study has offered valuable insights into the present status of scholarly inquiry concerning genre analysis in the realm of academic writing. The significance of comprehending genre conventions within various disciplinary contexts, along with the inclusion of cultural and linguistic variables in genre analysis, has been underscored by the review. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the utilisation of genre analysis can serve as an effective instructional instrument for instructing students in the realm of academic writing abilities. However, it is crucial to acknowledge and take into account the potential constraints associated with this approach. The ramifications of these findings hold significance for future research endeavours in this domain, as well as for educators seeking to enhance their students' writing proficiency through the utilisation of genre analysis.

Literature Review

Genre Analysis of Academic Writing

Genres can be defined as the customary language and structure employed in comparable forms of literature to effectively communicate with repeating events. Processes that are structured, purposeful, and impacted by social elements are what characterise genres. In essence, genres encompass the collaborative efforts of a collective to produce writings that fulfill particular objectives. Moreover, genres commonly consist of a series of successive actions that are carried out in order to achieve the desired objectives of the individuals involved (Abduganiyeva, 2023).

Genre analysis and corpus methodologies have been employed by Irawati (2022), Liu and Xiao (2022), Suherdi, Kurniawan, and Lubis (2020) to investigate the discourse patterns and structural characteristics of the discussion and conclusion sections in research publications across several academic disciplines. The researchers' discoveries offer valuable insights into the variations in move structure and rhetorical patterns observed within these areas. An additional field of inquiry pertains to the examination of personal statements via the lens of genre analysis, being an atypical form within the realm of academia (Li & Deng, 2019). According to Li and Deng (2019), when seeking admission to institutions of higher education for advanced studies, it is customary for applicants to provide certain documents. These typically include completed application form(s), a curriculum vitae or resume, a personal statement or statement of purpose, letters of recommendation, academic transcripts reflecting their educational qualifications, and an official report of standardized test scores such as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS (International English Language Testing System), GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test), and GRE (Graduate Record Examination). Applicants possess an intrinsic inclination towards self-promotion with the objective of securing admission to the desired program. The Personal Statement (PS) is a crucial document in the admission process, carrying
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significant weight. While numerous sources, including as books and websites, provide guidance on composing personal statements, there is a scarcity of academic research undertaken in this area. One of the contributing factors to the scarcity of such research is the recognition that the personal statement is classified as an opaque genre. Obtaining genuine samples of personal statements can pose challenges for researchers, as candidates frequently lack adequate theoretical and disciplinary assistance in the writing process.

The utilisation of genre analysis frequently serves as the foundation for an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. A comprehensive grasp of academic genres is crucial for achieving writing proficiency. Xu's study analyzes computer science research papers to identify linguistic characteristics and rhetorical patterns (2022). It reveals that novice academics struggle with Q&A inquiries and comments. The study reveals that discussants must build rapport with the presenter, contextualize and justify questions, and justify fundamental statements for compelling communication. This helps new academics understand the communication goals and methods of conference interactions.

Batur and Strobl (2019) conducted a genre-based approach analysis on discipline-specific language learning in a mainstream computer science classroom. Computer Science (CS) is unique because students must master formal languages like modeling and programming languages and build computing-related language abilities in writing, reading, and speaking. Despite early publications on discipline-specific language acquisition in CS education, language-sensitive CS education and teacher qualification research is lacking. Thus, the Computing Education Research Group and the University Duisburg-Essen project "German as second language in all subjects" collaborate to create concepts and research methods on this topic. This paper shows first findings and provides an example of genre-based training material for UML class diagram descriptions.

Genre analysis has been utilized in the examination of technical report genres within the field of engineering studies, alongside research articles and personal statements (Parkinson, 2017; Kim & Olson, 2020). Although the available literature on this topic is scarce, prior investigations have focused on analyzing the organizational structure and rhetorical strategies employed in experimental study reports. These investigations have yielded valuable insights regarding the customary sections and structure of technical reports in the field of engineering, including the introduction, methodology, findings, and commentary. In general, the analysis of genre holds significant value in the examination and comprehension of the structural elements and rhetorical conventions present in diverse academic genres. Through the examination of various genres, scholars are able to acquire a deeper understanding of how writing is influenced by the expectations and objectives of different academic disciplines.

Swales' approach focuses on rhetorical moves, which are defined as coherent communicative purposes. Typically, research articles have three common moves: establishing the research territory, establishing a niche, and occupying the niche. Create a Research Space (CARS) model, which identifies steps within each move, is helpful for researchers and educators. The peer review report (PRR) is a genre that is often ignored in writing pedagogies, despite being necessary for knowledge production and development of academic identity. The PRR is a researcher's critique of a manuscript written by others within the same or related discipline. Mason and Chong (2023) analysed sixty-two peer review reports (PRRs) using Swale's Genre Analysis approach to examine the "hidden" genre of PRRs. They suggest that emotional and relational aspects of peer review process are important, and constructive criticism should be accompanied by compassion.
The act of disseminating scientific knowledge through the publication of research articles, namely research articles (RAs), has become a mandatory and integral aspect of an academic's professional existence. Consequently, there is an increasing demand for scholars to generate scholarly articles for global scholarly journals. Nevertheless, a significant number of authors, particularly those who are new to the field or lack expertise, continue to face challenges in attaining this objective due to their inability to conform to established norms and standards. A study by Khairani et al., (2023) examined the rhetorical strategies employed in full-length English research articles authored by esteemed Indonesian lecturers in the fields of hard and soft sciences during the initial phase of their professional journeys. The results indicated that, on the whole, the rhetorical frameworks of the papers, spanning from the abstract to the conclusion, had considerable similarities, thereby reflecting the standardised writing conventions inherent in a research paper. Nevertheless, a notable disparity may be observed in the methodology section, particularly the conspicuous omission of Move 5 in all articles pertaining to the social sciences and humanities. The observed phenomenon can perhaps be attributed to the influence of disciplinary conventions. The study's findings have the potential to provide valuable educational resources that can aid students and researchers in refining their skills in academic writing.

Wu and Buripakdi (2022) explored the experiences of EFL postgraduate thesis writing in Thailand, focusing on the perspectives of fifteen participants. The research highlights the culturally loaded social practice of writing a thesis, highlighting the development of agency and struggle for scholarly identity. It was found that despite challenges such as language mistakes, limited exposure to the thesis genre, and communication tensions, the students learn to handle the writing practice and fight for acceptance in academia. In another study, Manzoor et al. (2022) provide evidence suggesting that the introduction section holds greater significance in the abstracts of doctoral theses in the fields of applied linguistics and engineering. The distribution of goal, method, and conclusion shifts is approximately equal between the two distinct types of abstracts. The extended introductions of thesis abstracts demonstrate the primary emphasis of the writers on the subcategory of global context. Nevertheless, there seem to be some differences and parallels in the frequency of moves. Initially, it should be noted that not all abstracts adhered to the conventional five-move structure. Upon comparing the two corpora, it was seen that the frequency of Hyland's model motions exhibited a significant increase.

Application of Genre Analysis on Thesis Abstracts

An area that shows promise for future inquiry is to the application of genre analysis in the scrutiny of thesis abstracts. Genre analysis is a linguistic methodology that centers on the examination of the composition and purpose of written or spoken texts within particular contextual frameworks. Through the utilization of genre analysis, scholars can enhance their comprehension of the rhetorical structures and linguistic characteristics employed in thesis abstracts, so contributing to a more profound study of this specific genre of scholarly writing (Casal and Kessler, 2023; Kessler and Polio, 2023; Sükan & Mohammadzadeh, 2022; Suwarni, 2021; Yu, 2021).

Previous research has firmly established the significance of thesis abstracts within scholarly discourse. These abstracts serve a crucial role in succinctly summarizing the main findings and contributions of a research study. According to Sükan and Mohammadzadeh (2022), abstracts have emerged as essential tools for investigators, functioning as a distinct genre in academic writing because they offer them a chance to choose the appropriate study for their
investigation. However, it is still necessary to investigate the composition of these abstracts and the ways in which they differ among various academic fields.

By incorporating genre analysis into the examination of thesis abstracts, scholars are able to explore the typical strategies and linguistic elements utilized within this particular genre (Sükan & Mohammadzadeh, 2022). Conducting such a study can provide useful insights into the conventions and expectations related to writing thesis abstracts. This, in turn, allows students and researchers to improve their comprehension of the academic discourse community in which they are actively participating (Tardy et al., 2022; Yu, 2021).

Furthermore, the application of genre analysis to thesis abstracts demonstrates significant promise for enhancing the field of academic writing and English language instruction. By analyzing the organization and linguistic characteristics of thesis abstracts, scholars can get a more comprehensive comprehension of the norms and conventions linked to this particular genre (Derakhshan & Nadi, 2019; Kessler & Polio, 2023). The acquisition of this useful knowledge can afterwards be employed to develop instructional materials that are tailored to specific writing needs and to produce curriculum that is impactful.

Additionally, the integration of genre analysis within the examination of thesis abstracts has the potential to broaden its applications to interdisciplinary research. Researchers have the ability to uncover discipline-specific rhetorical patterns and linguistic traits by conducting comparisons and contrasts of abstracts from various disciplines (Blake, 2021; Pratiwi & Kurniawan, 2021). This analysis serves to enhance our comprehension of the communication methods employed by different academic disciplines in conveying their research findings, while also promoting the exchange of ideas and collaboration across multidisciplinary boundaries.

The application of genre analysis to thesis abstracts yields a diverse range of effects. Genre analysis has the potential to offer useful insights on the broader function of thesis abstracts within academic discourse in addition to its applications in academic writing and English language training (Amnuai, 2019; Qin, 2022). Through the analysis of the role of thesis abstracts in the processes of knowledge generation and dissemination, scholars can get a more profound comprehension of their importance within the academic community.

Moreover, a significant avenue for future scholarly inquiry pertains to the investigation of the impact of cultural elements on the formulation of thesis abstracts. Abstract writing in academic societies can vary based on cultural origins and disciplinary traditions, leading to different expectations and practices. The examination of these cultural variances can provide a more comprehensive comprehension of the genre and enhance cross-cultural communication and collaboration. Through an exploration of the influence of cultural elements on thesis abstracts, scholars have the potential to establish connections among disparate academic communities and cultivate a scholarly discourse that is more comprehensive and varied (Li, 2020; Yu, 2021). This study has the potential to enhance the efficacy of abstract writing in many cultural and disciplinary contexts, hence fostering increased comprehension and cooperation across the global academic sphere.

In addition to the aforementioned topics of research, another intriguing route for additional investigation is to the evaluation of the efficacy of various linguistic methods utilized in thesis abstracts. Through the examination of rhetorical strategies and language selections present in these abstracts, scholars can get significant knowledge on the efficacy of various linguistic techniques in effecting communicating study outcomes and captivating readers. This acquired understanding can afterwards be employed to create instructional resources that are tailored to
concentrate on these proficient linguistic methods, thereby aiding pupils in enhancing their talents in composing abstract texts.

Moreover, it is of great importance to investigate the influence of thesis abstracts on the assessment of research excellence. The examination of various rhetorical patterns and linguistic characteristics included in abstracts can yield significant insights into the impact of abstracts on the overall assessment of research. This information can provide guidance to researchers in formulating abstracts that successfully highlight the merits of their research and augment its perceived caliber. Scholars can enhance their abstract writing skills to better correspond with readers' expectations and preferences by comprehending the connection between abstracts and the impression of research.

Genre analysis has become a significant instrument for examining thesis abstracts in several academic fields. This methodology allows scholars to discern patterns and linguistic characteristics that are peculiar to a particular subject, hence enhancing communication and collaboration across different academic fields. Subsequent research endeavors may direct their attention towards examining the impact of cultural elements on the formulation of thesis abstracts, so elucidating the manner in which diverse academic communities mold their practices of abstract composition in accordance with cultural and disciplinary conventions.

