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Unveiling Linguistic Frontiers in the 21st Century: A Systematic Literature Review of the Rise of Big Data's Role in Data-Driven Language Learning in the Saudi Arabian Context

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Abstract

This study delves into the potential role of big data and data-driven language learning in shaping the language learning landscape within the Saudi Arabian context. A comprehensive literature review, following the four main phases of PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines involving Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to employ specific inclusion/exclusion criteria as well as truncation techniques across major academic databases and prominent journal publishers, revealed a significant gap in research about how data-driven approaches influence language teaching in the Saudi educational context and sociocultural environment. As such, this study aims to illuminate the need to fill the identified gap by providing insight into future avenues for exploring big data's role in language pedagogy specific to Saudi Arabia. By addressing the main research question of how big data can influence and enhance language learning, this research underscores the importance of developing innovative, data-informed strategies that align with Saudi Arabia's educational goals. Ultimately, findings will inform and recommend various approaches to empower language educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in harnessing the transformative potential of big data. This will enable the development of data-driven strategies to foster linguistic competence, promote lifelong language learning, and cultivate a data-driven culture of language proficiency among Saudi students. The research provides valuable insights into an understudied area at the intersection of big data, language pedagogy, and the distinct Saudi educational landscape.

Keywords: Big-data, contemporary language learning research, data-driven education, linguistic frontiers, pedagogical innovation, Saudi Arabia

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Introduction

The pervasive influence of big data has profoundly transformed nearly every domain of contemporary society, ushering in a fundamental shift in how we conceptualize, analyse, and leverage information(Chauhan & Sood, 2021; Emmert-Streib, 2021). This data-driven revolution has had a profound impact on the field of education, particularly in the area of language learning (Pérez-Paredes, 2022; Xu, 2023). The exponential growth of digital resources, online learning platforms, and data-intensive pedagogical tools has catalysed a paradigm shift, unveiling novel frontiers in linguistic instruction and acquisition (Godwin-Jones, 2021). At the forefront of this transformation lies the burgeoning field of Data-Driven Language Learning (DDLL), which leverages the power of big data analytics to inform and optimize language education (Shah & Singh, 2021). DDLL represents a departure from traditional, prescriptive approaches, embracing a more organic, learner-centric paradigm that utilizes the wealth of digital language data to tailor instruction, enhance engagement, and foster autonomous learning trajectories (Sun & Hu, 2020; Zhang, 2022).

The exponential and unprecedented growth of big data in the 21st century has catalysed a paradigm shift in language learning, fostering the exploration of novel pedagogical frontiers and ushering in a remarkable transformation in language learning and its profound influence on pedagogical approaches (Chen & Wojcik, 2016). This paradigm shift has provided a multitude of potential new avenues for data-driven language learning in Saudi Arabia, warranting a systematic exploration of the research landscape.

The Saudi Arabian context presents a unique and fertile ground for exploring the applications and implications of DDLL. With a rapidly expanding digital infrastructure, a tech-savvy youth population, and a strong commitment to educational reform as per the Saudi Vision 2030 (Al-Shehri, 2020), the Kingdom has demonstrated a keen interest in integrating cutting-edge technologies into its educational ecosystem (Hoq, 2020). However, despite the promising potential of DDLL, its implementation in the Saudi context remains relatively unexplored, necessitating a comprehensive synthesis of the extant literature.

This systematic review aims to explore the depth and breadth of the landscape of big data and data-driven language learning research, elucidating the multifaceted role of big data in shaping the language learning landscape within the Saudi Arabian context. It seeks to unveil the intricate interplay between linguistic innovation and technological advancements, illuminating the challenges and opportunities that arise when data-driven English language teaching and learning pedagogies are introduced into the Saudi educational milieu. The review will also delve into the diverse applications of big data analytics in language acquisition, encompassing natural language processing, corpus linguistics, and adaptive learning systems.

As such, to guide this investigation, the study addresses the following key research questions:

- What is the current state of research conducted on data-driven language learning and EFL in the Saudi Arabian context?
- What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of big data in language education in Saudi Arabia?

By answering these two research questions, the study aims to provide an overview of data-driven language learning within the unique sociocultural and educational landscape of Saudi Arabia, highlighting gaps in existing research and proposing future directions for the field.

Literature Review

This study is underpinned by four major and distinct theories. The first theory is big data analytics in education (Shabihi & Kim, 2021), which posits that the vast amounts of educational data generated can be leveraged to gain actionable insights and drive pedagogical innovation (Fiofanova, 2020). As such, this framework emphasises the potential of data-driven approaches to personalize learning experiences, optimize instructional strategies, and enhance educational outcomes (Sharif & Uckelmann, 2024). By applying this lens to language learning, the study aims to explore how big data can revolutionize language pedagogy in the Saudi Arabian context.

The second theory is the language learning pedagogy which emphasises the role of technology and data-driven approaches in enhancing linguistic competence. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Dos Santos, 2020) and the task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach (Ellis et al., 2020; Jackson, 2022) provide a foundation for understanding how big data can be integrated into language learning environments to foster authentic, meaningful interactions and promote learner autonomy. Additionally, the study draws upon the principles of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Chen et al., 2021; Levy, 1997) to examine how big data tools and technologies can support language acquisition.

The study is further situated within the unique concept of the sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia, recognising the influential role of cultural norms, religious values, and educational policies in shaping language learning experiences. The framework incorporates insights from sociocultural theory (Lantolf et al., 2021; Poehner & Lu, 2023), which emphasises the importance of social and cultural factors in language learning. By considering the specific cultural and linguistic landscape of Saudi Arabia, the study aims to uncover how big data can be leveraged to address the particular challenges and opportunities faced by language learners in this context.

The theoretical framework of this study also draws on technology acceptance and adoption theories, incorporating elements from models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Kamal et al., 2020; Marangunić & Granić, 2015) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Sarfaraz, 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2012). These models offer a foundation for understanding the factors that shape the acceptance and integration of big data technologies in language learning contexts, including perceived usefulness, ease of use, and social influences. By exploring these factors within the Saudi Arabian context, the study seeks to identify effective strategies for implementing data-driven language learning approaches.

The integration of these theoretical domains creates a comprehensive framework that directs the systematic literature review and informs the analysis of big data's role in data-driven language learning in Saudi Arabia. By synthesizing insights from big data analytics, language learning pedagogy, sociocultural theory, and technology acceptance models, the study aims to address the identified research gap and contribute to advancing language education in the 21st century.

Exploring Big Data in Language Learning

The origins of data-driven language learning can be traced back to the field of corpus linguistics, which emerged in the 1960s as a result of the increasing availability of electronic text corpora and advancements in computational processing power (Crosthwaite et al., 2023). Pioneering linguists, such as Nelson Francis and Henry Kučera, recognized the potential of using large collections of authentic language data to study linguistic patterns and variations (Zarina, 2024).

Almost three decades ago, the "father" of Data-driven Learning (DDL), Johns (1994), advocated the learning-cantered value of DDL, calling "every student a Sherlock Holmes" (Boulton & Pérez-Paredes, 2024). The fundamental premise underpinning this concept is that learners can uncover a myriad of linguistic facets, ranging from grammatical patterns and lexical semantics to other nuanced aspects of language, through the process of mining the linguistic data and delving into extensive repositories of authentic language (Luo, 2023). This exploratory approach to language learning empowers learners to actively engage in the discovery of linguistic intricacies, fostering a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between form, meaning, and function (Bachtiar, 2024). By immersing themselves in the rich tapestry of authentic language data, learners can cultivate a more realistic grasp of language structures and usage, transcending the limitations of traditional, rule-based language instruction. This data-driven methodology not only enhances learners' linguistic knowledge but also equips them with the tools and strategies to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of language use in real-world contexts (Boulton & Vyatkina, 2021; Lee et al., 2020). Bellaj et al. (2024) state that: "Adaptive learning analytics (ALA) models have grown in favor of HE due to their claims of enhancing student learning outcomes, providing personalized learning paths, and allowing students to interact with course material at their own pace" (p. 24).

Big data has significantly influenced education, with a focus on improving the education process (Cui et al., 2023; Fischer et al., 2020). Its application in higher education, particularly in analytics, has been identified as a key factor in enhancing the learning experience (Mkrttchian et al., 2021; Samsul et al., 2023). The growing role of big data in education has led to the need for effective decision-making and the use of information intelligence (Hosch, 2020; Kalim, 2021). Boulton and Vyatkina (2021) state that:

> A promising direction would be more integration of DDL and SLA. Employing such SLA constructs as implicit and explicit knowledge, receptive and productive knowledge, knowledge breadth and depth, controlled and free production, and testing DDL effectiveness for the development of these knowledge types and language skills would undoubtedly bring both fields forward. (p. 83)

Figure 1 illustrates the author's visualisation of the role of big data in decision-making in education.



Figure 1. Big Data Role in Education – Author's interpretation of Maxwell et al. (2016) and Hartong (2016)

Xin et al. (2022) and Fahd and Miah (2023) further elaborate on the general steps followed in utilising big data as illustrated in Figure One above as follows:

1. **Identify Goals**: Define the objectives and desired outcomes for implementing big data in education, such as improving student performance, optimizing resource allocation, or enhancing the learning experience.

2. **Data Collection**: Gather relevant data from various sources, including student records, learning management systems, assessment data, and other educational platforms.

3. **Data Processing**: Clean, transform, and preprocess the collected data to prepare it for analysis.

4. **Data Analysis**: Apply appropriate analytical techniques, such as statistical modelling, machine learning, or data mining, to extract insights from the processed data.

5. **Insights & Decisions**: Based on the analysed data and visualizations, derive meaningful insights and make informed decisions related to educational strategies, resource allocation, curriculum design, or instructional methods.

6. **Implementation**: Put the decisions into action by implementing changes or new initiatives in the educational system.

7. **Monitoring & Evaluation**: Continuously monitor the impact of the implemented changes and evaluate their effectiveness against the defined goals.

8. **Continuous Improvement**: Based on the monitoring and evaluation results, identify areas for improvement and adjust the process or strategies, accordingly, creating a cycle of continuous improvement.

The application of big data in education brings ethical considerations, especially concerning privacy and security (Baig et al., 2020). Big data holds transformative potential for education and language learning by providing insights into learner behaviours and performance (Caspari-Sadeghi, 2023; Godwin-Jones, 2021). This potential is particularly valuable in higher education, where it can enhance educational quality (Alam & Mohanty, 2023) and improve students' learning experiences (Ang et al., 2020; Fischer et al., 2020).

In language learning, big data presents both significant advantages and challenges. It enables the tracking of learner progress and the analysis of patterns and variables that can lead to enhanced learning outcomes (Godwin-Jones, 2021). However, concerns over transparency, fairness, and the need for human oversight remain pertinent (Godwin-Jones, 2021). The vast data generated by various online platforms can be analysed to reveal broad usage trends and provide individualized reports, thereby supporting more personalized learning experiences (Alam & Mohanty, 2023).

A review of current literature indicates a growing interest in the use of big data in language learning, with studies emphasizing data-driven approaches for personalizing learning, adapting curricula, and delivering targeted feedback (Alghamdi & Rahman, 2023). However, research

focused on the Saudi Arabian context is limited. Although a few studies have examined technology integration in Saudi language education (Al-Shehri, 2020; Baniawwad et al., 2023), the specific role of big data in Data-driven Language Learning (DDLL) in this setting remains underexplored. Despite the rising use of big data analytics (BDA) in Saudi higher education institutions, these tools are not yet fully utilized, resulting in less-than-optimal outcomes (Aseeri & Kang, 2023). Aljasir (2022) found that Saudi self-learners of English tend to have realistic views about language acquisition, with a strong link between belief in language aptitude and self-assessed proficiency. Aljameel (2022) proposed a framework for applying big data in Saudi higher education, which could be extended to foreign language learning. Nonetheless, further investigation is needed to understand big data's specific impact on language learning in the Saudi context.

DDLL within the Saudi context has various elements of potential benefits, challenges, and future directions. Big data can also facilitate the development of adaptive learning systems that dynamically adjust to learners' needs and preferences (Singh et al., 2021). These data-driven approaches have the potential to enhance linguistic competence, increase learner engagement, and promote self-directed learning.

Despite the promising potential of big data in language learning, its implementation in the Saudi Arabian context presents unique challenges. One significant challenge is the limited availability of high-quality language learning data specific to the Saudi context (Baniawwad et al., 2023). The lack of diverse and representative datasets can hinder the development of effective DDLL models. Additionally, cultural and societal factors, such as the prevalence of traditional teaching methods and the varying levels of technological readiness across educational institutions, may impact the adoption and effectiveness of data-driven approaches.

Furthermore, ethical considerations surrounding data privacy and security must be carefully addressed. The collection, storage, and use of student data raise concerns about potential misuse and unauthorized access (Bamiah et al., 2018). Establishing robust data governance frameworks and ensuring compliance with relevant regulations are essential to maintain trust and protect learners' rights (Almutairi, 2021; Binjubeir et al., 2019).

This literature review has highlighted the potential of big data in data-driven language learning in the Saudi Arabian context. While the current state of research is limited, the benefits of leveraging data analytics to personalize learning experiences and adapt curriculum are evident. However, implementing DDLL in the Saudi context presents challenges related to data availability, cultural factors, and ethical considerations.

Methodology

A systematic literature review is a valuable approach to comprehensively search for, gather, and critically analyse previous studies that are pertinent to a particular research topic or question (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021). It involves a thorough examination and integration of the available evidence base to provide an in-depth assessment aimed at addressing specific research inquiries through a rigorous synthesis of the findings across multiple sources. By systematically collating and evaluating the existing scholarly work, a systematic review enables researchers to consolidate the current state of knowledge, identify gaps, and draw well-informed conclusions within a focused area of investigation. Systematic reviews use explicit and replicable methods to retrieve all available literature and publications related to or pertaining to a specific topic to answer a specific and defined question (Higgins, 2008).

The systematic literature review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) four main phases of identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion (Rethlefsen et al., 2021). See Figure Two.

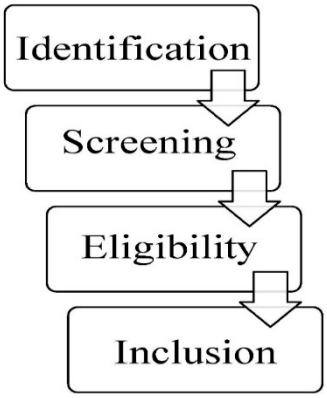


Figure 2. PRISMA's main four steps (Higgins & Green, 2008; Rethlefsen et al., 2021)

Also, the databases search employed a comprehensive search strategy utilising Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) and truncation techniques to identify relevant studies across major academic databases and prominent journal publishers. The search strings will combine keywords related to "big data," "data-driven learning," "language learning," and "Saudi Arabia," and their variants using wildcards and truncation symbols (e.g., "big data* learn*", "language learn*", "Saudi Arab*"). These search strings were adapted and refined for each database and publisher to ensure a thorough and inclusive coverage of the relevant literature.

Additionally, to establish rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria, the search results were filtered based on a set of predefined parameters. Studies were included if they focus on the integration of big data or data-driven approaches in language learning contexts, with a particular emphasis on the Saudi Arabian educational landscape. The database search only included peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and academic books published within the last decade were considered to ensure the relevance and currency of the findings. Exclusion criteria will involve (if applicable) removing duplicates, studies not available in English, and those that do not directly address the research questions or the intersection of big data, language learning, and the Saudi context.

Search Strategy

To conduct a comprehensive search, four major scientific databases were systematically explored: Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Springer Link, Taylor & Francis Online, and Sage journals. The selection of these databases was based on their extensive coverage and widespread use within the field of computer science. Additionally, Google Scholar was utilised to broaden the search scope, allowing for the inclusion of certain sources that could potentially provide valuable contributions to the systematic review. The final search across all databases was performed in April 2024 to ensure the most up-to-date information was captured.

To evaluate the identified studies and select the most pertinent ones for inclusion in this systematic review, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were implemented. The inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical case studies, theoretical research papers, as well as open-access publications. In contrast, sources such as book reviews, editorials,

posters, dissertations, and conference presentations were excluded from consideration. These criteria were employed to ensure the identification of robust practices, methodologies, and findings that could potentially inform and enhance the pedagogical approaches of language educators in Saudi Arabia when integrating big data and data-driven learning into their instructional practices. The overarching goal was to synthesize high-quality evidence that could guide the effective implementation of data-driven language education tailored to the unique educational landscape of Saudi Arabia.

The following various search entries with keywords and search terms were used in the main journals' databases:

1. ("Big data" OR "data-driven learning") AND ("language learning" OR "linguistic competence") AND "Saudi Arabia"
2. ("Big Data" AND "Language Learning" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "Second Language Acquisition" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "EFL" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "EFL" AND "Saudi Arabia")
3. ("Big Data" AND ("Language Learn*" OR "Second Language Acquisit*") AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "EFL" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "ESL" AND "Saudi Arabia")

The process of searching the five specified databases above was executed with the varied terms listed above to ensure the comprehensiveness of the results. The first search combines "Big data" with language learning concepts, specifically in Saudi Arabia. The second expands this, including alternative phrasings and related terms like "DDLL", "EFL" and "KSA". The third search further refines the approach, employing wildcards to capture variations of key phrases. This method allows researchers to cast a wide net while maintaining focus on the intersection of big data, language learning, and the Saudi Arabian context. By adjusting search terms, researchers can fine-tune their results, balancing specificity with breadth to capture relevant literature across different database indexing systems. Table One below lists the main search string for each database.

Table 1. *Search string for each database*

Database	Search String
ScienceDirect	("Big Data" AND "Language Learning" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "Second Language Acquisition" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "EFL" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "EFL" AND "Saudi Arabia")
Springer Link	("Big Data" AND ("Language Learn*" OR "Second Language Acquisit*") AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "EFL" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "ESL" AND "Saudi Arabia")
Taylor & Francis Online	(All: "bert") AND (All: "arabic") AND (All: "text classification") OR (All: "sentiment analysis")
Sage Journals	("Big data" OR "data-driven learning") AND ("language learning" OR "linguistic competence") AND "Saudi Arabia"
Google Scholar	"Big data" "data-driven language learning" "language learning" "linguistic competence" "Saudi Arabia"

Findings

The remarkably low number of search results generated from major academic databases was quite evident in the results obtained (See Appendix A - Figures Five & Six). In table Two, Appendix B, the results of each database search are illustrated. It can be clearly seen that a shortage on the number of studies on big data's role in data-driven language learning in Saudi Arabia exists, which is compounded by the fact that many of the search results (studies) may prove tangential or irrelevant. Table 3, Appendix C, lists five studies obtained from the Springer Link® database search. However, upon further examination, these studies were found to be either intangible or irrelevant to the current research objectives.

Out of all the searches that were carried out with the five major databases, the search conducted with Google Scholar® generated 10 results which surprisingly, also led to the elimination of 9 irrelevant studies and the inclusion of one single study that fit the criteria of our search. Figures 3 and 4 highlight the resultant search on Google Scholar® and the relevant included study.

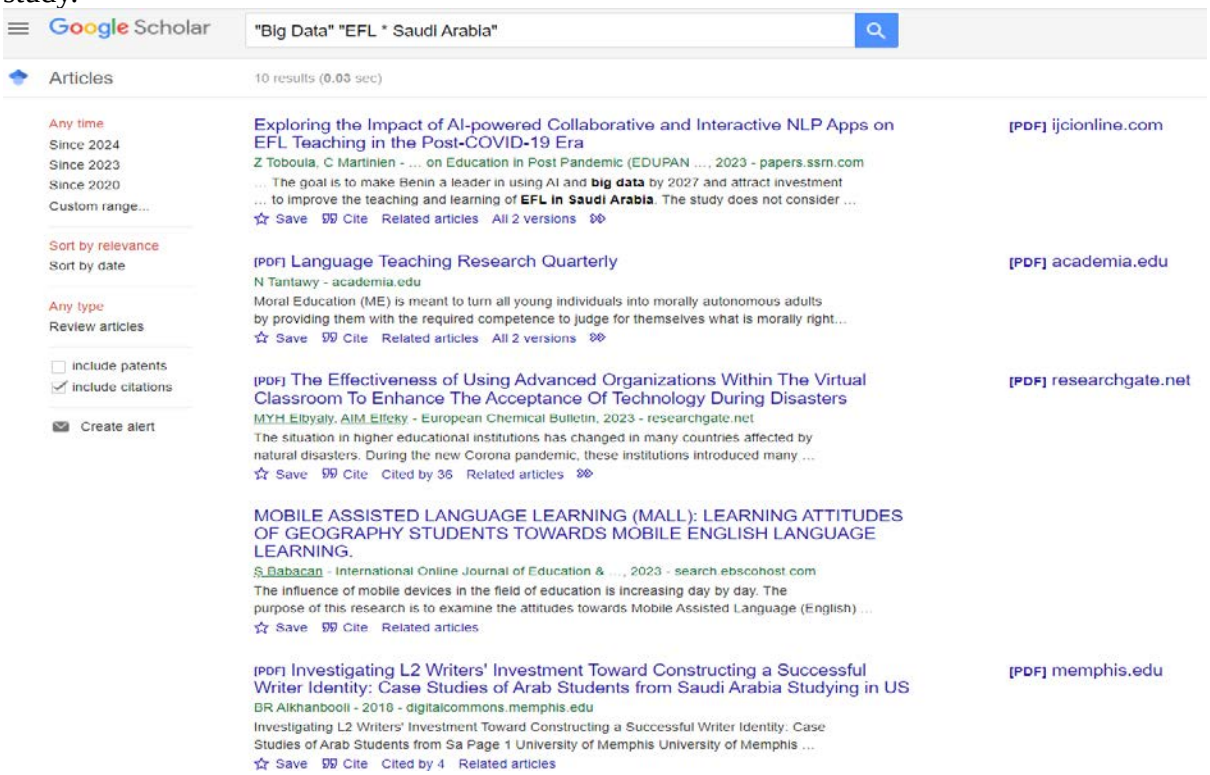


Figure 3. Search results on Google Scholar®

Figure 4 illustrates the main steps and processes involved in highlighting the inclusion of a sample



Figure 4. The inclusion of the accepted research study

The included study by Alhammad (2023) explored the application of Learning Analytics (LA) in the EFL classroom to predict educational benefits as per the data gathered and saved from Learning Management Systems (LMSs) and e-learning platforms. The study analysed the learning behaviours of 25 EFL female learners at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia. Results showed a significant correlation between video lessons and final grades, highlighting the importance of technology in forecasting student performance as well as the fact that learning analytics can help course developers, teachers, and learners improve educational outcomes by identifying learning patterns and predicting performance in assessment tests.

Discussion

For Research Question 1: "What is the current state of research conducted on data-driven language learning and EFL in the Saudi Arabian context?", it can be seen that the review reveals a limited number of studies focused specifically on DDLL in Saudi Arabia, with existing research often examining related fields or lacking a focus on big data's role in EFL. This gap underscores the importance of further investigation to understand how big data-driven methodologies can be optimised for this unique educational landscape. While Alghamdi & Rahman (2023) highlight the general potential of data-driven approaches to personalise learning experiences, only a few studies (e.g., Al-Shehri, 2020; Baniawwad et al., 2023) have explored technology integration in Saudi language education specifically. This limited focus underscores the need for further research to tailor DDLL to Saudi Arabia's unique educational landscape. The theoretical frameworks of big data analytics in education, as discussed by Shabihi & Kim (2021), suggest that data-driven methodologies could be transformational in optimising instructional strategies and personalizing language learning in Saudi Arabia. However, as highlighted, there is still a need for studies that investigate these benefits within the specific cultural and linguistic context of Saudi EFL classrooms

For Research Question 2: "What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the integration of big data in language education in Saudi Arabia?", it can be seen that the findings highlight several challenges in implementing data-driven approaches, such as Baniawwad et al. (2023) who note that a major challenge in Saudi Arabia is the limited availability of diverse and representative language learning datasets, which can impede the development of effective DDLL models. Additionally, societal and cultural factors, such as the reliance on traditional teaching methods, may impact the adoption of innovative, data-driven approaches.

Additionally, opportunities for enhancing language learning through big data include. These findings align with studies like Singh et al. (2021) who underscore the potential of big data to create adaptive learning systems that adjust to individual learner needs. This approach is particularly promising in Saudi Arabia, where data-driven models could engage students more effectively by tailoring content to their linguistic and cultural preferences.

The various literature searches were conducted across multiple prominent academic databases, including ScienceDirect®, SpringerLink®, SAGE Journals®, Wiley Online Library®, and Google Scholar®, to assess the current state of research on "Unveiling Linguistic Frontiers in the 21st Century: A Systematic Literature Review of the Rise of Big Data's Role in Data-Driven Language Learning in the Saudi Arabian Context". The search yielded an unexpectedly low number of relevant publications, strongly suggesting that this specific area remains significantly under-researched. This paucity of scholarly work is particularly noteworthy given the breadth and depth of coverage these databases typically provide across various disciplines, especially in the

fields of linguistics, education, and data science. The limited search results underscore a substantial gap in the existing body of knowledge, indicating a pressing need for further investigation and scholarly attention within the Saudi Arabian context. This dearth of research not only highlights the novelty of the topic but also presents a unique opportunity for researchers to make substantial contributions to the field of data-driven language learning in Saudi Arabia. The issue is further substantiated by the fact that the database searches for research studies pertaining to the main topic, which yielded a paucity of results, and exhibited a conspicuous lack of relevance to the central query, failing to adequately address the nexus between big data analytics and technology-enhanced language acquisition within the Saudi context.

The scarcity of published works may be attributed to several factors, such as the emerging nature of big data applications in language learning, methodological challenges in implementing data-driven approaches in the Saudi educational system, or a lack of awareness regarding the potential significance of this intersection within the academic community. Consequently, this under-researched area represents fertile ground for innovative studies, interdisciplinary collaborations, and the development of new theoretical frameworks tailored to the unique linguistic and cultural landscape of Saudi Arabia. Future research initiatives in this domain have the potential to significantly advance our understanding of how big data can revolutionize language learning practices in the Kingdom and potentially yield valuable insights with far-reaching implications for educational policy and practice in the region.

Though there were several search results generated from the chosen databases, the vast majority (if not nearly all) of those results were either unrelated to the focus of this study or, related to different contexts or different purposes. The only research paper which can be said to have been very related to our literature review is the study by Alhammad (2023) which examined the use of Learning Analytics (LA) in an EFL classroom at a Saudi university and emphasized its immense benefits in Language Learning (EFL) as supported by previous studies such as Zhang (2022), Godwin-Jones (2021) and Crosthwaite et al. (2023). The study analysed the online learning behaviours of 25 female undergraduate students over Six weeks using data from the Blackboard Learning Management System (LMS). It found that lesson videos were accessed most frequently, followed by practice exercises, with textual notes used least. There was a significant correlation between viewing teacher videos/readings and final exam performance. Topic completion and practice exercises also positively correlated with grades. The study concluded that LA could provide valuable insights into student learning patterns and help predict academic performance in EFL contexts. It recommends ways teachers can use LA to improve instruction and support students in the Saudi context which is in parallel with previous studies which supported the idea of utilising Big Data in education in KSA such as Lee et al. (2020), Almutairi (2021) and Baniawwad et al. (2023).

This systematic review has underscored the importance of big data in advancing language learning in the Saudi Arabian context. While unique challenges exist, the foundational principles highlighted in previous studies on data-driven education and EFL provide valuable insights. These findings suggest that a culturally and technologically tailored approach to integrating data analytics could help overcome current barriers. The review ultimately reinforces the need for further research to realize the full potential of DDLL within Saudi Arabia's educational system

Recommendation for Future Research

Due to the limited research on the role of big data in language learning within the Saudi Arabian context, further exploration is essential. Future studies should aim to develop and assess DDLL models that address the unique needs and characteristics of Saudi learners. Additionally, researchers should examine sociocultural factors that could affect the acceptance and effectiveness of data-driven methods in language education. Investigations that combine big data with other emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and natural language processing, could offer valuable insights for improving language learning experiences. Addressing these challenges and integrating advanced technologies could strengthen language education in Saudi Arabia. Leveraging big data in this way, educators and policymakers can work toward establishing a data-driven language learning environment that promotes linguistic proficiency and equips learners for the demands of the 21st century.

Conclusion

This study has explored the present landscape of research on data-driven language learning (DDLL) within the Saudi Arabian context, highlighting both the promising advantages and the obstacles related to adopting big data methods in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The findings reveal a significant research gap in understanding how big data-driven methodologies can be optimized for the unique sociocultural and educational landscape of Saudi Arabia. This gap, coupled with the growing importance of personalized and technology-enhanced learning, underscores the need for tailored approaches that consider local educational priorities and learner needs.

The review has shown that while DDLL offers numerous opportunities to improve engagement, adapt learning content, and enhance linguistic competence, challenges such as data availability, ethical considerations, and the need for culturally sensitive practices must be addressed. As noted, there is a need for frameworks that effectively integrate big data with emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and natural language processing, aiming to create adaptive, learner-centred environments that empower students and educators alike.

Ultimately, by bridging current research gaps and adopting data-driven strategies, Saudi educators and policymakers have the potential to foster a robust language learning ecosystem that aligns with the nation's Vision 2030 goals. This ecosystem can cultivate linguistic competence, lifelong learning, and technological proficiency, equipping Saudi learners to meet the demands of an increasingly interconnected and digital world. Continued research and innovation in this domain will be essential for driving future advancements in language education and for ensuring that DDLL methods serve as transformative tools within Saudi Arabia's educational landscape.