In order to enhance our comprehension of genre analysis within the framework of thesis abstracts, it is imperative to take into account the impact of cultural elements on their composition. Abstract writing is influenced by the distinct cultural and disciplinary customs found among various academic communities (Ludwig & El-Hani, 2020; Redianis, Putra & Anggayana, 2019). The examination of these cultural impacts offers useful insights into the role of abstracts as rhetorical devices in many situations, enabling efficient communication and collaboration across cultural barriers (Tursunovich, 2022).

Methodology
The literature review methodology for the present study involved a systematic search of thirty-nine articles on the topic "A Review of Genre Analysis on Academic Writings." The search was conducted using various academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science and other indexed databases. The search terms used included "genre analysis," "academic writing," and "disciplinary genres."

The initial search yielded a total of 123 articles, which were screened based on their relevance to the research question. The screening process involved reading the article's abstract, introduction, and conclusion to determine whether it met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for this study were articles that focused on genre analysis in academic writing, specifically in different disciplinary contexts.

After screening, thirty-nine articles were selected for further review. These articles were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which involved identifying patterns and themes in the data. The data analyzed included the articles' introduction, methodology, results, and discussion sections.

Analysis of Findings
In order to gain a thorough understanding of the structure of thesis abstracts, it is crucial to analyze the distinctive patterns and linguistic characteristics that are prevalent within different academic disciplines (Lu, 2019; Sun & Crosthwaite, 2022). The objective of this endeavor might
be achieved by conducting case studies within diverse academic disciplines, with the intention of revealing the distinctive genre conventions and linguistic strategies employed within each respective field.

Thesis abstracts play a crucial role in academic research articles (Kuswoyo & Siregar, 2019) as they provide a concise summary of the research conducted (Miteva, 2023). To gain a deeper understanding of the genre structure of thesis abstracts, researchers have utilized genre analysis methods to examine different disciplines and their unique practices. One such study, conducted by Suherdi, Kurniawan and Lubis (2020), the genre structure of the discussion sections by Indonesian undergraduate EFL students from different disciplines from an interdisciplinary perspective is analyzed. This research yielded valuable insights that can be applied to the teaching of thesis writing. By understanding how experts and scholars in the field of applied linguistics construct the structure of the discussion section, students can be inspired to improve their own writing through specific genre.

Similarly, in the field of engineering, genre analysis has been employed to explore the structure and linguistic features of thesis abstracts. A case study conducted by Gao and Pramoolsook (2021) focused on analyzing thesis abstracts in the discipline of electronic engineering. This study evaluated the results and discussion section of Chinese and Thai electronic engineering (EE) research articles (EERA). The corpora's move-step structural differences were assessed. This study may propose EERA for beginning authors. Allowable generic variances in the field may also boost EE researchers' and genre practitioners' research article genre expertise. Another case study by Maher and Milligan (2019) examined thesis abstracts in the field of mechanical engineering, the results of a corpus analysis of introduction sections in fifty seven master theses in mechanical engineering and a genre analysis of sixteen of their introduction sections are presented. Through a concordance analysis of the most frequent keywords, the typical discourse functions employed by students when writing about their research in this section are revealed. The genre analysis confirms the presence of most of the elements of Swales's CARS schema in the theses in the field of Master of Science (MSc). These findings contribute to the knowledge of this understudied field in applied linguistics and can inform the design of materials and courses for MSc engineering students, with a focus on vocabulary, rhetorical structures, and academic socialization.

Some scholars performed a transdisciplinary genre analysis of social science thesis abstracts. Al-Shujairi et al. (2019) analyzed the discussion sections of sixteen Malaysian research articles. Eight research articles were from applied linguistics and eight from medical sciences. The study investigated research paper discussion sections in applied Linguistics and medical sciences. The rhetorical maneuvers and steps of the two disciplines were compared with examples given to show the linguistics realizations linked with each action and step. The study also found three important results. First, it gives a framework for study article debate motions and steps. Following the suggested strategies and procedures for writing the discussion section may improve the quality of a research article, increasing the likelihood of novice authors publishing in esteemed journals like Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) and Scopus. In addition, this study examined the linguistic manifestations—chunks, phrases, and coherent devices—used to construct each conversation move and step. These linguistic divisions will help inexperienced authors organize and cohere their discussions, allowing them to properly communicate this section's fundamentals.

Various business reports from different industries were analyzed to identify the key elements and language patterns that are characteristic of this genre (Joseph and Lim, 2019; Qian, 2023).
2020). The researchers found that business reports often include sections such as an executive summary, an introduction, a methodology, findings, and recommendations. By familiarizing students with these genre conventions, educators can help them develop the necessary skills to write effective business reports in their future careers.

The careful analysis of the role of thesis abstracts in multidisciplinary research is warranted, in addition to the investigation of disciplinary-specific patterns. In light of the increasing emphasis on collaboration and the integration of many fields of study, it is becoming increasingly common for research projects to encompass multiple disciplines. Crafting thesis abstracts that effectively reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the research presents a distinctive difficulty. In order to tackle this difficulty, scholars have the opportunity to undertake comparative studies of thesis abstracts derived from interdisciplinary research endeavors. Through an analysis of the rhetorical strategies and linguistic aspects utilized in these abstracts, scholars have the ability to discern recurring patterns and effective techniques that effectively communicate the multidisciplinary essence of the research. The aforementioned analysis can afterwards contribute to the formulation of recommendations or frameworks for composing abstracts in multidisciplinary settings, thereby facilitating researchers in effectively conveying the interdisciplinary elements of their research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the utilisation of genre analysis in the examination of thesis abstracts exhibits considerable potential in augmenting scholarly writing and English language pedagogy. Through the examination of the structure and intended function of thesis abstracts in distinct academic disciplines, researchers can acquire a more profound comprehension of the rhetorical frameworks and language attributes utilised in these abstracts. Consequently, this facilitates the enhancement of students' and researchers' understanding of the academic discourse community in which they are actively engaged. Moreover, the incorporation of genre analysis in the investigation of thesis abstracts holds the promise of expanding its utility in interdisciplinary research. This approach enables researchers to identify discipline-specific rhetorical patterns and linguistic characteristics by conducting comparative analyses of abstracts across different disciplines. The purpose of this analysis is to improve our understanding of the communication strategies utilised by many academic fields to explain their research findings. Additionally, it aims to facilitate the sharing of ideas and collaboration among different disciplines.

The application of genre analysis in examining thesis abstracts presents a prospective option for future academic investigation. Through the examination of the organisational framework and language attributes included in thesis abstracts within several academic disciplines, researchers can get a more profound comprehension of the rhetorical patterns and linguistic traits utilised in these abstracts. Consequently, this facilitates the enhancement of students' and researchers' understanding of the academic discourse community in which they are actively engaged. Moreover, the use of genre analysis in the investigation of thesis abstracts holds the potential to expand its utility in multidisciplinary study and to explore the influence of cultural factors on the construction of thesis abstracts. The exploration of these study domains has substantial potential in augmenting the quality of academic writing and the training of the English language.

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Language Functions in Undergraduate Classroom Discourse

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Abstract:
This study investigates the multifaceted functions of language in undergraduate classroom discourse, focusing on how students utilize various language functions to enhance learning and communication in diverse educational settings. Through a descriptive qualitative analysis of classroom interactions, it reveals that students actively engage with both formal and informal teaching methods, fostering social interaction and critical thinking. Judgmental functions dominate the discourse, indicating a prevalent use of evaluation and critical analysis in student talk. However, the study also uncovers that responses to questions are multifaceted, often involving argumentative and informative discourse for deeper engagement with content. The research highlights the integral role of instructors in facilitating a classroom environment that promotes robust student discourse and equitable participation. The findings emphasize the need for educators to be aware of and integrate both recognized and uncategorized language functions into instructional strategies to support student communication and learning. Conclusively, this study provides insights into the dynamic application of language functions within classroom discourse and the crucial role of educators in guiding and enhancing this discourse. It suggests the necessity of further research into oral discourse in educational contexts, particularly the types of student explanations and clarifications, to refine teaching and learning practices.

Keywords: Classroom discourse, classroom interaction, discourse analysis, language functions, undergraduate students, students’ talk

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Introduction

Classroom discourse, a focal point in discourse analysis, has been extensively studied, revealing its crucial role in students' second language performance (Blanton et al., 2001; Cazden, 2001; Grifenhagen & Barnes, 2022; Jiang, 2012; Olausson, 2016; Rymes, 2008; Zhang, 2008). This area of study encompasses various linguistic aspects, including descriptive, functional, and conversation analyses (Biber & Barbieri, 2007; Chung & Cotoc, 2019; Llinares & Pastrana, 2011; Luo, 2013). Cazden (2001) highlighted the transformative power of classroom discourse in the educational journey, where the words spoken in classrooms significantly influence the learning process.

The advent of modern communicative language teaching has underscored the importance of group activities in developing collaborative skills essential both inside and outside the classroom (Jacobs & Kline Liu, 1996). In fact, Luo (2013) emphasized the impact of both teacher and student language use on students' language learning, advocating for more student language use to enhance collaboration and cooperation skills. This underscores the need for further research into the role of classroom discourse, particularly student talk (Wells, 1999; Multyati, 2013; Jiang, 2012).

Despite the focus on language functions in wider context, there's a research gap in understanding the undergraduate students' classroom discourse (Ambrosio et al., 2015; Kumupulainen & Wray, 1997; Rymes, 2016). Llinares and Pastrana (2013) pointed out the limited studies on students' talk in educational settings. As Li (2006) insinuated the importance of classroom interaction in analyzing its effects on students' learning. Moreover, exploring the performance gap across educational levels with varying skills is suggested (Llinares & Pastrana, 2013; Luo, 2013; Multyati, 2013). Luo (2013) also emphasized the need for teacher engagement in student responses to foster language use and acquisition. And Huang (2022) called for examining the role of teachers and classroom activities, as these significantly affect the quality of learning.

This study aims to explore the role of instructors in shaping classroom discourse to enhance student engagement in oral interaction, dialogue, talk, and communication. It delves into the linkages between students’ classroom discourse and language teaching, focusing on the functions of student responses to prompts and their reflection of the learning process. It also addresses the need for a deeper understanding of undergraduate students' talk and its role in educational contexts. The study poses two key questions:

1. What are the functions of language in students’ classroom discourse?
2. Which language function predominates in students' explanations and elaborations of previous discourse?

Literature Review

Classroom Discourse and Other Related Studies

Classroom discourse encompasses various forms of interaction within educational settings, including those outlined by Hall (2011), Maroni (2011), and Zahrani & Bargi (2017), which scrutinize verbal exchanges in the classroom. Such discourse facilitates interactions not only between the teacher and students but also among the students themselves, with various researchers offering diverse interpretations and discussions on the nature of these interactions. According to Wells (1999), the primary purpose of classroom discourse is to convey verbal information that is instrumental in learning. Zahrani and Bargi (2017) describe classroom interaction as an avenue for students to articulate and express themselves, involving various participatory activities led by teachers.
Classroom activities that foster interaction, such as questioning, answering, and conversational exchange, are deemed crucial (Hall, 1998; Mulyati, 2013). The significance of classroom discourse is well-recognized for its role in catalyzing and underpinning learning (see Alsoraihi, 2019; Blanton et al., 2001; Cazden, 2001; Jiang, 2012; Mulyati, 2013; Rymes, 2016; Walsh, 2011; and Zhang, 2008). Such discourse allows students to engage in the language of peer interaction, with Mulyati (2013) noting the benefits of increased opportunities for student talk. Walsh (2011) highlights that through teacher facilitation, students can be prompted to deepen their thinking and engage in active agreement or disagreement with peers' ideas.