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Appendices
Appendix A

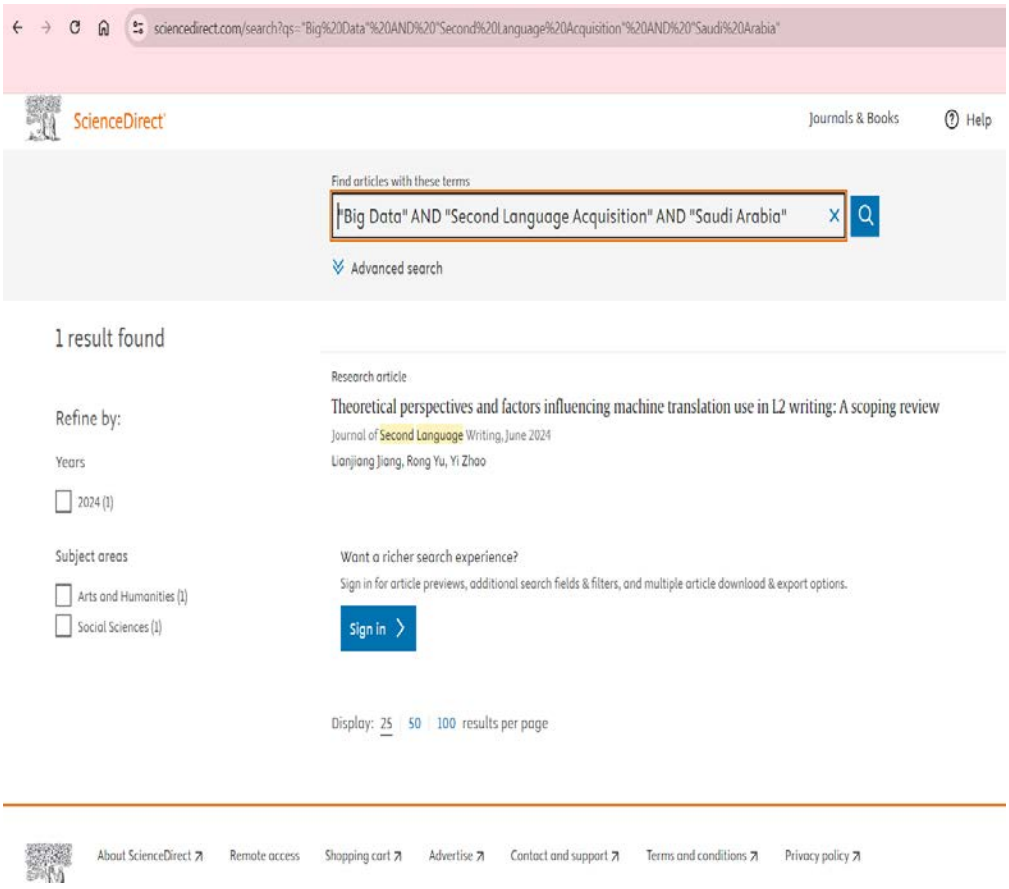


Figure 5. Search Results ***Sciencedirect*** – April 2024

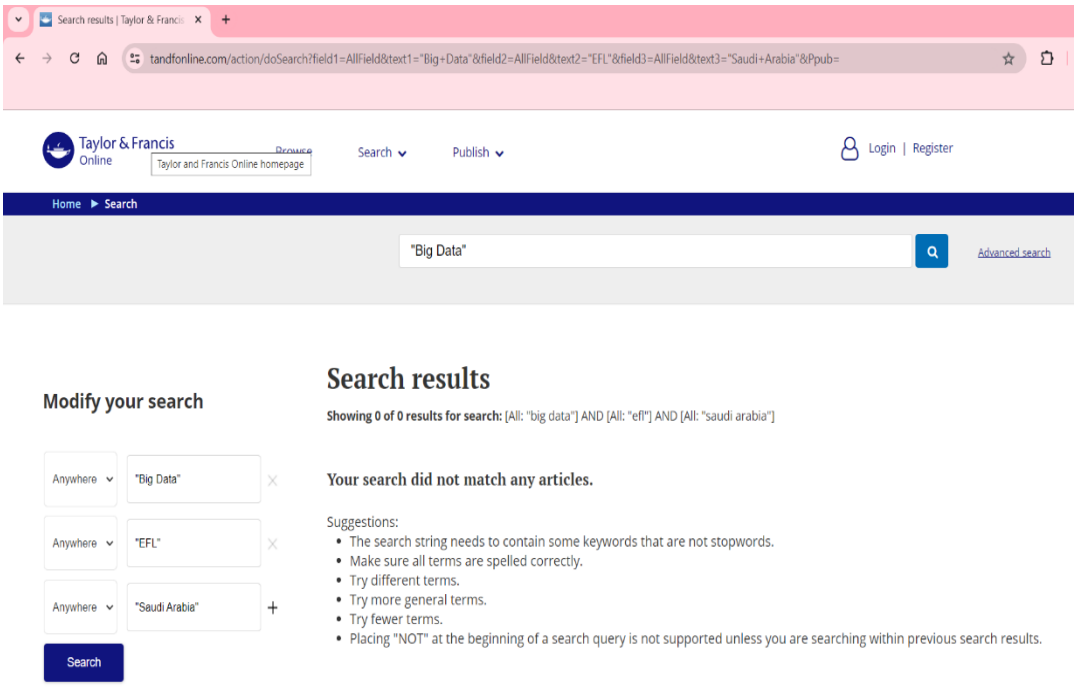


Figure 6. Search Results ***Taylor & Francis*** – April 2024

Appendix B

Table 2. *Keywords used for the process of finding relevant literature in the databases*

Databases	Keywords Used	Identification Phase	Included Phase
ScienceDirect	("Big Data" AND "Language Learning" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "Second Language Acquisition" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "EFL" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "EFL" AND "Saudi Arabia")	3	0
Springer Link	("Big Data" AND ("Language Learn*" OR "Second Language Acquisit*") AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "EFL" AND "Saudi Arabia") OR ("Big Data" AND "ESL" AND "Saudi Arabia")	5	0
Taylor & Francis	(All: “bert”) AND (All: “arabic”) AND (All: “text classification”) OR (All: “sentiment analysis”)	0	0
Sage Journals	("Big data" OR "data-driven learning") AND ("language learning" OR "linguistic competence") AND "Saudi Arabia"	3	0

Google Scholar (UK)	"Big data" "data-driven language learning" "language learning" "linguistic competence" "Saudi Arabia"	10	1

Appendix C

Table 3. *Results of the search in the Springer Link® databases*

No	Article Title	Author	Journal	Year
1	Towards automated writing evaluation: A comprehensive review with bibliometric, scientometric, and meta-analytic approaches	Yi Xue	Education and Information Technologies	2024
2	A decision support system for assessing the role of the 5G network and AI in situational teaching research in higher education	Xiaoshuang Liu, Mohammad Faisal, Abdullah Alharbi	Soft Computing	2022
3	Students' psychology for teaching design with artificial intelligence approaches for enhancing teaching	Lu Wang	Soft Computing	2023
4	Editorial for EAIT issue 6, 2020	Arthur Tatnall	Education and Information Technologies	2020
5	JOINT 12th EBSA congress and 10th ICBP – IUPAP congress, July 20-24, 2019, Madrid, Spain – Abstracts	n/a	European Biophysics Journal	2019

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Written Assignments and Generative Artificial Intelligence: Challenges and Considerations for English Education Major Students at A'Sharqiyah University, Oman

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Abstract
This study aims to provide insight into the perceptions of English Education major students regarding the utilization of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) in the completion of written assignments. This research employed both quantitative and descriptive qualitative designs. Quantitative data were obtained from closed-ended questionnaire items administered to 58 English Education major students, while qualitative data were collected from open-ended questionnaire questions. The results revealed that most students utilized GAI for written assignments; however, they did not consider it acceptable to rely on GAI entirely. The majority did not support banning GAI in educational contexts. The most frequent uses of GAI were to check grammar, improve vocabulary, and generate ideas. Additionally, almost half of the participants believed that GAI hindered the development of their thinking and writing skills. The majority, however, agreed that GAI assisted their learning. Students' opinions were equally divided on whether using GAI improved their grades or not. Based on these findings, suggestions and recommendations are provided.
Keywords: A'Sharqiyah University, English education, generative artificial intelligence, Oman, perceptions, written assignments

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Introduction

The rapid increase of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) applications that can create new contexts and easy access among students worldwide has raised concerns among language educators. Some educators feel that students might rely on AI-generated contexts to complete their assignments instead of actively engaging in the learning process and seriously focusing on enhancing their skills. Such an approach can potentially hinder the development of their learning skills. On the other hand, some educators see pedagogical value in GAI applications, which can enhance students' work quality, save time, improve their learning skills, and develop their critical thinking.

Amidst such diverse views toward the use of GAI in education, as instructors of English and teacher educators at A'Sharqiyah University in Oman, we, as well, have found ourselves on that threshold seeking answers that can shed better light on the context where we teach. The undergraduate English Education program at A'Sharqiyah University was established in 2021 and aims to prepare prospective English language instructors. During the four-year course of their undergraduate study, students enroll in different courses that focus on building arrays of their skills, such as their English language proficiency, thinking skills, and teaching skills. In every course, students are further expected to spend a certain number of hours on independent self-study. Hence, students are given homework assignments and projects to provide them with opportunities to review the class materials and consolidate their (language) learning.

In their prospective roles as English language teachers, the graduates will be teaching in different educational settings in Oman, namely primary, middle, secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary levels; hence, it is expected by the end of the program, the graduates will develop their English language skills and teaching skills. Nevertheless, the new reality that the emergence of GAI tools has imposed on educational settings has triggered concerns about whether GAI could benefit or harm students' learning outcomes. Therefore, investigating English Education major students' perspectives on the utilization of GAI tools when approaching their academic written assignments is critical for effectively implementing GAI applications in the educational field.

Literature Review

Non-Native Arabic Speakers' Linguistic Needs

Teaching the English language has a fundamental place in Omani education. Under the new Education system enacted in 1998, Omani students learn English from grade one through twelve (Sergon, 2011). In higher education contexts, many institutions have adopted English as a medium of instruction for majors such as Engineering, Computer Science, and Business. English is also a university requirement course for all majors at the university. Given the importance of the English language in the Omani curriculum, the need for efficient English language instructors is rising. A cursory look over the Internet can demonstrate the demand for English language instructors in Oman.

Nevertheless, Al-Issa (2006) points out that students exiting school still encounter challenges communicating in English. According to Al-Issa, since Omani students receive significant instruction in grammar, grammatical competence seems to be the least problematic area for them in comparison to other areas: discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Similarly, in their study on difficulties faced by students in academic writing in a higher education context in Oman, Mustafa et al. (2022) indicated that the challenges students faced when writing in English included a limited range of vocabulary, inability to use a range of

grammatical structures, difficulty comprehending English reading texts, and difficulties in summarizing and paraphrasing. Research studies conducted in different EFL contexts revealed similar results regarding EFL learners (see, for example, Alsariera & Alsaraireh, 2024; Ibrahim, 2021; Anh, 2019).

The instructional needs of EFL learners are different from native speakers, according to Ferris (2003), who, in her chapter titled "An Overview of First Language (L1) Composition Research on Responses and Its Influence on Second Language (L2) Writing Theory and Practice," points out that some L2 experts (Raimes, Spack, Zamel) have argued that L2 learners need the same sort of instructions as L1, however, they need 'more of everything'" (p. 16). Ur (2012) points out that teaching writing requires specific instructions, as it cannot simply be acquired without effort. Therefore, instructors can help their students develop their writing ability through "*the process-writing cycle,*" (160). Process writing views writing as a creative act that requires time and effort to be done well. It involves a series of stages, such as brainstorming, planning, writing, drafting, revising, and editing before students produce the final versions.

AI in Education

In their study on the perspectives of 61 Omani students, Al-Raimi et al. (2024) reported that the students had positive perceptions toward using GAI. It was found that the most common uses of GAI included translating words, phrases, and sentences, as well as checking spelling and grammar. The participants also indicated that they used AI tools to generate ideas for their writing and to help them compose essays and paragraphs. Aladin's (2023) study, which was conducted at Dhofar University (Oman), showed that AI dictionary programs and applications, such as Grammarly and QuillBot, proved to be effective in improving students' academic writing skills and logical thinking, as the students could express themselves clearly and made fewer mistakes. Similarly, Syahrin and Akmal (2024) examined the perceptions of instructors, students, and administrative staff on the role of ChatGPT at Dhofar University (Oman) and found that students extensively used AI to assist them with their assignments, understand complex problems, improve the quality of their written work, brainstorm for research ideas, and refine topics.

Results from a research study on the perceptions of GAI in higher education at the University of Liverpool also revealed that the majority of the students supported other students using GAI technologies for grammar help; however, they did not support using the technologies to write an entire essay (Johnston et al., 2024). Similarly, findings in a study conducted in an Indonesian context showed that students positively responded to using AI. Among the benefits of AI was that it helped students with their academic research, especially in the stages of planning, selecting a topic, and drafting (Utami et al., 2023). Farrelly and Baker (2023) also mentioned various benefits of AI for learners whose native language is not English. They stated that AI has the potential to serve as a personal language tutor for learners.

Pitychoutis (2024), in their comprehensive review of previous studies on using AI chatbots, also revealed that these digital assistants hold significant promise in advancing EFL students' essay writing skills, as they offered students "personalised and interactive learning experiences that resonate with constructivist learning principles, communicative language teaching methodologies, and the input hypothesis" (p. 197). Mudawy (2024) reported EFL instructors at Majmaah University had a positive view toward the use of AI tools and believed these applications "can improve efficiency and quality in the research writing process" (p. 181); however, the instructors indicated the need for more training in the use of AI tools.

On the other hand, findings from other research studies have revealed conflicting views toward ChatGPT. For instance, Al-Zubaidi et al. (2024), in their study among Moroccan students, point out that the respondents admitted that ChatGPT can be both beneficial and harmful to the students. According to one of their respondents, "It can save some of our time, but it is not to be fully depended on. Human intervention is always needed when using this App" (pp.20-21).

Along the same lines, there is a concern among educators that written assignments may become unnecessary or that to ensure fairness in higher education assessment, traditional methods of assessment (such as pen and paper exams) may be implemented (Farrelly & Baker, 2023). Akbari (2024) rejects such an argument and states that such claims are similar to arguing that no one should practice strength training because carts and forklifts can be used to move heavy stuff. Similarly, writing is learned for the cognitive and communicative benefits it provides learners. As to the return to the traditional argument, according to Harvard University (n.d.), "is unrealistic, pedagogically dubious, or both." Aljuaid (2024), in their systematic review which examined whether AI tools are replacing university academic writing courses, concluded that such courses develop "students' critical thinking, research, and communication abilities beyond the basic mechanics of writing that AI can automate" (p. 42); so, in light of this, AI cannot replace university academic writing courses. It is more likely that AI will be integrated as a supplementary resource to enhance students' learning and writing proficiency.

Another issue related to GAI that alarm educators is maintaining academic integrity. Fleckenstein et al. (2024) point out that current AI tools can generate texts that teachers cannot identify as AI-generated, posing a challenge for schools and universities when grading students' essays. The researchers strongly recommend a "meaningful exploration of strategies with and without the use of generative AI for assessment and learning in school," (p. 8). Akbari (2024) warns that just like steroids in the world of sports, GAI could create a "global cheating crisis that undermines the purpose and value of an education," (para. 2). In other words, GAI poses a threat to academic integrity. For example, students might develop the sense that only through using ChatGPT they can get better grades; otherwise, they risk losing college admissions, scholarships, and career opportunities. Individuals pursuing an online degree, such as in social work, can become a danger to others if they pass their exams through cheating.

Research Questions

1. How often do students use GAI when writing their assignments?
2. To what extent do students consider relying on GAI acceptable when approaching the completion of their assignments?
3. Do students support banning GAI in educational contexts?
4. For which purposes do students use GAI when working on their writing assignments?
5. Do students feel GAI generative tools help or harm their: a. thinking skills? b. writing skills? c. learning skills?
6. Do students consider using GAI to complete written assignments a form of cheating?
7. Do students think using GAI affects the grading of their assignments?

Method

The participants in this study were 58 first-year undergraduate students majoring in English Education at A'Sharqiyah University. We designed and conducted a 16-item written questionnaire to obtain information about the students' perspectives on the use of GAI when approaching written

assignments. Both closed and open-ended questions were used in the questionnaire. The number of closed-ended and open-ended questions was eight each. Quantitative data was obtained through the closed-ended questions, and qualitative data was obtained through the open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were used as follow-ups to the closed-ended questions, where the respondents were invited to elaborate on their responses to the closed-ended questions.

The questionnaire was created using Google Forms. To ensure its validity, the questionnaire was piloted to four students, who are not part of this study. Discrepancies and ambiguities in the questionnaire were fixed before sending it out to the participants. The questionnaire was sent out to 74 students enrolled in the first year English Education program at A'Sharqiyah University, and 58 students responded.

Quantitative results from the questionnaire were automatically analyzed by Google Forms and presented in pie graphs in both numbers and percentages. In contrast, the researchers analyzed the qualitative data by identifying themes and organizing the information according to the research questions. To preserve the authenticity of students' voices, when reporting their quotes, we did not make any linguistics edits. Data obtained from the questionnaire were reported using pie graphs, tables, and narratives.

Results

Utilization of GAI

Figure one indicates 29(50%) of the students responded they always/often utilized AI tools when completing their written assignments; on the other hand, 22(37.9%) students stated rarely, and seven (12.1%) students said that they never used AI tools (figure 1).

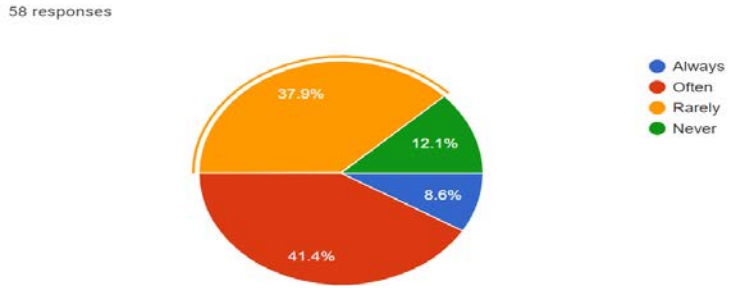


Figure 1. Students' utilization of GAI

Reliance on GAI

In response to whether it is acceptable to rely on GAI when completing written assignments, it was found that 35(60.3%) of the students indicated that it is not acceptable, whereas 23(39.7%) students stated that it was acceptable (figure 2).

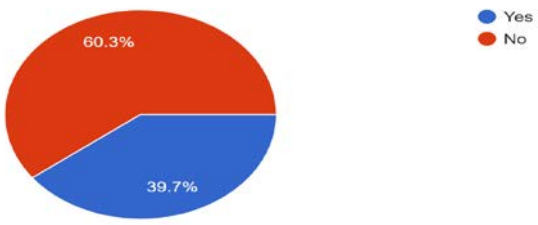


Figure 2. Students' reliance on GAI

Banning AI in Educational Settings

As shown in figure three, 49(84.5%) of the participants believed that AI should not be banned in educational settings, while 9(15.5%), stated that it needs to be banned (figure 3).

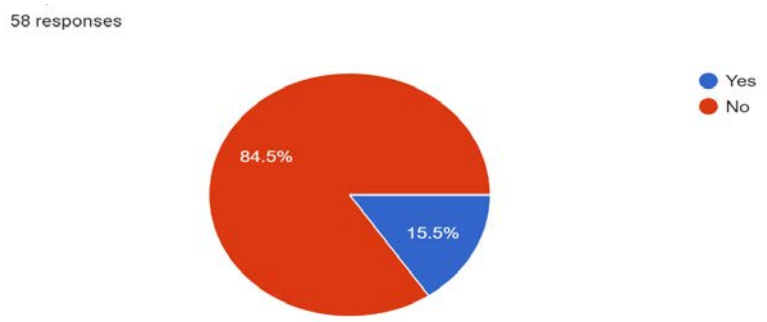


Figure 3. Students' perception towards banning AI in educational settings

***Open*-ended Questions**

The following quotes from students provide reasons for not banning GAI:

- *"Because it is very important, and most students depend on it."*
- *"It is not right to ban it because it is an effective tool to help and because the future is based on it."*
- *"Using AI is really helpful to get a good grade and learn new things through AI."*
- *"It's an exceptional tool for creativity and should be treated like one."*

Other students who supported the banning of GAI in educational settings, stated:

- *"AI sometimes slows down skills and thinking."*
- *"Not all students have the same level of critical thinking and English skills when they want to improve their grades, so they depend on AI to help them."*

The Purpose for which AI was Used

GAI to Generate Ideas

Table One indicates 26(44.8%) of the students used GAI to generate ideas, and 14(24.1%) occasionally used to do so, whereas 12(20.6%) indicated they rarely and very rarely used AI to generate ideas. The number of students who never used AI to generate ideas was 6(10.3%). Apparently, students who used AI to generate ideas seemed to be higher than those who rarely or never did so.

GAI to Organize Ideas

As indicated in Table One, when it came to organizing ideas, 21(36.2%) of the respondents indicated that they very frequently/frequently used GAI to organize ideas, followed by 12(20.7%) who said that they occasionally used AI to organize their ideas. The number of students who rarely/very rarely used GAI to organize ideas is shown to be 12(20.7%) and those who never used AI to organize ideas is 13(22.4%).

GAI to Check and Correct Grammar

Most of the students 28(48%) reported they very frequently/frequently used GAI to check and correct grammar, and 14(24.1%) stated they occasionally used GAI for this purpose. Additionally, some of the students 13(22.4%) indicated they rarely/very rarely utilized AI to check grammar and 3(5.2%) never used GAI for this purpose (Table 1).

Table 1. *The purpose for which AI was used by students*

	very frequently	**frequently**	**occasionally**	**rarely**	**very rarely**	**Never**
To generate ideas	10(17.2%)	16(27.6%)	14(24.1%)	8(13.7%)	4(6.9%)	6(10.3%)
to organize the ideas	10(17.2%)	11(19%)	12(20.7%)	7(12.1%)	5(8.6%)	13(22.4%)
to check and correct grammar	11(19%)	17(29.3%)	14(24.1%)	4(6.9%)	9(15.5%)	3(5.2%)
To enhance vocabulary usage	13(22.4%)	12(20.7%)	14(24.1%)	7(12.1%(	10(17.2%)	2(3.5%)
To check spelling	12(20.7%)	13(22.4%(	11(19%)	8(13.8%)	6(10.3%)	8(13.8%)
to check and correct punctuation	5(8.6%(	14(24.1%)	9(15.5%)	6(10.3%)	12(20.7%)	12(20.7%)

GAI to Enhance Vocabulary Usage

Results in Table One show that most of the students 25(43.1%) very frequently/frequently used GAI to improve their vocabulary usage in their writing. This was followed by 14(24.1% who indicated they occasionally used GAI to enhance their vocabulary usage, while 17(29.3%) students stated they rarely/very rarely used AI to enhance vocabulary. Only a small number of the students 2(3.5%) stated they never used AI for this purpose.

GAI to Check Spelling

Table One indicates that 25(43.1%) of the respondents very frequently/frequently used GAI to check spelling, whereas 11(19%) occasionally used GAI for this purpose. Additionally, 14(24.1%) of the students rarely/very rarely used GAI to check spelling and the remaining 8(13.8%) did not use GAI to check spelling.

GAI to Check and Correct Punctuation

According to Table One, 19(32.7%) of the students very frequently/frequently used GAI to check and correct punctuation mistakes, whereas 9(15.5%) stated that they occasionally used

GAI for that purpose. The table further shows that 18(31%) rarely/very rarely used GAI to check and correct punctuation, while 12(20.7%) never used AI for this purpose.

Responses to the open-ended questions

When students were asked to indicate any additional purposes for which they used GAI other than those mentioned above, most of the students reported using GAI to complete assignments that they deemed as difficult. Other respondents stated using GAI for summarizing and paraphrasing. One student elaborated on the use of GAI as follows:

> "*Everything, for example, if I want to ask about a definition or information about a writer, or if I want a suggestion on how to sequence ideas in a presentation. If I want an explanation of a paragraph, all I have to do is copy the paragraph and send it to artificial intelligence and ask it to explain in a simplified way or provide some examples. If I want to rephrase the speech or correct errors, and also if I want to extract the reference from scientific research in an easy and quick way, if I want artificial intelligence to design slides for my presentation*."

Students who avoided using GAI provided the following explanations as to why they 'never' use GAI:

> "*If I use AI, I feel I will not learn anything*."
> "*Because I want to answer myself and not use any answer via artificial intelligence, and I want to benefit from my information*."
> "*I don't trust those AI tools; they can give me perfect answers and essays but I won't be protected by them when the instructor asks me from where I wrote it. Also I like to do my essays or assignments by myself*."
> "*I don't know how you use it properly*."

GAI Helps or Harms

Table Two summarizes students' perspectives on how GAI impacts their thinking, writing, and learning skills. Regarding the development of their thinking skills, 27(46.6%) of the students stated that GAI was helpful, while 31(53.4%) felt it was harmful. On the other hand, students' opinion about the impact of GAI on their writing skills showed that 31(53%) considered GAI as helpful, whereas 27(46.6%) viewed it as harmful. For learning skills, the majority 45(77.6%) seemed to be in favor of GAI, whereas only 13(22.4%) said it did not help their learning.

Table 2. *Students' perception of AI use: Helpful vs. Harmful*

	Helps	**Harms**
Thinking Skills	27(46.6%)	31(53.4%)
Writing Skills	31(53.4%)	27(46.6%)
Learning Skills	45(77.6%)	13(22.4%)

Responses to the open-ended questions

Students were asked to elaborate on their response regarding the extent to which GAI helps and harms their thinking, writing, and learning skills. The following are some of their responses under each category:

Helps Thinking:

"It helps in thinking because it gives us new and diverse ideas."
"It's help us in our thinking skills because it gives us a new idea."
"it helps thinking because it provides us with new ideas."
"…but in thinking skills, the AI can help him to get new ideas."
"…sometimes it helps to develop your thinking because it gives you ideas learning it's very useful you."

Hinders Tthinking

"it will definitely harm our thinking skills because we will get used to AI tools providing us with all the information that we need without getting us thinking, analyzing or brainstorming anything."
"AI is helping with learning and writing but thinking? I don't think so, you have to think by yourself."
"On other hand AI is harmful for our thinking because we depend on AI for search. AI is benefit for learning process because it alerts us on a mistake to modify it and do a perfect assignment."
"AI does not help that much in the development of thinking skills because it makes the student get used on relying upon AI but not his/her mind and being independent, and lastly question."
"for thinking you think but you don't go deep because you let the AI do the needed thinking to answer."

Helps Writing

"AI can improve your writing skills by correcting your writing and give you what is wrong in the sentence."
"AI helps in writing skills where it allows any student to learn new vocabulary that suits his/her level of learning."
"In writing skills it can help you to get new ideas."
"Yes because some tools like paraphrasing and checking the grammar we can use in our research that may help us in our writing process."

Hinders Writing

"When relying on artificial intelligence, the practice of activities is reduced, writing, thinking and others, and thus it is damaged and weakened."
"…and it harms writing because everything comes prepared."
"because students will get used to those tools doing their own work and so they won't be able to experience writing by themselves which cause significant negative impact on writing skills."

"*It harms writing skills because when you rely on it you will not write you just keep AI writing*."
"*In my opinion, I expect that the student will rely completely on AI and will not make an effort to learn, especially in the writing skill, because he will just copy and paste without any effort*."
"*It harms your mental skills because you get a direct answer with no effort which leads to lack of real effort and makes students rely on something not themselves and that is wrong*."

Helps Learning

"helps in learning help for students to learn more."
"although I think it will affect us negatively, it is still very useful tool if used properly."
"AI helps us to learn more things and learn about new thing also it gives good information"
"if the student knows when and how to use AI properly it will help him/her to provide what skills they need."
"You can ask about anything and it will answer you but you to check the information sometimes."
"in learning AI can help you as i said before to get a new ideas, maybe you can use the answers in another way like, explaining to others."

Hinders Learning

"using AI a lot can be harmful because some students don't understand so they just come and use AI."
"Because the answer is ready from AI, and the answer must be answered by the student himself in order to benefit from the answer and the question."
".. it harms learning because by using AI you are not learning anything."

AI and Academic Integrity

Cheating or Not Cheating

Most of the students 39(67.2%) believe that using AI for academic work should not be considered as a form of cheating; however, 19(32.8%) of the students argue it is a form of cheating (figure 4).

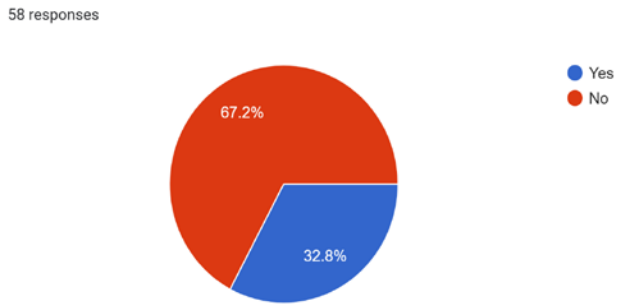


Figure 4. Students' perception of AI use: Cheating vs. not cheating

Response to Open-ended Questions

The following quotes illustrate some of the responses from the students.

Cheating

"Yes because you are depending on a tool to write for you. You are not using your own experience to write."
"Because the teacher wants an answer from the student himself, and the student comes up with an answer without any effort."
"Because the student did not strive to find the ideas and write them, but he used artificial intelligence to do it."
"Because it will do all the work."

Not Cheating

"Because assignments can get done in the house or any place, but it is considered as cheating in exams."
"In my opinion, it is not considered cheating because we may use it in order to obtain beautiful, tidy and correct work."
"It's not cheating, maybe the student didn't understand the lesson and the assignment was very hard to him so he used AI to learn through the answers of the assignment."
"Because at the end students write their own idea but they use AI to check about simple things not like cheating the whole assignment from the AI."

Grading

When asked whether students get good marks because they rely on GAI, half of the students 29(50%) responded with a "yes", and the other half 29(50%) said "no" (figure 5).

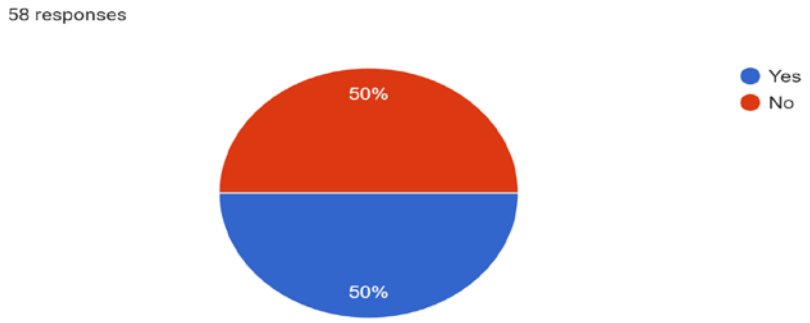


Figure 5. Students' Perception of AI Use: Impact on Grades

Concerns Related to GAI

Among the concerns stated by the students, the most common was that total reliance on GAI would interfere with developing their thinking skills. Additionally, some students indicated that the information they received from GAI was not always reliable.

One student expressed,

"*One worry is that relying too much on AI tools for assignments might affect our ability to develop critical thinking and writing skills on our own. It's essential to use these tools as a support rather than a crutch to ensure we're still actively engaging with the material and developing our own ideas*".

Discussion

General Perceptions of AI Utilization

The majority of the students 51(87.9%), in this study, admitted to using GAI when completing their written assignments, while only 7(12.1%) stated that they never used GAI. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies on GAI (Johnston et al., 2024; Al-Raimi et al., 2024; Aladin, 2023; Farrelly and Baker, 2023; Utami et al., 2023). GAI has become a new reality that has swept the educational field with questions and concerns regarding its impact on the present and the future (Johnston et al., 2024; Farrelly & Baker, 2023).