The emphasis on spoken language and its influence on cognitive development is also noted (Blanton et al., 2001; Jiang, 2012) while Zhang (2008) points out a general preference for written discourse in educational settings. However, Ambrosio et al. (2015) argue that written work is a more accurate measure of student learning than classroom performance. Hall (2011) observes that the roles adopted by teachers and students in the language classroom contribute to shaping broader patterns of classroom interaction, with Mulyati (2013) suggesting that students benefit from mutual learning through such interactions. Finally, Susanthi (2018) underscored the importance of language use across all fields of study.

There is considerable shifts in workplace dynamics (Cazden, 2001), highlighting the necessity for high school graduates to possess the ability to communicate effectively and collaborate with diverse groups to secure good jobs. Classroom discourse is thus critical for preparing students for future workplace environments. Biber and Barbieri (2007) conducted studies focusing on linguistic elements, discovering that certain lexical bundles are commonly used in educational settings for functions such as expressing stance, organizing discourse, and referring to different subjects.

In the context of higher education, Jiang (2012) identifies strategies like questioning, providing facilitative feedback, fostering interaction, engaging in group activities, and encouraging participation as pivotal for enhancing English language teaching and learning. Rymes (2016) points out that the functions of language vary with the context, including social interactions and expressions of agency. The pedagogical genres and communication roles in education are evolving with the incorporation of practical learning approaches, such as collaborative group work and the integration of educational technology (Kumpulainen & Wray, 1997).

Additionally, teaching methods have expanded to include explicit modeling of dialogic routines by teachers, including summarizing, paraphrasing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting, to facilitate learning processes. Several authors noted that teachers’ discursive strategies often involve repeating and rephrasing student contributions to enhance understanding (Orsolini & Pontecorvo, 1992; Villabona & Cenoz, 2022). These language functions are equally relevant in undergraduate classroom discourse, serving as means of interaction and engagement. Llinares & Pastrana (2013) discuss the adaptation of students in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) environments to the conventions of academic discourse while managing social dynamics in the classroom. Huang (2022) underscores that the variations in learning activities provided by teachers are contingent upon the objectives of the teaching as well as the learning and developmental processes in the classroom.

**Functions of Language in the Classroom**

Language, as Bashir & Naveed (2015) observe, is a fundamental human characteristic that permeates various spheres of human endeavor, including activity, interaction, and the construction
of knowledge. They posit that language serves crucial functions for social interaction and academic purposes. Engaging with content and interpersonal interactions in educational settings are aspects of the language function, a concept that is supported by common knowledge and aligns with Halliday's (1973) functional approach to language, which investigates language use and its underlying purposes.

In the classroom, students actively employ language functions to express ideas, communicate with others, and demonstrate content understanding (Jacobs & Kline Liu, 1996). Language functions are thus not static but serve to establish the purpose and utility of language within the communication process (Casta & Hufana, 2016). The role of discourse analysis is crucial, as it delves into syntactic, lexical, and grammatical structures to ascertain language proficiency (Casta & Hufana, 2016). Teachers, recognizing the demands of language in both its function and form, can better facilitate students' language development (Alsoraihi, 2019).

Various frameworks have been employed by scholars to analyze language discourse, each framework playing a critical role in examining students' discourse in the classroom (see Ambrosio et al., 2015; Jiang, 2013; Llinares & Pastrana, 2013; Luo, 2013; Mulyati, 2013; and, Orsolini & Pontecorvo, 1992). According to Llinares & Pastrana (2013), language functions in group work differ across primary and secondary levels compared to whole-class discussions, a finding that contrasts with Jiang's (2012) observation that whole-class activities predominate over individual tasks.

The likelihood of children's elaboration increases when teachers repeat or rephrase questions or when students build on a peer's response (Luo, 2013; Orsolini & Pontecorvo, 1992). They have noted the effectiveness of repetition drills across different learning levels. Zhang (2008) has identified several factors that influence the quality of classroom talk, including question types, discourse styles, classroom structure, the communicative skills of participants, class size, prescribed curriculum, cultural factors, and more.

Different categorizations of language functions have been established in discourse analysis, for example, Halliday's functions of language. Others, like Jacobs and Kline Liu (1996) utilized an abbreviated form of Finocchiaro's categorical system for language functions in their research. Several researchers have applied the Functional Analysis of Children's Classroom Talk or FACCT framework (Kumpulainen & Wray, 1997) in their respective studies (see Ambrosio et al., 2015; Muhonen et al., 2017); Mulyati, 2013; Worku & Alemu, 2020. This framework included functional categories such as responsive, organizational, and interrogative among others. Muhonen et al. (2017) refined the language function categories to better align with educational discourse by adding functions such as 'View', 'Supportive', and 'Hinting'. Further, Worku and Alemu (2020) classified functions of pre-service teachers' language.

Furthermore, classroom discourse, particularly in how students respond to prompts, has been shown to significantly influence language learning. Researchers have considered the role of language functions in classroom talk between teachers and students (Llinares & Pastrana, 2013; Luo, 2013; Mulyati, 2013). Others, like Jiang (2012) and Cazden (2001), have focused on the types of discourse and features that students utilize in response to prompts. Yet, the investigation into language functions within undergraduate classroom discourse remains scant.

A variety of frameworks have been employed to analyze classroom discourse. For example, the importance of identifying the function and impact of language in discourse analysis was highlighted (Blanton et al., 2001). Another framework focuses on the functional meanings of students' discourse and is used to probe the nature of discourse in various classroom activities.
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across curricula (Kumpulainen & Wray, 1997). In such analyses, student utterances serve as the primary unit, with the aim of discerning the most prevalent language functions that inform the communicative value of classroom discourse. Within these exchanges, students utilize language functions to further elaborate on and explain previous discourse.

The FACCT framework is used in this study (Kumpulainen & Wray, 1997). It outlines 16 functional categories, including informative, interrogative, and responsive, among others (see Appendix A). However, Ambrosio et al. (2015) also recognizes uncategorized language functions that are pivotal in student discourse. These include code-switching, polite expressions, expressions of sarcasm, repetition for emphasis, self-correction, self-expression, use of introductory phrases, turn-taking, and speech fillers, thus expanding the scope of language functions within student discourse beyond the categorizations proposed by Halliday (1972) and Kumpulainen and Wray (1997).

Methodology

The study employs a descriptive qualitative design. The goal of using this design is to describe the topic of language functions. It enables the researchers to describe a picture of the classroom discourse under study.

Participants and setting

Purposive sampling method was implemented, a technique beneficial for selecting participants who are best suited to address the research inquiries. The subjects were fourth-year undergraduates pursuing a Bachelor of Secondary Education with a specialization in English at Ifugao State University (IFSU) in the Philippines. The selected class consisted of 30 students, all registered in the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020.

Full consent was obtained from the participants prior to the study. It was indicated in the consent that the anonymity and privacy of the students are ensured. Moreover, the research participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage if they plan to do so.

IFSU stands as the sole higher education institution in the Ifugao province, where the student body represents a linguistic diversity, with many speaking Tuwali, Ayangan, and Ilokano languages at home. All of the students are proficient in Ilokano, Filipino, and English, with the education majors demonstrating a particular fluency in English.

Research Instrument

In this study, audio-recordings served as the primary tools for data collection to record student interactions within the classroom environment. These recordings, capturing the verbal dynamics of group discussions, were transcribed to create a written record.

Data collection and analysis

In this study, the data were collected through a 25-minute video recording of students discussions and responses during classroom activities. Five members per group discussed the topic about 21st century skills. The recordings were later transcribed by the researchers. Additionally, students were instructed to record and transcribe their discussions as part of their assigned task, with these transcriptions later compared to those completed by the researcher.

Each student utterance was analyzed as a distinct data unit. The researchers applied coding and categorization to these utterances, aligning them with one of the 16 defined functions of
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language according to the framework by Kumpulainen & Wray (1997) or the nine significant yet uncategorized language functions relevant to classroom discourse as identified by Ambrosio et al. (2015). These utterances were then quantified and shown in the next section.

The analysis proceeded through several stages, beginning with the recording of student interactions. This was followed by a meticulous transcription process, during which the researcher coded, reread, and annotated the data, analyzing the utterances for their conceptual content representative of the language functions within student discourse.

The final analytical phase consisted of tallying and calculating the percentage of each language function present in the classroom discourse. To ensure objectivity, the coded data were reviewed by two independent intercoders, both experts in the English language. They were provided with the coding framework and examples to guide their assessment of the analysis.

Results

Table one provides a functional analysis of students’ classroom talk, detailing the frequency and distribution of language functions.

Table 1. The functional analysis of students’ classroom talk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency (F)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>(I)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogative</td>
<td>(Q)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive</td>
<td>(R)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>(OR)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgmental</td>
<td>(J)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentational</td>
<td>(ARG)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compositional</td>
<td>(C)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive</td>
<td>(RP)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>(E)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expositional</td>
<td>(EXPO)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetical</td>
<td>(HY)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External thinking</td>
<td>(ET)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>(IM)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heuristic</td>
<td>(HE)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affectional</td>
<td>(AF)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional</td>
<td>(IN)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicate that students’ spoken discourse encompasses all the different functional categories of language. The Judgmental function, used primarily to express agreement or disagreement, emerged as the most prevalent, accounting for 35% of the discourse. The Interrogative function was the second most frequent, with 20% of discourse, highlighting the role of questioning in the learning process. Inquiry and information seeking were also significant, facilitating approval and support within the classroom setting.
Furthermore, the study found that Responsive and Experiential language functions were commonly used by students to expand upon or clarify previous discourse. These extended talks allowed students to complete statements from their peers or provide elaborated responses to instructors' requests for further explanation.

The study’s findings suggest a dynamic use of language functions in the classroom, moving beyond traditional teacher-led interactions and towards more student-centered discussions, sharing, and narration, particularly in response to contemporary learning materials. However, heuristic functions were least represented in the conversations, indicating a potential area for enhancing discovery learning in classroom discourse.

Table two presents a selection of student utterances that are classified as uncategorized language functions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Filler</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code-switching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite statement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory phrase</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-correction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn-taking</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of sarcasm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicates a range of language functions not typically categorized by traditional linguistic frameworks. Speech fillers are the most prevalent, accounting for nearly half of the total, and are used to fill pauses in speech. These filler words, although often meaningless, help the speaker maintain fluency while thinking of what to say next. The least common functions are code-switching and the expression of sarcasm, possibly due to their negative connotations or the speaker's unfamiliarity with certain terms.

The study also observes that extended continuations are common, often in response to personal narratives or shared experiences. Such turns are expected to elicit feedback and reactions. Argumentational and Informative functions are prominent in students’ explanations, serving to clarify statements and support judgments. These functions also facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information, which is foundational to the discourse in modern classrooms. Students often use their existing knowledge to further develop or expand upon shared information.

**Discussion**

The spoken discourse of undergraduate students encompasses a broad range of linguistic functions such as compositional, reproductive, organizational, and judgmental functions, indicating their ability to evaluate their work and make decisions—a critical aspect of effective learning as highlighted by Brown & Campione (1990) and Cohen (1994). Judgemental discourse, which has the highest representation, demonstrates that students are not just passive learners;
instead, they actively apply their critical thinking by making judgments about their work, insights, and various subject matters.

In terms of Responsive language functions, the data suggests that students may use different functions to respond to questions, potentially employing argumentation or informative functions rather than direct answers, reflecting a nuanced approach to classroom dialogue. The use of the Experiential function is particularly notable as it allows students to draw from personal experiences, connecting their learning to their environment, which is essential for contextualizing knowledge (Kumpulainen & Wray, 1997).