Interestingly, despite this increase in GAI usage, when the question regarding whether it is acceptable to rely on GAI when completing their written assignments, the majority, 35(60.2%), said it is not acceptable. At the same time, approximately 23(39.7%) said it is acceptable. There seemed to be an awareness among the students related to the academic drawbacks associated with the overreliance on GAI. Al-Zubaidi et al.'s (2024) research on the impact of ChatGPT on academic writing at Moroccan universities also revealed similar results; the respondents viewed ChatGPT as both harmful and beneficial to students. Similarly, in their study, Darwin et al. (2024) suggested the importance of balancing AI usage as it can be both a powerful tool with significant drawbacks. GAI tools have the potential to take students' learning experience to another level for the opportunities they provide, such as allowing them to translate, summarize, respond to questions, and generate content (Cotton, et al, 2023); at the same time, GAI poses threats to the development of students' independence and learner autonomy. Obviously, the respondents in our study realize the positive and negative impact of GAI.

However, when the question of banning GAI in educational contexts was posed, 49(84.5%) of the respondents did not support banning it because they stated that it provided them with the needed help. Students made a valid point. According to Johnston et al. (2024), banning GAI is "unrealistic and not beneficial to students" as they would continue using AI after graduation (p. 18). Similarly, Ng, et al. (2021) state that GAI technology has become an essential skill in the 21st century which can play a significant role across disciplines and industries. Hence, banning AI from academic contexts may not be the answer or the best solution in light of the current importance of AI technologies in disciplines such as business, science, art, and education. Instead, Johnston et al. (2024) state, "universities need to help students develop their skills to use these technologies in a productive and effective manner" (p. 18).

Table 3. *Summary of Main Findings*

Usage of GAI	51(87.9%) Used GAI	7(12.1%) Not Used GAI
Acceptability of usage GAI	35(60.2%) Not acceptable	23(39.7%) Acceptable
Banning or not?	49(84.5%) Not Banning	9(15.5%) Banning

Only some 9(15.5%) of the respondents favored banning GAI. The rationale provided by this group of students was that it slowed down their thinking. These students felt GAI placed all students on the same level when it comes to assessment, thereby blurring the individual differences. A similar dilemma in responses can be found in a Study.com survey of 1,000 college-age students, where 89% of the respondents admitted to using ChatGPT to complete a homework assignment, while 48% admitted to using it on at-home tests or quizzes, and 53% had the bot write an essay. When the question of banning ChatGPT came up, 72% percent of the respondents

preferred that ChatGPT be banned from campus networks (Study.com, 2024). These findings continue to shed light on the ethical challenges GAI poses in the educational field.

Impact on Academic Development

Furthermore, it was found that the three top purposes for which the students utilized GAI were checking grammar 42(72.4%), followed by generating ideas 40 (69%), and enhancing vocabulary usage 39(67.2%). If English Education major students heavily rely on AI tools for linguistic support, then, this reliance may hinder the development of their language competence. Tamimi et. al. (2024), share similar concerns in their research findings, and state that students' reliance on AI to complete simple school tasks negatively impacts their personal and academic development; so, by overusing AI "students lose control over what they learn and how they learn in a way that negatively affects their critical thinking and sense of creativity" (p, 39). In other words, over time, students' ability to self-correct or decide on appropriate vocabulary usage to express their ideas may decline. It is essential, therefore, for English Education students who aspire to become English language teachers to develop their language competency and become proficient users of the English language as they will teach language, which also requires explaining rules and providing feedback to students. Some of the students in this study realize the threat that GAI poses to the development of their language competency and writing skills, as can be seen in the following quotes:

"*If I use AI, I feel I will not learn anything*."

"*Because I want to answer myself and not use any answer via artificial intelligence, and I want to benefit from my information*."

Most students, also, used GAI to generate ideas. If, instead of indulging in deep thinking and brainstorming ideas, every time students have an assignment, they ask GAI to generate ideas for them, then it is doubtful they will develop their thinking and writing skills. Students who let GAI do the work for them, miss out on learning opportunities.

In response to whether GAI positively or negatively impacted their critical thinking skills, students' views seemed almost equally divided; 31(53.4%) stated that it harmed them. For example, one student said: "*it will definitely harm our thinking skills because we will get used to AI tools providing us with all the information that we need without getting us thinking, analyzing or brainstorming anything*." The other 27(46.6%) stated that GAI helped their critical thinking and explained that using GAI provided them with ideas. Perhaps, the latter group of students did not have a clear understanding of what constitutes critical thinking, which is generally defined as the ability to engage in higher order of thinking (see for example Bloom's Taxonomy) such as questioning, analyzing, interpreting, evaluating, and making a judgment about what is being read, heard, said, or written. Should students rely on GAI to provide them with ideas that they unquestionably accept, then their critical thinking development is at stake. This point is supported by Al-Othman (2024) who points out that among the issues associated with AI usage are "limited critical and creative thinking skills, decreased spontaneity in language use, and an overemphasis on standardizing language" (p. 99). Along the same lines, during an interview with *Oman Observer*, Dr. Ali Al Bimani (2023), Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Science and Technology, acknowledged that AI can be a valuable tool for personalizing students' learning, providing them with research assistance and homework support; nevertheless, he warned that overreliance on AI can hinder their critical thinking.

Findings from our study showed that 31(53.4%) of the students considered GAI as a helpful tool to develop their writing skill. The ability to write well in English needs both effective composing skills and language proficiency. Furthermore, writing teachers need to consider both the cognitive (individual) aspects and the sociocultural (contextual) aspects of writing (Weigle, 2014). Ur (2012) explains "the best way to promote students' writing ability is through the *process-writing cycle*: the experience of writing a first draft, getting feedback and rewriting," (p, 160). Given this general understanding of teaching writing, the main concern would be if every time students are given an assignment to write about, they seek assistance from GAI for ideas, organization, and other linguistic aspects, then this will hinder the full development of their writing skills in English. The respondents in our study seemed aware of this fact, as one student stated, "*When relying on artificial intelligence, the practice of activities is reduced, writing, thinking and others, and thus it is damaged and weakened*." Another student stated, "*As English teacher in the future, I would like to have more training in writing not just for assignments in the course, that will help me in the future without using any program and plagiarism percentage*." On the other hand, students who favored the use of AI when attempting written assignments believed that "*AI can improve your writing skills by correcting your writing and give you what is wrong in the sentence*." These differing perspectives on GAI highlight the need for establishing clear policies regarding the ethical and thoughtful integration of GAI tools in education.

Academic Integrity

The emergence and rapid growth of GAI technology have also raised concerns about maintaining academic integrity. The majority of the students 39(67.2%) in this study did not view the use of AI as a form of cheating. One of the students said, "*It is not considered cheating because it is an assignment, so students can ask for help from any person, any application, or AI*," and another said, "*It's not considered a means of cheating, but rather a helpful source*." On the other hand, 19(32.8%) of the respondents considered the use of AI a form of cheating, as one student clarified, "*Yes because you are depending on a tool to write for you. You are not using your own experience to write*," and another explained, "*Because the teacher wants an answer from the student himself, and the student comes up with an answer without any effort*" and one of the students summed it up as "*if GAI did everything for us then it's cheating*." Therefore, it becomes essential to define what cheating is and what it is not in the age of AI, for if cheating remains undefined, then both students and educators may find themselves trapped in the complexities created by AI technology.

On a similar note, the students' responses in our study as to whether students get good marks because they rely on AI were equally divided (50%:50%). Akbari (2024) argues that students who use AI for assignment completion and receive better grades send a message to other students that better grades can be obtained only through the use of ChatGPT. Similarly, in education, not using GAI, may mean losing out on college admissions, scholarships, and career opportunities. The point raised by Akbari sends some alarm related to the evolving mindset of students toward marking and grading. Moreover, as tools such as GPT-3 can generate text content for academic essays, speech, and opinion texts and escape plagiarism detection (Dehouche, 2021), the alarm among instructors increase as students may pass on assignments written by GAI as their own. In light of this, there is a pressing need for reevaluating assessment practices to ensure fairness in student evaluation.

Conclusion

The teacher preparation program at A'Sharqiyah University aims to build a generation of competent English language instructors. This study provides insight into the perceptions of undergraduate students majoring in English Education towards the utilization of GAI in the completion of written assignments. It was found that GAI technology has the potential to offer a range of benefits to students in improving their English language proficiency, personalizing their learning, and providing them support through its various features. However, these tools also raise several concerns, and absolute reliance on them may hinder the students' academic development.

Hence, to minimize AI use, there is a need to rethink and carefully design the types of assignments assigned to students. The article published by the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University (n.d.) provides insights into the type of assignments instructors can design for better learning in the age of AI. For example, teachers can encourage students to share their early stages of research and writing and turned them in as preliminary assignments, such as project proposals and draft introductions. Also, instead of sharing their written work with the instructor, the students can share their written work with other classmates and engage in discussions on the topic they had written. Furthermore, students can create reflective statements and explain how they reached their conclusions.

In addition, universities and institutions need to carefully consider the benefits and drawbacks of using GAI technology, particularly at a time when it may become difficult to distinguish whether work produced by students is human or machine-generated writing. Policies and procedures for AI usage should be clearly spelled out, and training for both faculty and students in detecting and preventing academic dishonesty should be provided. Finally, there is no doubt that GAI technology has become an integral part of the educational world, making it necessary to establish explicit ethical usage of AI, promote AI literacy, and develop frameworks to guide students and educators so that full advantages of these technologies can be taken.

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The Analysis of the Turkish EFL Students' Needs for a Translation Course at a State University

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Abstract
Globalization has made translation an integral part of our daily lives, spanning education, technology, and commerce, thus accentuating its significance. This has prompted universities to offer various translation courses, tailored to their specific contexts. However, the diversity in these programs highlights the need to cater to the distinct requirements of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners effectively. This study aims to uncover the specific needs of EFL learners in designing translation courses, with a focus on enhancing their relevance and student-centeredness. By gathering insights into learners' perspectives on translation courses, the research seeks to understand their preferences and expectations. "What are students' beliefs and attitudes regarding translation courses in EFL departments?" is the main research question of the present study. To achieve this, 50 EFL students from a state university in Ankara participated in the study, selected through convenience sampling, and responded to a structured questionnaire developed by Hui-Chuan Wang. The questionnaire covered various aspects of course planning, instructional methods, learning objectives, materials, teaching styles, and evaluation techniques. Employing a quantitative approach, the study aims to provide a clear understanding of learners' expectations and requirements regarding translation courses. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform improvements to the translation course curriculum at the state university, ensuring it better meets the needs of students.

Keywords: EFL Learners' expectations, EFL learners' needs, students-centred course, translation course, translation

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Introduction

Throughout history, the quest to comprehend the "other" has demanded a myriad of skills, with Foreign Language (FL) acquisition emerging as a prominent pursuit. Within the realm of FL teaching and learning, a rich tapestry of theories, methods, approaches, and strategies exists. Among these, translation stands as an indispensable facet, integral to the Foreign Language Learning (FLL) process and subject to multifaceted discourse.

Despite the undeniable utility of translation, skepticism towards its role persists, particularly when academic discourse aligns with prevailing sentiments, leading to the prominence of grammar-translation methods in language pedagogy (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Nonetheless, a growing recognition of the value and function of translation in advanced language instruction within collegiate settings underscores its enduring significance as a pedagogical tool.

This evolving attitude towards translation in language education, particularly evident since the early 2000s, has spurred academic discourse aimed at reevaluating its role. Publications in the field have advocated for novel conceptualizations and applications of translation in language classrooms, signaling an emerging awareness of its potential as an instructional strategy.

In the context of EFL classrooms, where strong ties to foreign languages prevail, translation emerges as a multidimensional tool for communication and cultural exchange. Its incorporation into pedagogical practices is not only common but also valued as a means to facilitate language learning and foster cross-cultural understanding.

Within the Turkish educational landscape, curricula for EFL departments emphasize three primary course categories: professional pedagogical knowledge, subject content courses, and general culture (CoHE, 2023). Notably, literature, linguistics, and translation courses constitute vital components of subject-content knowledge. Specifically, Turkish-English and English-Turkish translation courses, each spanning three hours, feature prominently within EFL curricula in Turkey. Every university has a different syllabus for its translation courses; however, generally, students' expectations, thoughts, and wishes are not taken into account when preparing the contents. Depending on the inconsistency among state universities and overgeneralization about translation courses, the present study aims to contribute to the realization and identification of the importance of translation courses and expectations of learners at EFL departments, and provide data for further curriculum developments in EFL settings by making translation visible.

To illuminate the importance of translation courses in EFL departments, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

(1) What are students' beliefs and attitudes regarding translation courses in EFL departments?

(2) How can expectations for translation courses be tailored to align with EFL curricula?

To refine these research inquiries and offer insights into student expectations, the subsequent sections will delve into a comprehensive review of literature about the role of translation in EFL classrooms. Subsequently, the methodology and findings will be presented to provide a structured outline for addressing the research questions.

Literature Review

Translation Courses In EFL Classrooms

Globalization in the world requires rapid international communication, and as a result of this requirement, translation has gained much more importance thanks to the ease of disseminating information via translations. Translation is generally defined as a kind of replacement of something else. In this sense, translation can be the "second best" and "the real thing". Within the framework of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication circles, translation acts as the strongest chain. Since translation is not the original communication event, it provides mediation between languages and acts as a channel for the reduplication of the information. It is known as the best way to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers.

The field of translation gained traction in the latter part of the 20th century, even though it was considered as a language practice and a subtitle of applied linguistics before. Translation was a technique in language teaching and learning, and this perception dates back to the 1960s (Munday, 2016).

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, translation was main tool of "grammar-translation method", and some of the FL methodologists, such as Gouin and Vietor, opposed using translation as a medium of FL teaching. They underlined the importance of using language functionally and spoken language. They redesigned FL learning environment and suggested a new method called "direct method". Its strengths were neglecting using translation during an FL process and using the FL functionally to communicate and perform actions by using the new language.

In the 1980s, translation gained importance as a language-teaching tool in EFL classrooms. Translation practice found a consistent place in FL classrooms, and scholars listed the advantages and disadvantages of translation activities in EFL classrooms as a result of the discussions (Randaccio, 2012). Disadvantages, according to Newton (1998) (cited in Randaccio, 2012) are listed as follows:

(1) "Strengthening thinking in one language by transmitting the meaning into another language and it results in interference

(2) neglecting four skills in foreign language learning: listening, speaking, reading, writing

(3) preventing learners and teachers from working within a single language

(4) creating a false apprehension about learning a language by focusing on word-to-word equivalence

(5) cannot fully achieve foreign language teaching aims, mostly communicative language use

(6) hesitating about grading and structuring"

On the contrary, Kopczynski (1983) lists some of the counterarguments that encourage using translation in classrooms(cited in Randaccio, 2012)

(1) "Conscious learning is allowed, and learners can get the control of the foreign language with the help of grasping the meaning; therefore, interference is reduced,

(2) learning becomes meaningful, and learners can be active participants in the learning process,

(3) conscious learning occurs, and it does not prevent habit formation,
(4) learners are aware of the fact that learning a foreign language differs from learning a native language,
(5) world knowledge of the learners and their abilities in conceptualizing the world via language helps them to overcome difficulties by using their native language and they try to find explanations for the different situations."

The factors mentioned above can be attached to the effects and contributions to the concepts of transnationalism and transcultural issues. The effects of cultural issues in all disciplines forced translation studies, and EFL fields for new designs and additions to teaching curriculums. According to Pym (2009), various institutions now offer long-term training programs and universities provide courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. University-level translator training is a relatively recent development, primarily emerging in the latter half of the twentieth century and experiencing significant growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Depending on the recent theoretical and practical developments in the field of translation studies, it was realized that translator training at university level is essential.