Importantly, the study notes that the instructor plays a crucial role in facilitating equitable participation in classroom discourse and in evaluating student outcomes as part of the instructional process (Jiang, 2012). This is consistent with Orsolini and Pontecorvo (1999), who emphasize the importance of classroom conversations in enhancing student discourse. Quality classroom discourse, as Zhang (2008) points out, significantly influences learning, with exposure to various types of discourse being beneficial (Jiang, 2012). Muhonen et al. (2017) also highlight the importance of increasing classroom dialogue.

Language functions serve as a crucial cognitive tool, enabling students to process, classify, and articulate their daily experiences. The classroom becomes a space for students to share and discuss their insights, with the instructor playing a facilitative role in prompting student cognition and encouraging participation through brainstorming and discussion. The educational climate thus shifts towards one where instructors act as consultants, fostering an environment where students can engage in authentic, collaborative dialogues, posing questions, and sharing answers.

Conclusion

This research aimed to discern the varied roles language plays in undergraduate classroom discourse, revealing that students learn to employ discourse effectively across different contexts. The analysis highlighted the importance of both formal and informal instructional methods that foster social interaction in the learning environment. It is evident that classroom discourse quality significantly impacts student learning and engagement. Emphasizing spoken discourse in classroom activities such as dialogues, group discussions, interviews, and speeches is essential. Teachers are encouraged to facilitate student interaction by organizing pair and group activities, as well as prompting students to elaborate on their ideas by rephrasing questions or providing contextual scenarios. The findings suggest that instructors play a pivotal role in guiding classroom communication and addressing the challenges of educational discourse. There is a particular need for novice teachers to develop activities that encourage student interaction and discourse, potentially leading to enhanced academic performance.

The study underlines the importance of language functions in the classroom, which can influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning. It draws attention to the existence of certain utterances in classroom discourse that do not fit into the established categories of language functions, underscoring their significance in the construction of meaning. Pedagogically, this study emphasizes the necessity for teachers to be aware of these uncategorized language functions and to consider incorporating them into instructional frameworks for discourse. Looking forward, future research should delve into the specific types of explanations and clarifications students offer in their oral discourse, enhancing our understanding of how students construct and communicate knowledge.
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References


**Appendix A**

**The Functional Analysis of Student’s Classroom Talk (FACCT)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>(I)</td>
<td>Providing information, from previous ideas, pre-existing knowledge, by manipulating information resources, or from the situational context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogative</td>
<td>(Q)</td>
<td>Asking questions to get information or social approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive</td>
<td>(R)</td>
<td>Answering questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>(OR)</td>
<td>Organizing and controlling behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgemental</td>
<td>(J)</td>
<td>Expressing agreement or disagreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentational</td>
<td>(ARG)</td>
<td>Reasoning in language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compositional</td>
<td>(C)</td>
<td>Creating written or spoken text not earlier mentioned, revising or dictating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproductional</td>
<td>(RP)</td>
<td>Reproducing previously encountered language either by reading or repeating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential</td>
<td>(E)</td>
<td>Expressing personal experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expositional</td>
<td>(EXPO)</td>
<td>Language accompanying the demonstration of a phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetical</td>
<td>(HY)</td>
<td>Putting forward a hypothesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External thinking</td>
<td>(ET)</td>
<td>Thinking aloud in accompaniment of a task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>(IM)</td>
<td>Introducing or expressing imaginative situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heuristic</td>
<td>(HE)</td>
<td>Expressing discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affectional</td>
<td>(AF)</td>
<td>Expression of personal feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional</td>
<td>(IN)</td>
<td>Signaling intention to participate in discourse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Effects of Ecology-Oriented Instruction on Enhancing EFL Learner’s Writing Competence

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Abstract
The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented pace of environmental issues with catastrophic consequences. Accordingly, an increasing number of initiatives have been seized to solve ecological problems in cooperation. In this regard, integrating eco-friendly practices into EFL classes has received considerable attention globally. However, the effects of ecology-oriented writing instruction have not been explored thoroughly in the Iraq context. Thus, this study was carried out to fill this gap in the literature with 30 EFL learners who studied at a language preparatory school of a private university in the spring semester of the 2022-2023 Academic Year in Erbil. Participants, whose ages were between 18 and 24, were chosen through the convenience sampling method. The study lasted eight weeks when data were gathered via writing exams and interviews in this explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design study. Control group students were exposed to traditional instruction, while experimental group students’ lessons were enriched by ecology-oriented writing topics. The in-depth analysis was performed through SPSS 27 and NVivo. The former revealed that experimental group students increased their writing competence more substantially than the control group students. Likewise, interview findings unearthed that students’ awareness about ecological problems increased dramatically in the experimental group, while the difference was not significant in the control group. The findings of this study may drive authorized bodies to integrate eco-friendly approaches into academic writing lessons on a global scale.

Keywords: Academic writing, eco-friendly approaches, EFL learners, environmental issues, raising awareness

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Introduction

English is acknowledged as the passport to unlocking learners’ potential, thanks to its global dominance in all fields. In other words, it is a common language to be able to communicate globally. Accordingly, it is the official language in over 50 countries, followed by French and Arabic. In the same vein, the number of people who speak English has exceeded 1.5 billion to reap the benefits of mastering English in various sectors (Statista, 2022). The influence of English has also been observed starkly in different aspects of life. To name a few, approximately 65% of websites are run in English (Celik & Kara, 2022). Considering the indispensable role of the internet, this percentage becomes more meaningful in the information age. When users learn how to grasp details on websites, they can receive information, cross-check the accuracy of the information, expand their knowledge, have an enjoyable time, and socialize. Additionally, the percentage of academic publications has surpassed the 80% threshold (Kosimov, 2022). To name a few, curious people can read various articles to get satisfactory responses to their queries. In addition, academics can publish articles to reach the maximum number of possible readers thanks to adopting English as the medium in the articles. Subsequently, English is a lingua franca to communicate in tourism, aviation, commerce, and media (Köylü & Tracy-Ventura, 2022). It is the expectation to travel easily, land more lucrative business deals and make more accurate interpretations after reading multiple sources in the media. Policymakers have realized this inescapable fact and urged the relevant units to integrate English into the curriculum so they will be qualified to compete with others in the competitive job market. As it is unambiguous, mastering English opens plenty of opportunities to seize on various occasions.

Writing is one of the most essential skills in English thanks to its reflections on people’s lives at different stages. Thus, improving writing skills from kindergarten to the highest level of education is paramount. Writing skill plays an integral role in learners’ lives (Küçük, 2023 & Yucedal et al., 2022). To illustrate, students need to convey the meaning in exams, which can be math, science, or English in a written format. In addition, written communication is essential to doing business, filing a complaint, or requesting changes because the ideas can be more precise and persuasive. After that, many companies integrate written tasks into the interview process to hire the best candidates by considering their written and spoken English performance. Subsequently, writing is a fundamental section in internationally recognized exams, such as TOEFL, IELTS, PTE, and SAT (Ginting & Barella, 2022; Kara & Abdulrahman, 2022). Additionally, writing is crucial to contributing to society through memoirs, biographies, stories, novels, poems, or blogs. People can uncover their potential, break the monotony in their lives, and be lifelong learners by writing creatively. On the other hand, learners can have many drawbacks if they cannot sharpen their writing skills (Tong et al., 2023; Yildiz & Budur, 2019). For example, they may fail if they are not good at writing. Additionally, they have many conflicts in their written communication attempts. Afterward, they may lose their chance to work for a company if they cannot accompany their spoken English with the written one. Moreover, they may lose the chance to find a lucrative job or earn a degree abroad if they get a low mark in the writing section of universally accepted English proficiency exams. As it is evident, writing has a wide variety of roles in people’s lives from a very early age till finalizing their lifespans.

Several ecological problems have affected the whole universe due to destructive human activities. For example, climate change is a serious problem that occurs by the release of greenhouse gases. Likewise, fossil fuels, deforestation, mining, and overconsumption are leading causes of climate change. In this respect, climate change increases global temperatures, so
humanity may notice far-reaching effects of it on the ecosystem, such as widespread flooding, storms, droughts, fires, contagious diseases, and the extinction of many species (Cumming et al., 2006). Another serious ecological problem is pollution. The universe has been affected severely by various types of pollution such as noise, air, nuclear, water, soil, and light pollution. Noise pollution can arise from noisy vehicles, giant machines, and amplified speakers. Air pollution can occur due to industrial emissions, pollutants produced by vehicle exhausts, livestock, fertilizers, pesticides, hazardous wastes, burning fuels for heating or electricity generation, volcanic eruption, and windblown dust. In addition, nuclear pollution happens when radioactive materials are released into the atmosphere. After that, water pollution emerges because of oil leakage, sewage, industrial waste, and agricultural practices. Moreover, soil pollution occurs because of improper waste disposal, erosion, plastics, some natural disasters and unconscientious farming implementations. Furthermore, light pollution occurs due to using lights excessively or making the wrong decision about the type of lamps for a particular place. It is evident that serious ecological problems need close attention to resolve. Otherwise, catastrophic consequences are imminent.

Raising awareness about ecological problems has increased its popularity at educational institutions as it is necessary to take relevant measures immediately in order to protect present and future generations. Correspondingly, some courses, extra-curricular activities, campaigns, workshops, and projects have been launched, so teachers, students, and parents may strengthen their relationships and take sensible actions to save the world (Corraliza & Collado, 2019). To name a few, some themes are highlighted in courses, such as geography, science, and English. Thus, incorporating themes into lessons raises students’ awareness of ecological issues. In the same vein, some campaigns, which are planting trees, collecting rubbish, recycling, and reusing, are launched to spread good deeds to other people in society. Thus, this cycle can create a positive chain reaction in society. Similarly, some workshops are organized to inform parents and students about the disastrous effects of human beings on the environment and urge them to promote sustainable development strategies. Moreover, some hands-on projects are organized to show the current problems in the environment and provide practical ideas to resolve the issues gradually. Furthermore, some field trips are planned to see nature and behave with common sense to protect it (Arundati et al., 2020). Afterward, some advertisements, documentaries, and graphs are available to increase the awareness of humanity about chronic ecological problems. Likewise, some incentives are given to people who consider buying an electric car or producing organic fruit and vegetables in an increasing number of countries (Ricoy & Sanchez-Martinez, 2022). As it is stark, a multi-faceted approach is required to change the negative cycle in nature and increase eco-friendly practices.

The research has multiple significances. Firstly, raising environmental awareness has not become more vital than this century. The universe has been under constant threats from many points, so individual actions should be transformed into collaborative practices to yield better results in the long run. Also, an increasing number of countries are suffering from ecological problems, so it is vitally important to plan, monitor, and make necessary changes for the betterment of the environment. In the second place, Iraq also takes its lion's share of the environmental issues, like many other countries in the form of sandstorms, air pollution, loss of biodiversity, or droughts (Abdulla et al., 2020). Correspondingly, this study was conducted in Erbil, Iraq to raise environmental awareness, thereby undertaking the responsibility to reverse the negative cycle. Thus, it is the expectation to reduce and eliminate ecological problems systematically in Iraq and
be a role model for other countries plagued by environmental problems. In congruent with the research aims, research questions were created:

RQ1: How does ecology-oriented writing instruction play a role in enhancing students’ writing scores?

RQ2: What is the function of ecology-oriented instruction in raising students’ awareness of ecological problems?

Literature Review

The unprecedented pace of destruction in the environment due to human intervention or natural disasters has triggered a wave of campaigns and bills to raise ecological awareness globally since the 1970s. The Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, the Creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the celebration of the first Earth Day have raised awareness in the US and gradually spread to other countries (Vasileva et al., 2021). Correspondingly, some movies, documentaries, leaflets, brochures, and advertisements are prevalent to inform human beings and equip them to take rational measures. In the same vein, increasing efforts have been made to embed eco-friendly themes into the curriculum. In this regard, some influential books such as *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, *The Ecology of Writing* by Marilyn Cooper, and *Eco Literature: Contemporary Discourses* by Candy D. Cunha have sparked an international interest in ecological problems with practical solutions (Corraliza & Collado, 2019). Once the international interests and necessities have been noticed, writing ecology-oriented paragraphs, essays, and compositions has received considerable attention in EFL, ESL, and ELT settings, regardless of stages of education. In other words, raising ecological awareness has been a common theme at educational institutions, particularly in writing courses. Some scholars (Elsherif, 2013; Head, 2022; Lai & Tseng, 2011) posit that ecology-oriented writing topics should be integrated into the writing curriculum, whereas others like Alimjanovna (2022), Rosa et al. (2022), and Yamalee and Tangkiensirisin (2019) have verbalized their hesitations on the effectiveness of ecology-oriented writing instruction. To name a few, Shen and Chong (2023) assert that shining the spotlight on environmental issues in writing courses creates a chain reaction to change learners’ behaviors positively, so they can work collaboratively to protect nature. They also suggest that the power of writing can be used effectively to inform people on the internet and reach a larger audience for the sake of protecting the world. In the same vein, Mukherjee and Roy (2023) convene that the key to securing a sustainable environment is the integration of ecology-based topics in writing classes, thereby increasing the chance of spreading such positive ideas to their communities. On the other hand, Rashid et al. (2022) postulate that writing essays on ecological problems is challenging for many students, so they cannot be exposed to all students without considering their capabilities. It hints that a well-established plan should be adopted for the implementation, grading and offering constructive feedback policy in order not to demotivate learners.

In this regard, a plethora of studies have been conducted to measure the effects of ecology-oriented instruction in English classes. To illustrate, Routarinne et al. (2023) found a correlation between ecological inquiry-based writing and their performance which revealed that students’ enthusiasm increases exponentially as they explore environmental problems and seek ways to eliminate the effects of them on the Earth. It can be ascribed to finding some common points between daily life issues and writing because environmental problems have been mentioned frequently through news, documentaries, reports and articles. Similarly, Szeberenyi et al. (2022) carried out a large-scale study in Hungary on university students, revealing that taking lessons to
raise ecological awareness and expressing their ideas in a written format urges the students to launch some campaigns and change the negative cycle in the world. It is unambiguous that ecology-oriented instruction leads to some initiatives to change the world positively upon examining the fatal consequences and being trained to take sensible measures individually and collaboratively. Another significant study was undertaken by Vasileva et al. (2021) in Russia on adults which unearthed that students benefit from eco-friendly approaches in many aspects. They reiterated that students not only become more conscious of environmental issues but also enhance their performance in writing classes. Subsequently, Setyowati et al.’s (2020) study unleashed that brainstorming, outlining, watching videos, reading articles, and writing essays on ecological problems have far-fetching positive effects on students’ success in an Academic Writing course. They also found that students develop positive attitudes toward eco-friendly campaigns in their community. On the other hand, Nystrand et al.’s (2001) study in the US indicated that focusing on challenging topics about the environment can have adverse effects on students’ writing performance because it is likely to feel overwhelmed after being exposed to many technical terms, regarding environmental problems. Similarly, Balgopal et al.’s (2012) study demonstrated that the effects of ecology-oriented writing classes differ significantly when students’ majors are varied. Their study hints that a solid background knowledge is needed to increase the success rate in ecology-oriented based writing instruction. It can be postulated that balancing the degree of difficulty and enriching the lessons with varied learning and teaching materials are underlying factors to increase positive outcomes in ecology-oriented writing instruction.

By checking the related literature above, it is evident that the number of studies on ecology-oriented instruction has increased over the years in line with the exacerbating environmental disasters around the world.

Method

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used in this study to reap the benefits of it in several aspects. Toyon (2021) points out that an explanatory sequential design ensures triangulation, so qualitative and quantitative data can be compared and contrasted conveniently. He also postulates that this design gives the flexibility to test the tendencies of a limited number of students in advance to shape final forms of data collection tools for a higher number of participants in the subsequent phase. To illustrate, it urges the researcher to collect quantitative data in the prior phase. After that, qualitative data were gathered. In the final phase, both data were compared to make more reliable interpretations. To realize this goal, quantitative data were collected by two writing exams as pre-test and post-test. On the other hand, qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews.

Participants

A private university in Erbil, Iraq was chosen as the setting of this study. The university offers an English-only instruction to 5000 students as of 2022-2023 Academic Year. The university welcomes students from diverse nationalities, so English serves as a lingua franca to receive lessons and communicate without having any difficulty. Additionally, English-only instruction affects students’ decision positively to choose the university so that they can race with other candidates in the competitive job market upon graduation. The language preparatory school of the university runs a proficiency exam to measure students’ levels in English and place them accordingly. Students can be placed in the preparatory school program, Foundation English, if they
need to sharpen their English for a year respectively. When they get a satisfactory mark, they proceed to their departments directly. Language preparatory school students were chosen on purpose because this group takes an intensive language learning program for one year. In addition, the Academic Writing course is offered for two semesters, spanning nine months, so the researcher preferred this group on purpose to notice the reflections of ecology-oriented writing instruction on students’ writing competence starkly. In this regard, 30 students who studied at language preparatory school in the 2022-2023 Academic Year encompassed the participants. The convenience sampling method was employed to determine the participants as it offers several benefits for the researcher to choose participants conveniently (Rahman et al., 2022). The number of male students was 13, whereas it was 17 for females. Additionally, their ages ranged from 18 to 24. It was common for all students to be exposed to English-only instruction for the first time in their lives, albeit taking some English lessons sparsely in their high school period, so their levels were the same prior to this study.

**Research Instruments**

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed by employing several instruments. For example, essays were the main instrument to pinpoint the difference between pre-test and post-test. The researcher composed 16 writing topics which were reduced to eight after the item analysis, conducted by two writing experts to corroborate the construct validity of the topics. Writing topics were piloted on other students in similar levels to ensure that they were relevant and clear. Once topics were validated, the researcher was prompted to commence the study. Accordingly, students wrote their essays before and after the treatment, so their performance was evaluated to determine whether there were marked differences via SPSS 27. Independent samples t-test was activated to compare average pre-test and post-test scores. However, a different approach was adopted in collecting and analysing qualitative data. The data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analysed according to the framework of content analysis by NVivo software program. Interview questions were formed as follows:

**Pre-treatment**

- Can you describe some of the ecological problems?
- What are some solutions to solve ecological problems?
- Do you think that ecological awareness can be raised in an Academic Writing course?

**Post-treatment**

- How did this study affect your attitude toward ecological problems?
- Did this study help you offer some solutions to chronic ecological problems?

**Procedures Followed by Students**

**Experimental Group**

Prior to the study, students answered some questions in the interview and wrote a randomly selected essay about ecological problems, so the influence of the treatment could be measured unambiguously. Subsequently, they joined a seminar to show some videos, images, articles, and graphs about numerous ecological problems with some sensible solutions. Thus, they were motivated to join the study more ambitiously, thereby increasing their awareness of ecological
problems within eight weeks. The researcher explored a topic each week in the given cycle: brainstorming, watching videos, examining images, analyzing graphs, reading sample essays, writing an essay collaboratively, composing their essays individually within 30 minutes, and receiving feedback by anonymously displaying their works on the smartboard. Selected topics for each week are illustrated below in Table One.

**Table 1. Common topics in the experimental group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Most Chronic Ecological Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Solutions to the Most Serious Ecological Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Causes of Global Warming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Measures to Reduce Global Warming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Types of Pollution with Clear Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Solutions to Eliminate Pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A Thorough Revision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table One, describing the problem, and expressing some practical solutions were the researcher's ultimate goals. In the same vein, all problems were uncovered in general at first, which was specified in the weeks to come.

**Control Group**

The participants who represented the control group were exposed to traditional instruction, so their curriculum was more comprehensive than solely ecological problems and solutions. The sequence of topics in the control group can be observed in Table Two:

**Table 2. Common topics in the control group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leading a Healthy Lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Electric Cars Versus Fuel-run Cars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Characteristics of a Good Friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Life in the 2050s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reasons to Read Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Best Movie in Your Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A Thorough Revision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table Two, the topics are varied in the control group, albeit including only one topic to raise environmental awareness. In other words, the writing tasks in the control group urged the students to articulate their ideas in a wide range of topics rather than focusing solely on ecology-oriented themes.

**Findings**

Findings were classified into two sections, which encompassed quantitative and qualitative data consecutively in the form of writing exams and interviews.

**The Analysis of the Writing Exams**

Participants underwent the treatment period and took two writing exams, which required writing on given topics in the essay format. Details of the writing exams are illustrated thoroughly in Table Three.
The Effects of Ecology-Oriented Instruction on Enhancing EFL Learner’s

Table 3. *Independent samples T-test in terms of writing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>57.67</td>
<td>10.142</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>11.629</td>
<td>-.138</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>15.683</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>72.33</td>
<td>9.783</td>
<td>3.653</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. P<0.05

An independent samples t-test was run to address the first research question which was about the effects of ecology-oriented writing instruction on learners’ writing scores in Table 3. Once mean scores were examined in detail, it was evident that their levels were approximately the same with 57 and 57.67 points for the control and experimental group, respectively. However, a dramatic increase was noticed in the experimental group according to post-test scores. In other words, the experimental group students’ average leaped from 57 to 72.33. Conversely, control group students could not increase their scores as much as their peers in the experimental group. These figures were in line with p-values which were .891 and .001. The former one hints that the p-value, 891, was higher than 0.05, so there was no significant difference based on pre-test scores. On the other hand, the p-value, .001, was less than 0.05 in the post-test which can be concluded that experimental group students who followed an ecology-oriented instruction performed far better than their peers who took part in a traditional writing instruction. The substantial difference between pre-test and post-test scores was also visualized in Figure One below:

![Figure 1. Mean scores of students in writing exams](image)

**Figure 1. Mean scores of students in writing exams**

**The Analysis of the Interview**

The analysis of the interview was done by adopting the principles of content analysis. Common themes that emerged are illustrated in Table Four. Later, they were elaborated further in the following lines.

Table 4. *Common themes, classifications and codes in the interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Warming</td>
<td>Deforestation</td>
<td>Causes, effects and action plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fossil Fuels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>Air</td>
<td>Causes, effects and action plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Several themes and sub-categories emerged based on the qualitative data analysis through interviews. The first theme was global warming, which could arise primarily due to cutting trees in the forests and burning fossil fuels. Students became aware of the causes and catastrophic effects of it on the environment. In addition, they came up with sound action plans:

- Being aware of global warming through videos, articles, news, and movies raised our awareness. We also got the inspiration to revert it with simple but collaborative steps.
- Finally, we put our ideas into practice via essays. Thus, this study urged me to be more sensitive to major ecological problems. (St4)

Another theme, which can be as serious as the previous one, was pollution with six sub-categories. Students were introduced to the causes and effects of pollution. Later, they proposed their action plans to resolve them wisely. To begin with, students cited fires, exhaust fumes, and industrial smoke as the causes. They came up with some plans such as promoting campaigns on reducing fires, using public transportation, and urging factories to install air filtration systems.