As Translation Studies evolved into an interdisciplinary field, it drew inspiration from various related disciplines such as discourse analysis, text linguistics, pragmatics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and information technology. Furthermore, the translation industry and market have expanded to encompass a wide range of activities beyond traditional translation tasks. Consequently, translators are now expected to engage in additional activities such as documentation, terminology management, rewriting, and tasks associated with the localization industry. Therefore, a broad spectrum of activities can be considered part of the domain of translation competence.

In the context of EFL classrooms, translation courses play a crucial role in helping students develop proficiency in the target language. Gutiérrez (2018) reports that translation courses in FL classrooms are used mainly for two purposes. The first consideration is handled under the term of pedagogical translation, and according to the author's article, using translation in FL classrooms necessitates identifying boundaries and contributions of translation in FL classrooms. As for House "… translation, however never seen as the 'daily bread of language instruction', but as an interesting change in a predominantly monolingual instruction. (2007, 145) The second dimension of using translation in FL teaching depends on the interaction among social groups and other disciplines. According to Gutiérrez (2018), interaction is grouped under two aspects as communicative and cultural.

Training translators is an issue discussed under various titles and subtitles. Hatim and Mason (2005) suggest applying text linguistics to translator training. For an appropriate material selection, application, and grading, teaching text types and adopting a text linguistic approach in classifying texts became prominent. According to their suggestion, identifying the text type and acting compatible with the determined type or types as a translator was seen as essential for designing a curriculum for translators. Different text types necessitate different translation

processes within the framework of the target culture.

When translation education is considered, it is necessary to mention different learning and teaching environments. In Schäffner's research, this issue is handled in two ways: teaching translation as part of a language programme and teaching translation within a translation programme. Translation is one of the courses in a language teaching course. Students are expected to understand the content and linguistic structure of the given text, produce well-structured L2 texts as a result of their translation process (translating from L1), and consequently perform back translations. Students' perceptions about the content of the translation course is analyzed. It has been observed that translation is a kind of practice that was used as a pedagogical exercise as a part of language learning. To highlight the colorful and multidimensional aspects of translation, texts from different genres are introduced to the students. Text type variations require different translation strategies prioritizing the target receiver. The purpose of the text, the target text reader, cultural background, and aspects such as time, place, and reception have been introduced as the main topics. This process includes teaching referring to parallel texts, dictionaries, and technological tools. They have introduced the main issues of translation criticism by examining other translations of the same text. Within the second framework, students meet the functional dimensions of translation studies. The course begins with a brief introduction to the history of translation and moves on to the equivalence issue, text linguistics, and functionalist approaches to translation, including cultural issues. Texts are discussed, focusing on external and internal text factors. By working on the translation, students discover the production process of a work of translation and witness its relation with decision-making and creativity (Schäffner, 2004).

According to Siregar (2018), a study conducted in Indonesia reveals that students' perceptions about EFL teaching methods and the role of translation in language teaching are limited. The data was collected through a questionnaire on Google Forms, which included questions about learning methods, translation aids, and materials. The conclusion remark of the study mainly presents the students' eagerness to learn translation courses designed to increase the efficacy of university school students.

Canlı and Sarıgül (2024) state the relationship between pre-service EFL teachers and translation courses with the help of a study including 40 participants at a state university by using pre-test and post-test questionnaires before and after the translation course. According to their study, after the translation course was completed, a positive shift in comprehension of translation was observed, along with increased awareness of text types and strategies. They suggested a collaboration in terms of curriculums between ELT and Translation Studies Departments.

Another study carried out with Turkish EFL instructors (12 participants) demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of Translation courses according to instructors and teachers. According to the results obtained with the help of convenient sampling. Translation courses were found to enhance the linguistic competence and teaching skills of pre-service teachers. In conclusion, Şahin (2022) suggests integrating translation courses into teaching content to improve intercultural competence.

To sum up, translation has been discussed by the researchers in the fields of FL teaching and translation studies. Depending on the factors and developments noted above, researchers noted that that translation is a natural form of human communication and will be an indispensable part of FL teaching. Translation as a tool in language teaching or part of a curriculum in foreign language teaching has been handled by most of the researchers. As noted in the above-mentioned studies, translation in EFL settings transformed into a positive approach and was accepted as a reinforcement in learning. The intersectionality of translation studies and EFL settings requires special attention to be introduced to English teacher candidates. For this reason, a questionnaire aims to narrow the focus by understanding students' expectations from a translation course and offering course content suggestions that include translation competence and awareness of strategies.Therefore, the research objectives include exploring the perspective of students regarding translation courses in the EFL department along with the possible curriculums they expect from these courses. Translation courses at FL teaching departments require new involvements from the theories and applications of translation studies.

Since this study is basically investigating the expectations of students about translation courses provided in English Language Teaching Department, an inclusionary model called the Holistic Model will be mentioned to clarify the literature.

The Holistic Model developed by the PACTE group (Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) emerged in 1997 to explore the acquisition of translation competence in written translation. Their purpose was to establish incorporated criteria for translation training (acquisition of translation competence) and describe the characteristics of professional translators (translation competence). They approached translation as a communicative endeavor, examining translation competence from two aspects and employing both qualitative and quantitative methods to validate their findings. Firstly, they investigated the translation process by scrutinizing the mental processes involved in translation and identifying the abilities and competencies required through experimental studies. Secondly, they delved into the translation product by analyzing data from an electronic corpus containing translated texts. Consequently, they agreed upon a conclusion that translation competence and bilingual competence are fundamentally different, and bilingual competence is described as one of the components of translation competence. (PACTE, 2003, cited in Esfandiari et al., 2015).

In the Turkish university education system EFL departments started to give translation courses such as Translation I and Translation II. Now, courses named Literary Translation, Computer-Assisted Translation, Audio-Visual Translation, etc can be added to the syllabus. Every university has a different syllabus and evaluation system for these courses.

The following parts of this study cover the methodology and findings parts. The methodology will be described clearly, and results will be discussed by indicating the prominent results obtained from the questionnaire, which is mainly about the expectations of students studying at a state university in Turkey's Department of English as a Foreign Language.

Method

This study is quantitative research, which is the process of collecting and analysing numerical data. One of the main goals of quantitative research is to create accurate and trustworthy measures that can be used for statistical analysis. Creswell (2003) points out that quantitative research "employ strategies of inquiry such as experimental and surveys and collect data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data". In this study, a questionnaire prepared by Professor Hui-Chuan Wang (2014) was used. The questionnaire is a structured instrument that facilitates standardized data collection, enabling researchers to analyse large sample sizes efficiently.

Participants

For this study, 50 EFL students from a state university in Ankara participated during the fall Semester, of the 2023-2024 academic year. Convenience sampling, which entails inviting people who are available and willing to participate in the study, has been used to choose the students. This sampling type has been chosen as more and faster volunteer students can be reached through this sampling method. This study employs a quantitative research approach, which involves the collection and analysis of numerical data. Quantitative research aims to establish accurate and reliable measures suitable for statistical analysis. As highlighted by Creswell (2003), quantitative research utilizes inquiry strategies such as experiments and surveys, gathering data through predetermined instruments that yield statistical data. In this study, data collection was facilitated through the administration of a questionnaire developed by Professor Hui-Chuan Wang (2014). This structured instrument enables standardized data collection, allowing researchers to efficiently analyze large sample sizes.

Research Instruments

Hui-chuan Wang (2014) created the structured questionnaire that was utilized in this investigation. The questionnaire has 5 parts and a total of 45 items; "9 multiple-choice questions, 2 dichotomous questions, and 34 rating scale questions" (Wang, 2014, p. 80). The first part, consisting of 6 rating scale questions, is related to "Learning goals", the second part is related to "Course Planning" and has 3 multiple choice questions, "Instructional materials" compose the third part, and this part has 20 different types of questions, in the fourth part, the 15 questions are related to "Teaching and learning" and the last part including only one question is about "Evaluation". The rationale for choosing this specific questionnaire is that its main focus is on the EFL learners and the student-centred translation course. Through this detailed instrument, the participants will clearly express their opinions regarding the need for translation courses and their design.

Research Procedures

The data for this study was collected at a predetermined time, specifically during the

middle of the second term, to gather additional insights about the course. Prior to administering the questionnaire, participants were briefed on the study's objectives and content. Researchers were on hand to address any queries that arose while participants completed the questionnaire. All participants were assured of the anonymity of their responses and were informed that completing the questionnaire was optional. Given the advanced level of the participants, translation of the questionnaire was deemed unnecessary. On average, participants required approximately 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics have been used to analyse the questionnaire responses. This procedure was chosen to understand the features of the questionnaire responses in a short and summarising manner. "Learning Goals" and some parts of "Instructional Materials" have been analysed by SPSS, and other parts have been analysed and calculated using a formula for each question. The formula used;

P (Percentage)= (F (The frequency of agreement) *100) / (T (The total number of participants))

Lastly, the data for each part have been interpreted according to the results.

Results

The principal aim of the present study was to gain insight into students' perspectives regarding the translation course, understand their expectations, preferred evaluation methods, and, ultimately, their preferences for student-centered translation courses. The findings of the questionnaire were analyzed and interpreted according to distinct sections.

Learning Goals: Table One reveals that according to participants, the primary objectives of a translation course are "Improving English ability" and "Using languages"; the percentages of which are the same; however, standard deviations are different. The two important goals are "Understanding the major differences between English and Turkish" and "Sharpening real working skills of translation", respectively. The least important goal is "Finding language weakness".

Table 1. *Importance level of each goal in translation courses*

Goals	N	Mean	SD	Rank
1. Improving English ability	50	4,80	0,45	1
2. Using languages	50	4,80	0,49	2
3. Understanding the major differences between English and Turkish	50	4,60	0,67	3
4. Sharpening real working skills in translation	50	4,52	0,64	4
5. Raising your language learning motivation	50	4,38	0,78	5
6. Finding language weakness	50	4,10	0,81	6

Course Planning: The results demonstrate that for course planning, nearly all the participants (98%) believe that English-majored students need translation courses, and only 1 of them (2%) doesn't approve of the translation course. 18 of the participants (36%) who approve the

translation courses think that courses should start in the first year of the university, 15 of them (30%) believe that the third year of the university is when they should start, and 14 of them (28%) suggest that the courses should start when they are in the second year of the university. According to others (6%), the last year of the university is enough for translation courses. Moreover, 38 of the participants (76%) believe that a translation class should include no more than 15 to 25 students, while the others (24%) think that 26 to 35 students are the ideal student population.

Instructional Materials: Half of the participants (50%) say they don't require a book, while the other half (50%) think a textbook is necessary for a translation course in terms of instructional materials. Table Two shows that the most crucial information to consider when selecting readings for a translation course is "Translation skills"; while the last one is "Translation theories". According to the results, the next two important contexts are "Language knowledge" and "Model translations."

Table 2. *Significance level of each content when choosing a textbook*

Goals	N	Mean	SD	Rank
1. Translation skills	50	4,66	0,65	1
2. Language knowledge	50	4,44	0,90	2
3. Model translations	50	4,42	0,81	3
4. Translation difficulties	50	4,40	0,70	4
5. Punctuation of two languages	50	4,28	0,88	5
6. Turkish and English rhetoric	50	4,26	0,82	6
7. Language structures (grammar)	50	4,26	0,92	7
8. Comparison of two languages	50	4,20	0,99	8
9. Resources (books, websites, etc.)	50	4,08	0,98	9
10. Translation Theories	50	4,04	1,02	10

Table Three shows that the participants mostly prefer "Materials related to your interests" (with a mean of 4,24) and "Materials related to work" (with a mean of 4,10) rather than textbooks or teacher-generated materials. To understand the proportion of the materials, participants were asked for the desired percentages of these two materials (interests and work needs), and the results demonstrate that 27 participants (55,1%) prefer 50% vs 50%. 11 participants (22,4%) think that the proportion should be 25% vs. 75%; while the other 11 participants (22,4%) agree with the proportion of 75% vs. 25%.

Table 3. *Express your agreement level on the materials*

Goals	N	Mean	SD	Rank
1. Materials related to your interests	50	4,24	0,77	1
2. Materials related to work	50	4,10	0,88	2
3. The textbooks from Europe and the USA	50	4,06	0,92	3
4. Teacher-generated materials	50	4,02	0,98	4
5. The textbooks from Turkey	50	3,26	1,02	5

Tables Two and Three discuss the significance of choosing a textbook for a translation course in a classroom and how important it is that the material be linked to the student's interests and student-centred. It was seen in the results that the students preferred the course material to be textbook-based rather than generated by a teacher.

The translation task genres associated with the lifestyles that participants are most interested in are displayed in Tables Four and Five show the work-related genres. Table Four demonstrates that "Stories" is ranked as the most important genre related to lives (86%), while "Tables" and "Cards" are ranked as the least important ones, with percentages of 6% and 8%, respectively. Based on frequency and percentage data, the top six genres with a 50% share are Stories, Dramas, Schedules, Songs, Poems, and Conversations.

Table 4. *The percentages of the genres related to lives*

Genres related to lives	N	Frequency	Percentages	Rank
1. Stories	50	43	86%	1
2. Dramas	50	37	74%	2
3. Schedules (TV, movie, etc)	50	31	62%	3
4. Songs	50	30	60%	4
5. Poems	50	29	58%	5
6. Conversations	50	28	56%	6
7. Letters	50	16	32%	7
8. Jokes	50	14	28%	8
9. Riddles	50	11	22%	9
10. Cards	50	4	8%	10
11. Tables	50	3	6%	11

According to Table Five, the first four genres above 50% are "Academic articles", "Professional books", "Newspapers", and "Language magazine articles", respectively, while "Maps" has the lowest percentage.

Table 5. *The percentages of the genres related to work*

Genres related to work	N	Frequency	Percentages	Rank
1. Academic Articles and Abstracts	50	34	68%	1
2. Professional books	50	30	60%	2
3. Newspapers	50	27	54%	3
4. Language magazine articles	50	27	54%	3
5. Business documentation such as order letter, resume	50	24	48%	5
6. Cartoons	50	19	38%	6
7. Other magazine articles	50	19	38%	6
8. Advertisements	50	18	36%	8
9. Official forms or documentation	50	16	32%	9
10. Handbooks	50	16	32%	9
11. Internet information	50	16	32%	9
12. Recipes	50	13	26%	12
13. Menus	50	6	12%	13
14. Signboard	50	6	12%	13
15. Maps	50	4	8%	15

Table Six shows which topics of translation tasks participants pay attention to. The three genres with percentages above 50% are "Culture and art", "Social issues", and "Education". On the other hand, the three subjects with less than 10% of the total were "medical issues"," Business"

and Recreation".

Table 6. *The percentages of the genres related to work*

Topics	N	Frequency	Percentages	Rank
1. Culture and art	50	41	82%	1
2. Social issues	50	30	60%	2
3. Education	50	27	54%	3
4. Travelling	50	24	48%	4
5. Songs	50	22	44%	5
6. Living	50	21	42%	6
7. Health	50	19	38%	7
8. Public Media	50	19	38%	7
9. Fashion	50	18	36%	9
10. Technology	50	18	36%	9
11. Animals	50	15	30%	11
12. Science	50	14	28%	12
13. Computer	50	13	26%	13
14. Politics	50	13	26%	13
15. Sports	50	12	24%	15
16. Law	50	11	22%	16
17. Medical issue	50	7	14%	17
18. Business	50	6	12%	18
19. Recreation	50	6	12%	18

The above-given results provide an interpretation that the participants preferred more day-to-day activities than traditional textbook genres. The possible reasons behind this preference, which could be sought out, was that the participants required more relatable and easily accessible content. The translation course bridges a gap between non-native and native speakers to get their message across without any hindrance. This can only occur if participants learn to translate day-to-day content rather than following the traditional textbook style.