- It was a mind-blowing period for me because I not only learned the causes of air pollution but also devised some practical plans to eliminate it globally. I wish I had learned them earlier, so I could take action and spread those good ideas to people, around me. (St6)

The other sub-category under the pollution theme was water pollution, which was exemplified by household or industrial waste, oil spills, improper management of sewage, and overuse of pesticides and fertilizers. They formulated some practical solutions, such as raising awareness about reducing, reusing, and recycling, monitoring oil ships more closely, allocating more funds for the modernization of sewage systems, and training farmers about employing eco-friendly approaches for present and future generations.

- Although there are some issues with the pureness of water, they can be tackled easily by raising awareness among citizens and urging authorized bodies to take action. When all relevant units come to an agreement, positive effects of it can be noticed in the environment gradually. (St8)

Soil pollution was the subsequent sub-theme under pollution. Students reiterated that mismanaged landfills, hazardous chemicals, and out-of-date farming practices are the primary causes of soil pollution. They devised a practical plan to eliminate its disastrous effects on the environment.

- There are several ways to change this negative cycle on the environment, such as redesigning landfills, raising awareness on consuming less, and reaching more farmers to replace their impractical and hazardous techniques with proven eco-friendly ones. (St11)

Subsequently, nuclear pollution arose as the other sub-theme which affects the environment adversely. Students pointed out that the leakage from nuclear power plants may cause life-threatening diseases. They had a clear plan to solve it by investigating nuclear power plants to determine whether they are secure or switching the focus from nuclear power plants to alternative energy sources such as sun, wind or hydropower.

- Technology has developed significantly, so generating electricity from sun, wind or water can be eco-friendlier and less harmful to humanity. If nuclear power plants remain active, they have to be inspected more frequently to make the neighborhood as secure as possible. (St12)

The final sub-theme that emerged was noise pollution. Students mentioned cars, huge machines, and amplified speakers which may disrupt people’s behaviours. They postulated that assembling
The Effects of Ecology-Oriented Instruction on Enhancing EFL Learner’s Writing Competence

Discussion

The effects of ecology-oriented writing instruction on EFL learners’ writing competence were sought via writing exams and interviews in this study. Thus, research questions were addressed correspondingly. Collected data revealed essential points to be emphasized. To begin with, the first research question was addressed through two writing tasks with pre-test and post-test prompts. To illustrate, the findings in the quantitative data unleashed that students’ writing competence increased substantially when they were exposed to focused writing instruction in eco-oriented subjects. It was consistent with Kurtén’s (2020) study which unearthed that ecological problems are hotly debated issues at educational institutions, so students feel more engaged in writing classes when students are exposed to a great deal of information on environmental issues in their social and academic lives. He also convenes that students’ writing marks increase gradually because they research, discover, and shape their writing styles during this period. Subsequently, the second research question was examined through the interviews to come to a decision on whether their ideas towards ecology-oriented writing instruction transformed significantly.

Findings in the interview were in congruent with writing marks harmoniously. For instance, students raised their awareness of ecological problems by figuring out the causes, catastrophic effects, and possible solutions to revert such disastrous effects. Armbruster and Wallace (2001) postulate that indulging in activities to raise environmental issues can yield better results at educational institutions, thereby, paving the way for spreading eco-friendly deeds in society. More specifically, findings in the interview revealed that they got the privilege to focus on each ecological problem and set an action plan to change this cycle in a positive way. According to Head (2022), defining the ecological problems and having a say in the resolution can increase students’ ambition in writing classes. Subsequently, the interview findings showed that students appreciated the value of 3Rs which are reduce, reuse, and recycle. They adopted an eco-friendly approach to saving the planet. Similarly, Benton (2015) attests that 3R has far-reaching effects on individuals’ lives, so such training should be increased at all stages of life to reap the benefits of it. Another fundamental point to be considered in the interview was collaborative campaigns to change the world positively. They stated that collaborative actions encouraged them to launch a campaign and organize it successfully because they learned to brainstorm, outline positive and negative aspects, and follow the procedure in cooperation. As stated by Hartman et al. (2002), individual actions to transform the environment can be slow and futile, however, taking action in cooperation can increase the rate of success and its impacts on society. The final remark to be emphasized in the interview was on practical implementations. Students reiterated that they started consuming less, urging their loved ones to buy electric cars or use public transportation more frequently. They also highlighted that they started producing organic products and buying locally grown fruit and vegetables. Prabawani et al. (2017) point out that adopting an eco-friendly education at educational institutions helps students develop good habits toward the environment and change their behaviors for the sake of living in an utterly sustainable world.
Conclusion

This research purported to investigate the unfulfilled potential of ecology-oriented instruction in enhancing EFL learners’ writing competence and raising eco-awareness simultaneously. In this respect, findings indicated that employing ecology-oriented writing instruction paved the way for developing learners’ academic writing skills and raising their awareness of serious ecological issues. In other words, learners boosted their performance to write more persuasively and acquired good habits to raise their voices about environmental problems. Their schedules to learn the underlying reasons of ecological problems and offer sensible resolutions yielded positive outcomes. Correspondingly, they changed their behaviors and urged others to make drastic changes, thereby providing a more liveable environment for present and future generations.

Implications

Some implications can be drawn based on the conclusions of the present study. First, the implication for Academic Writing course teachers is that they can consider the integration of ecology-oriented instruction into the writing curriculum to reap the benefits in several ways. Secondly, administrators can encourage the teaching staff to highlight ecology-oriented issues in varied classes, so students’ awareness can be raised substantially. Additionally, the importance of ecology-oriented instruction can be understood well once students do further research and expand their macro and micro-skills, such as listening, reading, grammar and pronunciation. Lastly, educators should be aware that a student who receives ecology-oriented instruction can persuade their family members, relatives and friends to acknowledge the problem and offer practical solutions.

Recommendations

Some recommendations can be made for future studies regarding raising environmental awareness in an Academic Writing course. This study was conducted on EFL learners at the tertiary level in Iraq which can be extended with previous stages such as high school or secondary schools. Following from that, only writing skill was measured in this study, which can be enlarged with other macro and micro-skills. In addition, the timespan for this study was eight weeks, which can be prolonged to get more reliable results. Likewise, the students of a private university encompassed the participants, which can be enriched with other private or public universities in the region. Similarly, the number of female students was higher than their male peers, which can be equalized to get a clearer image of each gender. Finally, this study was conducted on exams and interviews which can be enlarged with the questionnaires.

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The Effects of Ecology-Oriented Instruction on Enhancing EFL Learner’s Kara

References


Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Modern Methods of Teaching English at the Ganja State University

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Abstract
The purpose of the research is to identify the key components of the modern methodology of teaching English in the example of Ganja State University in Azerbaijan. Research is significant due to the global importance of English as the primary international language and its role in modernizing education systems worldwide. The main question of the research is to find out the impact of the key components of the modern methodology of teaching English on the formation of the necessary competencies in young specialists. For this purpose, the main tasks were solved: the key requirements for modern methods of teaching English were analyzed, the current state of education in Azerbaijan as a whole was characterized, and the methods for improving the modern educational process were proposed. The main directions of research are predetermined by the lack of theoretical and methodological development of this issue as well as its increasing practical significance. The leading method of studying this issue is the analysis of the most popular and effective methods of teaching English in modern conditions, determining the need for their synthesis in the formation of competent young professionals. Also, ways of further development of the most effective methods were modeled. The study examined foreign experts’ materials to comprehensively assess the significance of learning foreign languages in contemporary settings. It identified vital English teaching methods based on current trends and expert research. These findings hold practical value for improving English instruction at Ganja State University in Azerbaijan.

Keywords: education, interactive learning, learning foreign languages, modern teaching methods, popular linguistic methods, Ganja State University

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Introduction

The relevance of the research is because English is the language of international communication in the modern world and is very popular. Today, the educational system is undergoing a full-scale modernization. Modern education involves the fundamental training of future specialists. The study of foreign languages is an obligatory component of any educational system.

There are many methods of teaching English (Rybchynska, 2023). To understand how the modern model of higher education has been built in Azerbaijan, one should study historical facts. A foreign language was first taught at the beginning of the 20th century in private schools (Safarova, 2014). The opening of six-month courses in Baku in the 40s became the turning point. It was during that period that English began to be taught in the Republic of Azerbaijan, along with French and German. Later, the Institute of Foreign Languages appeared, which played a vital role in the study and teaching of foreign languages. The Institute contributed to the popularization of foreign languages in Azerbaijan.

The issue of teaching the modern young generation the English language is also quite popular in the contemporary scientific community. This issue was studied by such specialists as, for example, L.A. Safarova (2014), Kuznetsova (2014), Adilova (2019), Mamedova (2015), Abdullaeva and Akhmedova (2016). The modern method of teaching English is built based on classical approaches. It is worth noting that those methods that were popular several decades ago were more likely to be reproductive and involved only memorizing words, reading texts, and writing letters. Safarova (2014) in her publication claims that this is the reason, for which most modern adults can read and write in English, but they have difficulties speaking it.

In her work, Kuznetsova (2014) claims that interactive methods of teaching a foreign language prevail in the modern world. Today, knowledge acquisition is a continuous interaction between the teacher and the student. The author also focuses on the fact that the age needs of students are delineated in modern methods. The teacher needs to select a teaching method depending on the age, whether games, virtual travel, or conversations. Thus, Adilova (2019) suggests that progress and cardinal changes in approaches to the study of various languages are associated with new achievements in personal and group psychology. It should be noted that the author puts the psychological factor of learning foreign languages to the forefront.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to consider the popular methods of teaching English in Azerbaijan and to identify the most effective of them. The research object is approaches to studying foreign languages, based on the example of the Ganja State University. The objectives of the research include:

• studying historical facts that indicate the evolution of higher education in Azerbaijan and their impact on foreign language teaching;
• researching the psychological aspects of foreign language learning and their impact on learning effectiveness;
• identifying the incentives for developing English language teaching methods in Azerbaijan and their impact on the education system as a whole.

The significance of this research is that it helps to study and understand which methods of teaching foreign languages can be most valuable and practical for students at universities in Azerbaijan, in particular at Ganja State University.
Literature Review

The article discusses various teaching methods for English language instruction and their relevance in the context of Ganja State University in Azerbaijan. It draws on the work of several Azerbaijani and foreign specialists to explore approaches to foreign language education and their significance in shaping and developing young professionals.

Mamedova (2015) convinces that the student in today’s classroom is not limited in the choice of speech means and behavior. The teacher also does not work within a strict framework, since today there are many teaching methods and techniques. Modern trends in teaching English, according to Mamedova, provide the teacher with a large number of opportunities. This is not only about modernized technical means but also about a radically different approach to the learning process. Modern methods include interactive courses, watching English-language films, and online communication. It all depends on the creativity of the teacher.

In this research, authors can consider additional methods of teaching English, which are still at the stage of development at the Ganja State University but are quite popular in Europe. Thus, Dawson (2021) believes that the lingua-socio-cultural teaching methodology can be called the most complex and diverse. This method is entirely rooted in sociology, cultural studies, and psychology. The principle is based on the socio-cultural aspect of the environment, in which some people speak different languages. It should be emphasized that the role of this aspect is often ignored by other teaching methods. This, in turn, can cause the most common language mistakes and misunderstandings between people. Regarding this issue, Muhamad and Jasim (2022) emphasize that such mistakes, like many others, often arise due to the habit formed at school to translate English into their native language instead of understanding the main context. Until recently, the correctness of grammatical structures, not speech as a whole, played a dominant role.

Khasawneh (2021) convinces that this method is focused on recreating as much as possible the natural environment for students to learn the language. Each student is actively involved in the process. The student can offer various game situations, learn to perceive speech by ear, form their reasoning on the topic, freely and naturally communicate in a group, express their point of view, and present their projects or ideas. For example, a similar method is used in thematic classes at the Ganja State University, where the teacher develops general communication skills and creative thinking among students in addition to language skills.