Teaching and Learning: Participants were asked to answer what kind of work they prefer to study. The most preferred one is "individual work", with a percentage of 68%, while the least preferred one is "whole class" work, with a percentage of 18%. The second and the third ones are "pair work" and "group work", with a percentage of 54% and 50%, respectively. Moreover, Table 7 shows what kind of activities the participants are interested in in a translation class. The results show that the three most preferred activities are "Discussion on translation", "Group in-class translation", and "Training of language skills"; while the least preferred one is "Group presentation".

Table 7. *The percentages of the preferred learning activities in class*

Learning Activities	N	Frequency	Percentages	Rank
1. Discussion on translation	50	38	76%	1
2. Group in-class translation	50	30	60%	2
3. Training of language skills	50	29	58%	3
4. Teacher's lecture	50	27	54%	4
5. Individual in-class translation	50	24	48%	5

6. Reading translation models	50	19	38%	6
7. Peer editing	50	16	32%	7
8. Group presentation	50	5	10%	8

Table Eight is related to what a teacher should do or provide to help the participants learn translation. According to the results, the three preferred types of instructions are "Translation skills", "Common translation errors", and "Student's translation errors", while the least important one is "Use of dictionaries"; its mean is under 4.00.

Table 8. *The importance level of teachers' different instruction*

Instruction	N	Mean	SD	Rank
1. Translation skills	50	4,60	0,60	1
2. Common translation errors	50	4,56	0,64	2
3. Student's translation errors	50	4,53	0,68	3
4. Language knowledge	50	4,52	0,58	4
5. Suggested translation of student's translation	50	4,44	0,54	5
6. Comparison of two languages	50	4,41	0,76	6
7. Jargons	50	4,33	0,74	7
8. Model translations	50	4,32	0,65	8
9. Translation Theories	50	4,28	0,75	9
10. Online resources	50	4,12	0,80	10
11. Group meeting and discussion	50	4,08	0,96	11
12. Translation software	50	4,04	0,88	12
13. Use of dictionaries	50	3,88	0,99	13

The students, in the above-given results, are shown to prefer learning activities that help them get a good grip on translation on a practical level. These learning activities can also help the participants reduce their affective filter and boost their confidence. These practices align with effective teaching practices in translation courses.

Evaluation: Table Nine illustrates the participants' preferences about how to be evaluated for a translation class. 33 participants (66%) want to be evaluated by "In-class translation tasks (individual)", and 28 of them want "In-class translation tasks (group)". The least preferred one is "Tests of translation skills in the textbook", with a percentage of 46%.

Table 9. *The percentages of teacher evaluation in translation classes*

Evaluation	N	Frequency	Percentages	Rank
1. In-class translation tasks (individual)	50	33	66%	1
2. In-class translation tasks (group)	50	28	56%	2
3. Reports on translation analysis	50	28	56%	2
4. Take-home translation exercises	50	27	54%	4
5. Tests of language knowledge	50	24	48%	5
6. Tests of translation skills in the textbook	50	23	46%	6

Discussion

The study has aimed to understand and investigate what university-level EFL students wanted and needed from a translation course. Therefore, this study sought ways to two main situations;

the beliefs and interests of EFL students for translation courses and the expectations for translation courses that will be aligned with EFL curricula. The results of the study illustrate that translation courses are very precious for participants to understand the cultural and linguistic differences between the languages, to improve their language skills, and to get better future careers. In addition, the results add that most participants developed positive attitudes towards practical activities that give them the opportunity to use the language actively instead of using a textbook. Moreover, with the help of the results gathered from this study, the curriculum, resources, and assessment techniques used in the translation course will be able to be improved.

The findings related to "Learning Goals," show that participants need translation courses to understand both languages and to improve their language skills. Nevertheless, they indicate a wish not only to acquire basic translation skills but also to advance their language abilities for future career prospects. While participants generally express satisfaction with the translation course, there are varying perspectives among them. Especially, with more than 40 pupils in Class 3 and more than 80 in Class 4, the current class sizes are thought to be unnecessarily big. Participants prefer smaller class sizes, ideally ranging from 15 to 25 students, to get more benefits from the course. Furthermore, a majority of students believe that translation lessons should commence in the 3rd grade.

For instructional materials, participants believe that it will happen whether there is a book or not. In addition, they want more practical things rather than theoretical subjects. The possible reason for this is the participants want to use languages, and they want to do something for their future careers. The participants prefer the course material which is teacher-generated and related to their interests and work. On the other hand, if they use a textbook since students think these topics are essential to learning in a translation textbook, it may be connected to language structures, translation abilities, and language knowledge (such as slang and idioms). Furthermore, the possible motive for not wanting a textbook for this course is that they don't want a stereotypical lesson. Instead, they want to engage with their interest, such as stories, dramas, schedules (TV, movies, etc.), songs and their future work, such as academic articles and abstracts, professional books, newspapers, or language magazine articles. Lastly, it is understood that students don't prefer textbooks from Turkey; the reason for this may be that they don't trust Turkish sources as they are learning foreign languages, and foreign countries' sources can be better for them. Briefly, it can be said that no matter how good the material is, students' wishes and expectations are much more important.

During the learning and teaching process, students mostly prefer individual work, or they want to study with a pair, as they do not want to get lost in big groups, and they want to have a voice. Moreover, they want to try to understand the translation process and the languages. For the activities that are used in a translation class, nearly nobody wants group presentations as they think they cannot learn anything from them. They want to practice, so practical and useful things can help them, such as discussing translation and training in language skills. With the help of this, they can understand the translation process better, and they can see the similarities and differences

between the languages.

Instructor responsibilities for translation classes primarily revolve around imparting translation skills. It is well known that language proficiency alone is insufficient for effective translation. As a result, teachers play a precious role in guiding students. To transform students' translation mistakes and typical translation pitfalls into strengths, teachers lead hands-on, real-world practice sessions that improve students' comprehension of the translation process. Participants are aware of this requirement, so they prefer hands-on learning methods over dictionary use. Their primary objective is to become fluent in the language and get a thorough understanding of the translation process, with a focus on experiential learning and practical experience.

Turning to teacher evaluation, instead of the textbook's language knowledge or translation abilities assessments, the participants would prefer individual or group in-class translation assignments in evaluation. The reason for this is that it's all about students who want to learn translation and put it into practice rather than grammar. The practical application of translation is much more preferred as it would help the students and participants in applying it in the field.

The findings of the study support the results of the previous studies. For example, Kopczynski (1983) discussed that translation activities facilitate conscious learning, helping students gain control over the target language by allowing them to grasp meaning actively. Students have indicated a preference for interactive and hands-on translation assignments, which they thought enhanced their comprehension of both languages, which is in line with the current findings. Likewise, House (2007) suggested that translation, while not the "daily bread of language instruction," can be an engaging and valuable supplement. The study's participants also regarded translation as a useful exercise that supports their more general language learning objectives.

Furthermore, Gutiérrez's (2018) concept of pedagogical translation, which highlights the function of translation in promoting student engagement and tying classroom activities to real-world applications, is consistent with the preference for translation activities on individual interests and career goals. The participants' preferences for materials related to work-related genres like academic articles, professional books, and newspapers have been consistent with Canlı and Sarıgül's (2024) results that translation training raised students' understanding of text types and methods.

In addition, findings demonstrate that students favored translation skills over theoretical knowledge, which supports Schäffner's (2004) differentiation between translation taught in language programs versus translation-specific programs.

Finally, the results of the assessment methodologies, which indicate that students prefer in-class translation activities over language or theoretical knowledge assessments, are in line with Bekereci-Şahin's (2022) study. Bekereci-Şahin has shown that Turkish EFL teachers view translation courses as helpful for improving their teaching abilities and linguistic competency, particularly when they emphasize active learning strategies. This viewpoint is supported by the current study, which found that students preferred assessment techniques that stress real-world

applications—like solo and group translation tasks—over conventional exams.

Conclusion

This present study gives some ideas about the translation classes in a Turkish state university. With the help of this study, an idea has been gained about the needs and expectations of the students. It has been learned that students want translation classes to start as junior classes, and instead of being theoretical, they prefer practical lessons. While they are translating, they want to learn both languages and compare the similarities and differences between them. They also want to learn how to translate correctly, and they want to use and apply the things that they have learned for their future career.

In addition, while designing the syllabus, genres and topics must be selected according to their needs and expectations. In addition, it is learned from the study results that students prefer classes with few students to get the best efficiency. Therefore, these requests should be taken into account when making class adjustments. The syllabus should be designed in a way that enhances the learning process.

Suggestions

Some recommendations can be made to improve the efficacy of translation courses for EFL learners in the light of the study's findings. This study is only limited to 50 students, which causes a limitation. A larger group of participants would be better and result in more accurate findings. For future recommendations, a larger group of participants can be picked out, or different universities, state or private, can be added to the study. In this way, the results may be more valid, and therefore, it can give more valid information on how to organise and plan translation classes. Moreover, more detailed studies can be applied to all universities in Turkey, or there will be some comparison between the universities in Turkey and Europe. While doing this, in addition to the questionnaire, interviews with teachers and students can be conducted, and lessons can be observed. Lastly, it is always difficult to evaluate a translation class, so there will be some research about the evaluation of translation classes.

In addition, course designs can be enriched by getting help from the departments, of translation studies to present the content of courses in a more natural way. Since translation will exist as long as humans want to communicate with each other, introducing the history, theory, philosophy and ethics of translation will be inspiring for FL teachers and instructors.

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Triggering Epistemic Curiosity in Boosting Iraqi EFL Students' Speaking Skills through in-class and out-of-class Tasks

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Abstract
Epistemic curiosity's popularity has expanded exponentially thanks to the rising inclination to put curiosity-based instruction into practice in EFL classes. Accordingly, the number of publications measuring its influence on EFL students' linguistic performance has quadrupled in the last decade. On the other hand, an unbridgeable gap has been noticed in the Iraq setting, where there are few studies on epistemic curiosity's role in developing EFL learners' speaking skills. In this regard, this study attempted to investigate the influence of epistemic curiosity on improving first-year students' speaking skills at a private university in Erbil, Iraq, spanning 9 months in the 2023-2024 academic year via appealing presentations. To fulfill this aim, 66 experimental or control group students were chosen through stratified random sampling. After doing in-depth research at home, the first experimental group of students presented the catchy topics in units after studying thoroughly; however, the second experimental group of students made a 10-minute knowledge-seeking attempt about the assigned topics within the class and shot their speech. However, control group students followed the official curriculum. SPSS 28 and NVivo were tools to analyze speaking exams and verbal responses. The findings revealed that the students whose presentations were addressed after studying thoroughly at home outperformed other groups. It hints that assigned speaking presentations are more fruitful when they can study further at home. This study's findings can have implications for stakeholders contemplating inserting curiosity-driven exercises in EFL classes.

Keywords: Curiosity-based instruction, EFL classes, epistemic curiosity, in-class and out-of-class tasks, speaking skills

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Introduction

English has evolved from being the native language of a small island nation to becoming a global lingua franca, playing an indispensable role in international diplomacy, communication, commerce, and education. In today's interconnected world, the importance of English is not endorsed only culturally but also statistically, supported by its unstoppable presence in various domains (Nosirova, 2023). To name a few, over 1.6 billion people have been regarded as English speakers globally. Similarly, it is the official language to carry out formal tasks in approximately 80 nations, representing 40 % of the world population. Moreover, international diplomacy cannot be envisioned without knowing English because commanding English precisely is necessary to join conferences, read analyses, and interpret reports of the UN, UNICEF, or the EU (Irham, 2023).

Furthermore, people are privileged to travel affordably and conveniently thanks to sophisticated means of transportation, so English is the most common language in tourism to communicate with local people, guides, and hotel workers. Subsequently, the language of websites and scientific publications is English, with a percentage of over 70 % (Abdulrahman & Kara, 2023; Irham, 2023). Thus, educational institutions are launched to thoroughly accommodate people's needs so they can learn ambitiously and seize opportunities throughout their lifespans. In this regard, a growing number of students are racing to learn English to reap the benefits in a globalized world through various initiatives, regardless of whether they are chefs, doctors, civil engineers, teachers, interior designers, or businesspeople.

It is human nature to be curious and seek novel information through multiple endeavors. The rationale for being curious is that people are driven to be knowledge-seekers, which can be elaborated on by internal and external factors (Wale & Bishaw, 2020). To begin with, human beings have an innate desire to learn and put knowledge into practice because the unknown sparks curiosity to explore different cultures, mindsets, and fields. In addition, people are passionate about chasing and realizing their dreams, which can be envisioned after having the required information to master. After that, students are inclined to defy the challenges in their lives and overcome them, so learning life-changing lessons through books, movies, and newspapers can be of the most significant importance to achieving them. Subsequently, people can get inspiration from their role models whose success stories can be intriguing to read further about any domains ranging from science to business (Kucuk, 2023). Afterward, there is a close link between being curious and earning respect in communities. Thus, such people can invest in their development on the way of being a polymath whose knowledge spans many fields. As it is stark, being curious has multi-faceted dimensions in people's lives from birth to death.

The ever-growing need for good communication skills in the English language has created a huge worldwide demand for achieving a good command of English among non-native speakers around the globe. Regarding this notion, only written English is inadequate to reach proficiency, which spoken English should accompany. That is why oral proficiency has come to the forefront in settings where English is required to carry out conversations without barriers. In this regard, five domains of speaking, which are phonology, semantics, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics, should be sharpened to earn mastery in speaking (Issa, 2024; Lozi, 2023). Phonology concerns the abstract, rule-based systems of sounds in a language, which phonemes, allophones, minimal pairs, stress, and intonation can exemplify. On the other hand, semantics is the branch of linguistics that

focuses on the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, and passages. The following domain is morphology, which directs the attention to the structure and formation of the words. Essential concepts of morphology are morphemes, compounding, word formation, inflectional, and derivational morphology (Gunes & Sarigöz, 2021). Additionally, syntax is another crucial branch of linguistics that governs rules for systematically arranging words. Inserting parts of speech appropriately matters considerably and can be conceptualized by applying the syntax rules sensibly. The final domain is pragmatics, which is related to interpreting meaning from the context (Celik et al., 2022; Han, 2020). Thus, speakers and listeners can grasp the literary or implied meanings through social cues, norms, and intentions. As unambiguous, speaking skills are governed by multiple dynamics, so paying attention to speaking principles can pave the way for speaking proficiency through guided speaking activities, chat applications, and videos.

There are compelling reasons to carry out this study so that its significance can be understood more clearly. The first reason is that students' cognitive and psychological variables play pivotal roles in enhancing students' performance in EFL classes. Additionally, cultivating a mindset to unlock students' full potential in speaking classes matters for academic, social, and professional development. Likewise, quenching the thirst for novel information is a great motivational source to have good well-being and sharpen linguistic skills simultaneously. It is expected to articulate ideas more convincingly after having background information from various websites (Yucedal et al., 2022). Thus, this study is one of the rare attempts in the literature to use a psychology term to foster EFL learners' speaking performance, thereby ensuring their mental and psychological preparedness in Iraq for university students.

Correspondingly, the following research questions are formed:

1) What is the influence of epistemic-curiosity-based instruction in boosting the speaking performance of EFL learners with in-class and out-of-class activities?
2) What are the overall opinions of students on the epistemic curiosity-based language learning process?