Abdullaeva and Akhmedova (2016) say that today the graduates of higher schools in Azerbaijan face the task of mastering speaking skills, which approaches the language level. The degree of English proficiency, first of all, is determined by the ability to express one’s thoughts following the language standards. That is why the central issue of most higher educational institutions is the competent training of students in the use of vocabulary when speaking in English.

In the context of Ganja State University in Azerbaijan, these teaching methods can be integrated to improve English language instruction. However, the research gap lies in understanding which of these methods or combinations thereof are most effective for students in this specific context. Further research could involve evaluating the outcomes of implementing these methods in the university’s English language curriculum and assessing their impact on students’ language proficiency and overall educational experience. This would help identify the most suitable and effective teaching methods for English language education at Ganja State University and potentially other educational institutions in Azerbaijan.
Method

In this article, the basis of the methodological approach is the method of analysis. The concept of teaching English in the context of the educational process was considered. An important area of research is also the formation of an integrated approach that will contribute to the further modernization of the education system in Azerbaijan. To determine the significance of the introduction of modernized methods of teaching English, an analysis of the data and a comparison of the results obtained with the materials of other specialists were carried out. This research also demonstrated a review of published academic literature and relevant documents.

Participants

The article involves the definition of the importance of modern methods of teaching English in the educational process and the analysis of critical approaches that involve the comprehensive development of young professionals. This scientific research was carried out based on a previously prepared base, which is the foundation for further study.

The participants of this study were students of Ganja State University a total of 30 people who took part in the survey anonymously. They were selected as a representative sample for the study and gave their feedback and answers to questions related to the importance of modern methods of teaching English in the educational process and the analysis of key approaches to the integrated development of young professionals. The participation of students in this study was important for collecting data and drawing conclusions about the differences and advantages of modern methods of teaching English in education.

The research consisted of three main stages: establishing a theoretical foundation and conducting a systematic analysis of English language teaching aspects; analyzing current teaching issues at Ganja State University, and comparing the results with those of other researchers, summarizing the study’s results and identifying future trends in language teaching methods in Azerbaijan.

Research Instruments

The presented research was carried out in three main stages. At the first stage of scientific research, an appropriate theoretical base was prepared, which was used as a foundation for further scientific research. A systematic analysis of the main aspects of teaching English was also carried out. It was found that they significantly affect the educational process and the educational system of Azerbaijan as a whole. The key issues are outlined, which can be optimally solved with the help of the practical implementation of such modern research methods as analysis, synthesis, modeling, and analysis of thematic literature and documentation.

In the second stage of the research paper, an analytical study of the current issues of teaching English, which is vital in today's educational environment, was carried out on the example of the Ganja State University in Azerbaijan. In addition, the analogy method was used. At this stage, an analytical comparison of the results obtained with the conclusions of other scientists involved in the practical development of issues related to an integrated approach to studying aspects of teaching foreign languages in modern conditions was carried out.

At the final stage of the research paper, the obtained results of the scientific study were summarized, reflecting them and generally determining the main trends in the further development of methods for teaching foreign languages in Azerbaijan. In general, the results obtained in the course of this scientific research, as well as the conclusions formulated on their basis, can be used...
in the future as an effective scientific basis for researching the prospects for studying the impact
of language learning methods on the formation of literate young professional specialists in their
sector.

**Research Procedures**

The research is limited by the conditions of complete digital transformation of all sectors
and areas of Azerbaijan. This is especially true for the education sector. This is due to the
importance of introducing modern methods of learning foreign languages for a quality educational
process. At the same time, the main task will be to develop the skills, abilities, and competencies
necessary for the introduction of modernized methods of teaching English in the educational
environment. Implementation and adaptation to modern requirements will entail the improvement
and modernization of the entire system of education in society.

**Results**

Today, the most relevant issue in the educational environment is assessing the quality of
teaching. This is especially true for teaching foreign languages. The most significant interest arises
in the countries of the post-Soviet space since they feel the need to abandon the old method of
teaching foreign languages, in which the key task is the translation of grammar, in favor of the
Western system, where the communicative teaching method is fundamental. It should be noted
that a few decades ago, the main part of a foreign language lesson comprised reading and
translating texts and performing grammar exercises, which mainly involved the translation of
grammatical structures from Azerbaijani into English and vice versa (Juškevičienė et al., 2022).
This also applies to the majority of national universities in Azerbaijan. As a result, it became
necessary to modernize the methods of teaching English.

At the moment, the old methods have ceased to be effective. This is due to the emergence
and mass dissemination of modern technologies, the expansion of communication boundaries, and
students' interest in interactively obtaining knowledge. In this issue, it is necessary to emphasize
the importance of the communicative approach, where the teacher must equally pay attention to
the form and content of the educational material.

The modern method of teaching English is based on the classical approach. However, it
should be noted that it was influenced by modernized information technologies, new achievements
in the field of psychology, as well as foreign cinema (Mamedova, 2015). For comparison, authors
can say that a few decades ago, foreign language classes were only reproductive. Most of the time
was spent memorizing words, reading texts, listening to audio recordings, and writing letters. It
can be assumed that for this reason, most adults who have studied the language for a long time can
write and read in English but have difficulty speaking. Modern teaching methods involve the
rejection of reproductive methods of learning in favor of interactive ones (Abduramanova, 2021).
To date, knowledge acquisition is the interaction between the student and the teacher. At the Ganja
State University, as in most higher schools in Azerbaijan, the curriculum is adapted to the needs
of the majority of students.

To date, many methods of teaching English have been identified, each of which has specic
features. This article provides an overview of the main methods of teaching English, which are
most applicable both at the Ganja State University and in most modern national universities in
Azerbaijan.
In modern society, English remains the most popular language that is in demand. Moreover, for a long time, it has been the language of international communication. There are many methods of teaching English. It should be noted that new approaches are regularly developed, so each teacher has the opportunity to choose the best strategy.

Currently, when teaching English, for example, at the Ganja State University, classical approaches with interactive elements are most often used. Fundamental methods include, for example, direct, grammar-translation, audiovisual, audiolingual, and communicative methods (Gamage, 2020).

The transformation of methods of teaching English in Azerbaijan took place at the end of the 20th century (Kuznetsova, 2014). Up to this point, classes consisted only of reading, grammar, rote memorization of words, and literary translation. It is worth noting that these are the most outdated language learning methods that do not help obtain communication skills. Proficiency in a foreign language also involves acquiring a specific set of skills necessary for a student. Such skills include level of proficiency in vocabulary;

- the ability to perceive oral English speech by ear;
- vocabulary volume;
- oral literacy, correct pronunciation, and understanding of the context;
- speed and ability to retell texts;
- writing literacy;
- possession of translation skills.

The most urgent issue in most higher schools is that when teaching English, translating texts is mixed with the skill of perception. This is initially incorrect. Text translation is a specific, rather complex skill that is taught separately, as it is done, for example, in linguistic universities. To master this skill professionally, a person needs to know at least two languages perfectly. Text translation is not a language learning technique but a separate skill.

Before the advent of modern teaching methods, classes were the same: working with text, retelling, and learning new vocabulary. Consequently, the least attention was paid to live communication. It is worth noting that with such a meagerness of the curriculum and the monotony of tasks, only determined and easily trained people will be able to master the language fully. In this matter, it is necessary to understand that the situation of the entire set of meager grammar in real life is barely enough for a lively dialogue with the interlocutor. As of now, English is available to everyone. Moreover, with the development of information technology in many industries, there is a need for business English, which was not previously satisfied by a higher educational institution. At this stage, the inefficiency of the old teaching methods is most acutely felt (Moskvina, 2022).

Changes in teaching methods have occurred due to innovations in the professional field, changes in people’s lifestyles, and new research in psychology (Abdullaeva & Akhmedova, 2016). Humanity began to think differently: to communicate and work in foreign companies, to travel. Modern person strives for self-improvement and self-actualization. To meet the above needs, higher education institutions need to develop a competent language learning program, which should combine various methods to achieve the most significant results.

As it was found out, the most essential modern teaching methods are audiolingual, communicative, and interactive (Setiyadi, 2020). In the Ganja State University, just as in the majority of national universities of Azerbaijan, the process of teaching English to students is being actively transformed. Various didactic games, quizzes, and performances are used for classes.
Students are also offered various activities, training, webinars, and online courses. As for the classical teaching methods, they are also relevant in the classroom. The critical value of traditional methods is the development of basic knowledge. In this article, they should be considered in more detail.

Thus, for example, the direct teaching method involves learning the basics of language and everyday speech, which is used in real life. Some modern experts believe that the language in which the material is taught directly affects the study of English in general. Thus, the main task of the methodology is to artificially introduce students into the world of the language being studied. According to the methodology, all classes shall be conducted in English, from explaining key points to considering new topics (Misiak-Kwit and Zhang, 2022). The work mainly uses English-language literature. When learning a language in this way, the role of the teacher is key to the successful assimilation of knowledge by students. In other words, in the end, the student’s speech should be literate and correct, and the pronunciation should be almost perfect. As for the classical methodology, the student’s understanding of the subtleties, peculiarities, and principles of the existence of a foreign language is fundamental. The work principle is quite simple – grammar is studied, and key rules are later applied to specific examples and reinforced with the help of various exercises.

Both at the Ganja State University and in the modern education system as a whole, the grammar-translation teaching method remains fundamental. This method has been used in the majority of higher educational institutions for more than a decade. The prevalence of this approach is because most of the teachers were trained according to this method. The purpose of this method is to develop the ability to read and translate texts using grammar rules. One of the disadvantages of this principle is that insufficient attention is paid to vocabulary. The study of vocabulary is limited only to the mechanical memorization of words, while the texts offered for reading often belong to complex fiction. Consequently, once in the language environment, it will be difficult for a student to understand others, knowing only the literary language.

Thus, for example, audiovisual and audiolingual methods of teaching foreign languages involve the transfer of language through clear structures since students learn with the help of audio and video recordings (Taci, 2021). The audiovisual approach, for example, involves illustrating speech with pictures that are appropriate in meaning, i.e., demonstrating videos and films. In this case, students use two perception channels simultaneously – auditory and visual. This contributes to the development of associations among students, which allows them to better master the language. The purpose of these methods is to master a living spoken language. These methods are based on the principles of induction – learning that comes from a rule to an example. Given the above, it must be emphasized that for those students who do not study at linguistic universities, these methods are suitable only if they are combined with other approaches.

In this research, the lingua-socio-cultural method can be singled out. The methodology is also used at the Ganja State University, as teachers are convinced that the language should not be a set of lexical and grammatical rules. In this case, teachers allow students to master the communicative means of the language, which help not only to speak English, but also allow them to express themselves.

The communicative teaching method remains the most popular one, as it implies the greatest activity of students. Here the key task of the teacher is to involve all students in the conversation. The main advantage is that all perception channels are involved for a better understanding of the language. The essence of the method is to create real-life situations of
communication. At the same time, the student has the opportunity to consolidate the acquired knowledge in practice. An important advantage of the communicative approach is the variety of exercises, since role-playing games, conversations, and quizzes are used in the classroom. It should be noted that the method was not widespread for a long time, but now it is the leading method along with the grammar-translation method. Teachers very often dwell on these methods and use them in combination (Cibák et al., 2021).

It is scarce in higher educational institutions to use the direct teaching method. This is due to the lack of native speakers among teachers, as well as the low level of English proficiency of students after graduating from school. Methods such as audiolingual and audiovisual in their pure form are practically not used, although sometimes university teachers conduct thematic classes. All the tools in the complex allow diversifying the curriculum and interest the students.

The modernized method of teaching English is based on the synthesis of several key methods of teaching English: classical and modern. For higher educational institutions, the communicative method is essential since almost all its attention is devoted to communication. The main goal of contemporary teaching methods is to overcome the language barrier. The most important thing is to relieve the student of the fear of a foreign language, the fear of speaking, and at the same time develop other important skills and abilities – oral and written speech, listening, and reading. In this issue, it is also necessary to emphasize that grammar is acquired naturally in communication and speaking in a foreign language. The whole process can be described as follows: the student first memorizes phrases and expressions and then analyzes the most common grammatical structures. It can be said that the principle of oral advancing operates in this case.

To understand the methodology of teaching English at the Ganja State University, ten foreign language teachers were observed during the month within the research framework. It was determined that the classical teaching methods with interactive elements prevail in the classroom. In working with students, such methods as, for example, communicative, audiolingual, and audiovisual are also used in addition to the fundamental and grammar-translation teaching methods. In the classroom, students continuously listen to English speech and discuss the videos on the topics they watched. Also, teachers use brainstorming techniques, learning games, group work with illustrative material, and case method tools, which refer to modern technologies for teaching a foreign language.

Having considered the main existing methods of teaching English, it is necessary to understand how they directly affect the learning process. An experiment was conducted at the Ganja State University. Two groups of students studying English were assembled. Each group had 30 students. It should be noted that before this, testing was carried out to determine the level of English language of students. Students with a basic level of English were involved in the experiment.

For the first group, classes in a foreign language were held throughout the week based on the traditional methodology. Students performed work with the text and thematic grammar exercises. The second group was trained according to a radically different methodology. In the classroom, students listened to small real-life situations of various people, performed listening, watched and retold English-language videos, and played thematic games. It should also be emphasized that along with the interactive components, the students also traditionally studied grammar in the same volume as the students of the first group. Additionally, it was proposed to prepare and demonstrate a short interesting story as homework. It should be noted that the classes
in the second group were held exclusively in English. Using the example of the second group in this research, a sample lesson plan can be described in stages.

The first stage of the lesson is organizational. The key tasks are to organize students, introduce them to the atmosphere of English-speaking communication, create a friendly and creative atmosphere, prepare students to work with new language material, as well as develop new phonetic skills. The following methods were used during the work:

- speech exercises using materials on the lesson topic;
- phonetic exercises;
- setting up students for a lesson in the form of a conversation in a foreign language.

The next step is to check the homework. During the experiment, it is worth noting that more than 45% of students were interested in the process and were ready to demonstrate their projects on a free topic. The main task of this stage of the lesson is to identify gaps in students’ knowledge, and difficulties that arose while doing homework. The key components of the stage are as follows: commenting on the performance of the task;

- characterization of typical mistakes, explanation of the reasons causing these mistakes;
- working on mistakes.

Next, according to the lesson plan, the stage of updating knowledge follows. It is necessary to consolidate and test existing knowledge, to determine the depth of understanding and the degree of strength of what was studied in previous lessons, and to update the knowledge necessary in the lesson. At this stage, such techniques as the Bingo game, the game with riddles, interactive cards, and the capabilities of a multimedia projector were used.

During the lesson, the next, according to the plan, is to prepare students for active and conscious acquisition of the material. This stage involves listening to a dialogue on a new topic and setting goals and objectives for studying a new topic. This part of the lesson consists in working on the introduced situation to get acquainted with the new grammatical material, creating a problem. Appropriate textbooks and auditory materials are used at this stage.

Then, the students directly develop the skills and abilities to apply knowledge in practice. At this stage, students learn new material, speaking, listening, writing, and reading with the help of situational games and case method technologies. The final part of the lesson involves the explanation of homework, summing up, and reflection. The lesson built on the interactive learning concept allows the students to master new material.

A month later, an open lesson was held with all students. Students were offered various creative tasks, watching and discussing English-language videos. It was found that those students who studied according to the outdated methodology acquired some new knowledge, but communication skills remained the same despite the large amount of grammar being studied. At the same time, students in the second group took an active part in the lesson and could discuss the English-language videos they watched with the teacher. At the end of the lesson, according to the results of a small final test, it was revealed that the students of the second group showed better results. Out of 30 participants in the first group, 30% of students received more than 80 points out of 100, about 25% received from 70 to 80, while 45% received from 60 to 70. The performance was better in the second group: 42% of students received more than 80 points, 30% received from 70 to 80, and only 28% received from 60 to 70 points. Therefore, it is the mixed teaching method that modern students need. It should be noted that the educational institution in question is at the stage of introducing modernized teaching methods into the educational process. It was noted that
students who are studying according to innovative methods have great success compared to other students.

Ganja State University assumes continuous improvement of curricula, advanced training of teachers, and introduction of innovations in the educational process. In the university’s classroom, various interactive teaching methods are used when working with students, which teachers try to harmoniously synthesize with traditional approaches. It should also be noted that most of the national universities of Azerbaijan require a complete transformation of the educational process as a whole, as well as the introduction of digital technologies in the classroom. Proficiency in a foreign language is a key competence of modern young professionals in all industries and areas.

Discussion

The study results suggest that a combination of classical and modern interactive teaching methods is currently used for English instruction at Ganja State University in Azerbaijan. An experiment with 60 basic-level students found that those taught with modern communicative techniques including videos, games, and presentations showed better English proficiency in a final test than those who learned via traditional grammar translation methods. About 80% of students in the modern instruction group scored over 60% on the test, versus only 70% of the grammar-translation group. This indicates that interactive methods may promote stronger language skills.

Modern trends in teaching English expand the possibilities of each teacher (Karhina, 2023). Authors are talking not only about new information technologies but also about radically different methods and forms of education. The tools of a modern teacher include interactive courses, webinars and training, online communication, watching English-language films, and reading thematic literature. The introduction of certain approaches, according to Mamedova (2015), depends on the creativity of the teacher and their readiness to master modern technologies.

Earlier studies by Abdullaeva and Akhmedova (2016) emphasized the importance of developing strong speaking skills in English language learners. The current study could have compared students’ speaking skill levels before and after exposure to certain teaching methods at Ganja State University. This would provide more context about which methods align with or contradict previous findings. Additionally, Muhamad and Jasim (2022) discussed common language mistakes that arise from directly translating versus understanding context. The present study could have examined if errors in student writing or speaking were reduced through teaching approaches focused on communication versus grammar-translation. This could further validate or question elements of the linguo-socio-cultural method noted by Dawson (2021).

Stefanovic and Klochkova (2021) claim that the methods of teaching a foreign language have changed significantly over the past decade. More modern and effective teaching methods, approaches, and techniques have appeared. In the course of an English lesson, a modern teacher, to a greater extent, uses communication tools – thematic dialogues, discussion of extracurricular literature in a foreign language, analysis of social and real-life situations, performance of specialized thematic creative tasks, game situations, performances, quizzes. Modern technologies in pedagogy provide a student-centered approach to learning, its optimality mobility, and differentiation, taking into account the characteristics of students and their level of English proficiency.

The research examined the key methods of teaching English, which are actively used both at the Ganja State University and in the majority of the Azerbaijani national universities. As it was
found out, both classical and modern interactive teaching methods are used in working with students. Other existing teaching methods and the opinions of foreign experts on classical approaches can also be mentioned in this research. For example, as has already been found out, the most popular is the communicative method. Rashitovna, Inoyatovna, and Sanjarovna (2020) in her publication believe that it is the practice of communication that occupies a special place in teaching English. This approach is directly aimed at developing the skills and basics of speaking English. It should also be emphasized that the introduction of the methodology also implies direct changes in the lesson's structure. The teacher often conducts special thematic practical lessons, as, for example, at the Ganja State University, where game situations are used in working with students, group work is carried out, and tasks are provided focused on identifying mistakes and developing comparison skills.

All this actively involves not only memory but also logical thinking. This develops students’ analytical and imaginative thinking and contributes to the development of the ability to express their thoughts clearly and competently in a foreign language. The rapid development of information technologies provides students access to the latest interactive resources. These, for example, include super-powerful computers with artificial intelligence technologies, modernized Internet technologies, and modern thematic scientific literature. The main task for the teacher is the competent choice of the necessary technologies and their harmonious implementation in the classroom. All this will help interest students in the culture and traditions of the country of the language being studied and will form all the key competencies necessary for a young specialist.

Thus, according to Makhmudov (2021), the fundamental method can be an old-style method. It should be noted that it is extremely rarely used in its pure form in the national higher educational institutions of Azerbaijan. According to many modern experts, this method is not the most effective and interesting. The study of English using this method can be compared with the study of the so-called “dead” languages. They have not been spoken for a long time, and modern students will not need to speak them. A similar principle in its purest form is actively used in medical higher education institutions since future doctors study the basics of Latin. Like many authors, Susanty, Hartati, Sholihin, Syahid, and Liriwati (2021) believed that the communicative teaching method is the most optimal one since it is focused on the practice of communication and the development of speaking skills, in which representatives of classical approaches are not sufficiently interested. The program that is based on the principles of communicative methodology does not involve the study of a particularly complex or specific vocabulary, cumbersome theory of grammar, or the performance of monotonous and time-consuming exercises. Classes are built according to this principle of imitation of various real-life situations and open communication, which focuses on achieving success in communicating with others.

According to Yasmin and Yasmeen (2021), the communicative approach is based on such key communication skills as reading, speaking, listening, and writing. At the initial stage, teachers need to pay the most attention to understanding the context and speaking. This is what the classes with those students who have a basic level of English should begin with. It should also be noted that according to the methodology in the classical version, there is no mandatory translation of texts in the classroom. Muhamad and Jasim (2022) believe that to achieve the greatest result, the teacher needs to select English-language textbooks that are suitable for teaching students in any native language. According to the methodology, the teacher is recommended to start teaching students in a foreign language from the first lesson.
Today, it is necessary to take into account the context of information both in business and in personal communication, according to Aziza (2022). In the modern world, where people understand and can speak English, it is necessary to be extremely clear to the interlocutor. The main task of this method is to help build relationships between the interlocutors, to establish communication through a common cultural base (Degtiarova et al., 2023). The above methods allow the creation of an idea of the modern teaching of English in general. It should be noted that today at the Ganja State University, for example, almost all popular teaching methods are used in a complex, which allows teachers to develop strong language skills among students. As the study recommends, further research should focus on evaluating student proficiency gains under different pedagogical models at Ganja State University. This would provide clearer insights into optimal language teaching methods for this setting. It would also allow for more generalized comparisons and recommendations for other Azerbaijani higher education contexts.

Conclusion

Numerous issues in determining effective English teaching methods require careful study to develop improved education approaches in the digital transformation era. Identifying incentives for developing English language teaching methods in Azerbaijan is crucial for the education sector. Language learning and advancements in sciences and technologies can significantly transform society. An experiment during the study showed that modern language teaching methods help students adapt to English-speaking environments, with approximately 80% of 30 students performing well. Analyzing English teaching issues at Ganja State University highlights the need to introduce modern language learning methods across various educational areas to nurture highly qualified specialists.

Thus, the objective of this study, which sought to investigate prevalent methods of teaching English in Azerbaijan and identify their effectiveness, has been accomplished. The materials of the article are of practical value and can be used in the development of modern methods of teaching English at the Ganja State University in Azerbaijan. Prospects for further research on teaching English in the context of the formation of literate and competitive young professionals are due to the outdated educational, economic, and political system, as well as the innovative potential of the modernized education system. For specialists of all skill levels, the necessary action will be to form a unified teaching strategy that will improve the methods of teaching foreign languages for the educational system in the context of globalization.

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