Literature Review

Epistemic Curiosity (EC hereafter) was theorized as the drive to learn new concepts, eliminate uncertainty in knowledge, and engage in intellectual activities. It is channeled into two distinctive groups, which are intellectual interest curiosity (type I) and informational deprivation curiosity (type D) (Schutte & Malouff, 2023). The former refers to the thirst to reach for new and exciting information. However, the latter means being driven to close the knowledge gaps so that individuals cannot be deprived of essential information when shooting their answers in some places such as class, home, café, or workplace. Undeniably, both types of curiosity push people to be more alert about expanding their repertoire for various topics directly connecting to real life. According to Li et al. (2023), curiosity drives individuals to grow their mindsets incessantly, stimulating creativity, raising academic performance, and increasing job performance. Thus, such traits can increase their chance of being distinguished among crowds and earn more dignity. In this respect, curiosity urges them to improve many 21st-century skills gradually and become global citizens who can stand on their feet in various countries.

The roots of EC can be traced to Greek Philosophy by Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato, who emphasized the function of curiosity to discover and raise the level of wisdom (Celesty & Lucena,

2024; Fan et al., 2024). Likewise, Roman philosopher Cicero was credited with the popularity of EC with philosophical and scientific exploration. Subsequently, early modern thinkers like Francis Bacon championed empirical investigation, laying the groundwork for the scientific method. After that, the Enlightenment Period highlighted reasoning, critical thinking, and the pursuit of knowledge with the invaluable contributions of scholars such as René Descartes, John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant (Albalawi, 2024; Dover, 2024). Besides, William James identified curiosity as a cognitive and emotional response to novel stimuli, so the rise of modern psychology accelerated the adoption rate of EC—finally, groundbreaking thoughts of renowned scholars, such as B.F. Skinner, Jean Piaget, and Daniel Berlyne conceptualized curiosity in the 20th century, which was seen as a prerequisite to ensure cognitive growth (Younis et al., 2024). It can be postulated that the effects of EC have been observed overtly for millenniums in different domains.

Having absorbed the principles of scholars, the effects of EC are noticed at educational institutions through Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), Project-Based Learning (PBL), Exploratory Learning (EL), Self-Directed Learning (SDL), and Task-Based Learning (TBL). Correspondingly, the positive impacts of EC have been studied in different subjects such as science (Bustillo et al., 2023), math (Dietiker et al., 2023), history (Karaköse & Safran, 2023), sociology (Bineth, 2023), economics (Lozi, 2023), psychology (Wilson, 2024). For instance, Agustini et al.'s (2024) study uncovered that employing curiosity-driven instruction fostered elementary school students learning in science classes because they took part in many exercises to activate critical thinking and shape their learning accordingly in Indonesia. After that, inquiry-based learning was implemented in Iraq on high school students by Kurudirek and Berdieva (2024) whose studies showed that learners could boost their performance considerably in math classes. Moreover, Lee's (2023) ground-breaking study documented that curiosity-oriented history classes paid off on Malaysian students because they fed each other harmoniously to increase the benefits of the course in a welcoming learning atmosphere. Furthermore, Katan and Baarts (2023) conceded that curiosity-based instruction could transform students' attitudes toward learning in many courses, including sociology, psychology, and economics in Denmark. Apart from other disciplines, the effects of EC have been sought in EFL settings in increasing numbers. To name a few, Kara (2023) implemented EC-based education in English classes for first-year students who studied at a university in Iraq, which unearthed that curiosity-based instruction is promising for developing students' reading and listening skills simultaneously because curiosity urges them to embark on a journey where they expand their capacity by reading or being exposed to the audio-enriched materials. Another notable study was conducted by Hong et al. (2022) in Taiwan on university students whose grammatical competency improved substantially upon having the instruction based on EC. More specifically, students took part in some games in flipped classrooms to expand their grammatical knowledge by satisfying their curiosity. Besides, Fraschini and Tao's (2023) study in Korea revealed that EC-oriented education reduces language learning anxiety and increases the vocabulary breadth of learners through continuous learning attempts. After that, Fan et al.'s (2024) study underlined that curiosity-driven education yields better results in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, thereby considerably boosting learners' speaking skills in a US university. Moreover, Younis et al.'s (2024) study on Lebanese university students revealed that curiosity-based instruction is the key to mastery in writing. Furthermore, Albalawi (2024) pointed

out that EFL students' motivation increases as they receive the education to spark curiosity in Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, Metcalfe et al.'s (2020) study in the USA documented that epistemic curiosity ensured ongoing class engagement thanks to researching thoroughly in advance and expressing ideas freely in classes, activating student-centered instruction and peer learning. Last but not least, Hassan and Abbas (2024) postulated that sparking curiosity positively contributed to EFL learners' language proficiency in Iraq as their continuous efforts to expand their learning culminated in higher grades at the tertiary level. Considering the studies, it can be postulated that spotlights are on EC to take advantage of it in many forms at educational institutions.

Methods

A quasi-experimental strategy was preferred to establish a causal relationship between this research study's dependent and independent variables. This strategy is widely used in social sciences for its practicality regarding non-random sampling, manipulating the independent variable, and facilitating comparisons between groups to achieve more reliable interpretations by amalgamating quantitative and qualitative instruments (Ballance, 2024). The study consisted of two experimental groups and one control group to assess the impact of EC-oriented instruction on learners' speaking scores through exams on oral proficiency and semi-structured interviews so that both types of data could be gathered and triangulated to determine whether there were conflicts among findings, or they were harmonious (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). Having these procedures in mind, participants underwent the treatment period to address research questions thoroughly and proceed accordingly.

Participants

This study was conducted at a private international institution in Erbil, Iraq. The justification for selecting this university is its exclusive use of English as the medium of instruction for over 4000 students across 32 departments in the 2023–2024 academic year. Participants were all students enrolled in the Foundation English course, assigned to this category based on their results from the university's proficiency exam. The Foundation English course is meticulously crafted to enhance participants' English proficiency through a comprehensive, year-long language study and teaching program.

Students are anticipated to adapt to departmental courses with minimal difficulty when granted the privilege of increasing their English skills throughout the year in technology-enhanced classrooms with highly qualified and experienced lecturers. The students receive 10 weekly training hours via the OWN IT series, released by Cambridge University Press in 2020. The OWN IT series is distinguished for presenting engaging subjects for teenagers and adults across four levels tailored to the requirements of educational institutions, so it is expected to raise students' motivation with well-established units (Qomariyah & Khasanah, 2023). Furthermore, all units have been augmented with additional resources to cultivate learners' 21st-century competencies, so enhancing their English proficiency and interpersonal skills for more tremendous success in academic, social, and professional spheres is the ultimate goal, which is far better than improving solely linguistic skills. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling procedure, which required the researcher to divide the population into homogenous sub-groups and choose participants from each stratum equally to represent each department. Stratified random sampling

offers several advantages for researchers in avoiding biases and increasing the generalizability and validity of the study (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021). Thus, researchers in social science studies have chosen it to display the diverse qualities of participants. Participants aged between 18-27 years old were placed in three groups to represent experimental or control groups.

Research Instruments

Multiple instruments were employed to accurately assess EC's role in boosting students' reading performance. In this respect, the researcher utilized a prominent test to precisely measure students' background knowledge in English and make the placement homogenous to avoid biases regarding scientific principles. Students' overall proficiency in English, including macro and micro-skills, was evaluated using the Cambridge Placement Test (OPT). The exam included 18 questions, which included reading, grammar, vocabulary, listening, writing, and speaking sections. Multiple-choice sections were graded by the software automatically, while speaking and writing prompts were directed and marked by the committee members according to the pre-defined rubric. It should be noted that CPT was administered to other students for piloting, and the results showed a Cronbach Alpha Index of. 86, indicating that it was sufficient to meet internal consistency according to Bonett and Wright's (2015) guidelines. Before beginning treatment, students were driven to take the placement test and be assigned to the classes accordingly, so their average scores did not differ significantly from their peers.

Apart from placement examinations, students were exposed to two speaking exams created through supplementary materials of OWN IT 2. A question pool was formed based on extra speaking materials from the book, so they were asked randomly during the pre-test and post-test periods. It is essential to highlight that the difficulty was balanced for each set so that students did not feel overwhelmed, which could be demotivating for some pupils. Speaking exam questions were also piloted on other students with the same proficiency levels, and necessary arrangements were made to refine the items.

The last instrument used to collect data was the interview, which was integrated into the study to ensure triangulation with qualitative data. Semi-structured interview questions were formed to compare EC-based instruction and EC-free-based instruction. A semi-structured focus group interview (FGI hereafter)) form was used to ask in-depth questions about a specific subject and make the situation more explanatory (Fusch et al., 2022). FGI form encompassed two items in each set to depict a clearer image between participants' comments in terms of pre-test and post-test. Thus, students' genuine opinions about curiosity-driven education were sought meticulously. Items of the interview were kept concise to keep students' concentration up during the interview. When the number of items is exaggerated, the percentage to get sincere opinions decreases as students' concentration spans are not limitless. That is why questions in the interview were checked by the experts and abridged accordingly, which guaranteed face and content validity. Students were given the privilege to answer responses in 3 languages so they could elaborate their ideas more convincingly. Also, sufficient time was allocated for the students to prevent them from answering superficially. Additionally, a voice recorder was used to get students' thoughts and refer to them precisely because recording videos could be intimidating for some students (De Villiers et al., 2022). The interview process continued until it was saturated. In other words, recordings were

stopped when transcripts became a repetition rather than gaining novel information. FGI lasted for 2 hours until a new concept was no longer produced.

Data Analysis

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 28 and NVivo were employed to analyze the collected data. The former was used to analyze speaking exams, whereas the latter was activated to highlight interview themes through content analysis. More specifically, Tukey and one-way ANOVA tests were standard tools for statistical analysis, while themes with pros and cons of EC were emphasized in NVivo. In the final phase, numerical values were cross-checked with verbal cues to determine whether data complemented each other in harmony with the participation of ELT experts.

Reliability and Ethics

A permit from the Tishk International University Scientific Committee was acquired to thoroughly examine scientific procedures and ethics. The participants in the sample were informed about objectives, their responsibilities, and the insertion of a voice recorder during the focus group interviews, and their verbal consents were taken. The researchers notified the students involved in the study of their right to join or withdraw at any moment. The research was performed following the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Research Procedures

Each group took two comprehensive workshops to be informed about the whole study and ask any questions in their minds to be clarified. Additionally, students' consent forms were distributed to be signed. Some students were hesitant to join with valid excuses, so some of them were excluded and replaced with new students whose schedules fit to join the study. All students participated in the classes to cover units between 3 and 8. In the subsequent phase, groups were placed correspondingly and received the treatment. For example, the first experimental group of students took part in the lessons to sharpen their English through OWN IT 2. During the treatment period, students and teachers cooperated to choose topics, thereby doing thorough research on the internet the day before the lesson was held. Later, some students are assigned to express their ideas orally in the class to exchange them with their peers. This cycle continued with a well-established plan, and some modifications were made to increase students' enthusiasm and engagement during the study. On the other hand, the second experimental group of students was given 10 minutes to research the Internet during the lessons and shoot their ideas about the topics consecutively according to their assigned orders for the presentation. It is worth mentioning that other students also researched and contributed to conversations at their disposal. However, control group students continued their lessons according to the sequence of activities in the course book. In other words, they did not research the internet to trigger EC. Meanwhile, the topics for the presentation included many prominent people, key terms, and breakthroughs. To name a few, they embarked on a knowledge-seeking journey about common phobias, Aesop's Fables, Neymar, Zimbabwe, Mark Boyle, Black Friday, top 10 in-demand jobs, Finland, Chris Hemsworth, Nautilus House, The Inuit, Life-threatening accidents or injuries, high tech life, Mozart, Albert Einstein, Edison, J.K. Rowling, Ada Lovelace, Louis Braille, Kirtin Nithiyanandam, Alma Deutscher, Mikaila Ulmer.

Presentation topics were varied to learn about inventions, countries, prodigies, success stories of inspiring celebrities, countries, life-saving tips, and promising occupations for the future.

The phases of the lessons are illustrated in Table One below:

Table 1. *The cycle of lessons in both groups*

Group	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Exp 1	Detailed Orientation	Doing research at home for oral presentation
Exp 2	Wide-scale Orientation	Doing research in class for oral presentations
Control	Comprehensive Orientation	Joining regular classes in a presentation-free format

Table One indicates that the differences among groups were observed overtly. Experimental Group One students took the liberty of doing thorough research at home without having a time restriction. However, Experimental Group Two students grabbed their mobile phones and clicked on various sources to expand their knowledge about the topic within 10 minutes in class. On the contrary, control group students solely took part in lessons and responded to queries simultaneously in the class without resorting to further research on the web.

Findings

The study's primary findings were categorized into two sections to address the study's objectives quantitatively and qualitatively so that the distinguishing qualities of each datum can be observed clearly.

Descriptive Results

Participants' speaking pre-test and post-test scores were compared to determine whether the difference was significant under two headings.

The Comparison of Pre-test Grades

Tables Two and Three illustrate the pretest scores of the three groups using descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics for groups*

Variables	Measurement	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Pre-test	Experimental 1	22	54.54	9.50
Pre-test	Experimental 2	22	54.31	12.56
Pre-test	Control	22	54.09	9.63

Considering pre-test speaking scores, as visualized in Table Two, the average speaking scores were 54.54, 54.31, and 54.09, with 9.50, 12.56, and 12.85 SDs, respectively. It can be inferred that their average scores did not differ significantly from each other in the initial phase.

Table 3. *One-way ANOVA for groups*

Groups	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p.*
Between Groups	5.575	13	.429	.580	.859
Within Groups	38.425	52	.739		
Total	44.000	65			

In the following stage, having completed descriptive statistics, the researcher ran a one-way ANOVA to measure whether a statistically significant difference was prevalent among the three groups' means on the pre-tests, as illustrated in Table Three. The p-value, .859, revealed no noticeable difference between groups in pre-test scores as the p-value was higher than the pre-defined significance level of 0.05. In other words, no significant difference was measured concerning each group's pre-test scores, p. > .859 > 0.05.

The Comparison of Post-Test Grades

Post-test scores are analyzed in Tables Four, Five, and Six as descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, and Tukey to ensure that measurements complement each other harmoniously without leaving any doubts.

Table 4. *Descriptive statistics for groups*

Variables	Measurement	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Post-test	Experimental 1	22	79.90	16.72
Post-test	Experimental 2	22	63.18	15.47
Post-test	Control	22	58.63	10.13

Having implemented pre-test exams, the researcher was prompted to run post-test exams. In this regard, Table Four displays that two experimental groups outperformed the control group. To illustrate, the first experimental group's scores increased from 54.54 to 79.90, equal to precisely 25.36 points gained by employing a collocation-enriched education. Similarly, the second experimental group's marks shifted from 54.31 to 63.18, equal to 8.87 points enhancement by adopting an idiom enriched education. However, the control group students' average changed from 54.09 to 58.63, equal to 4.54 points increase by following the steps of the curriculum in a traditional format.

Table 5. *One-way ANOVA results for groups*

Groups	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	18.590	12	1.549	3.231	.002
Within Groups	25.410	53	.479		
Total	44.000	65			

In the subsequent phase, a one-way ANOVA was duplicated by inserting the post-test scores of students in each group, which revealed a statistically significant difference, p > 0.02, based on the values depicted in Table Five. It may be asserted that the intervention period increased students' productivity in speaking via curiosity-based instruction to expand their knowledge on queries through the sources on the web.

To illustrate the differences between groups, pre-test and post-test scores are visualized in Figure One below:

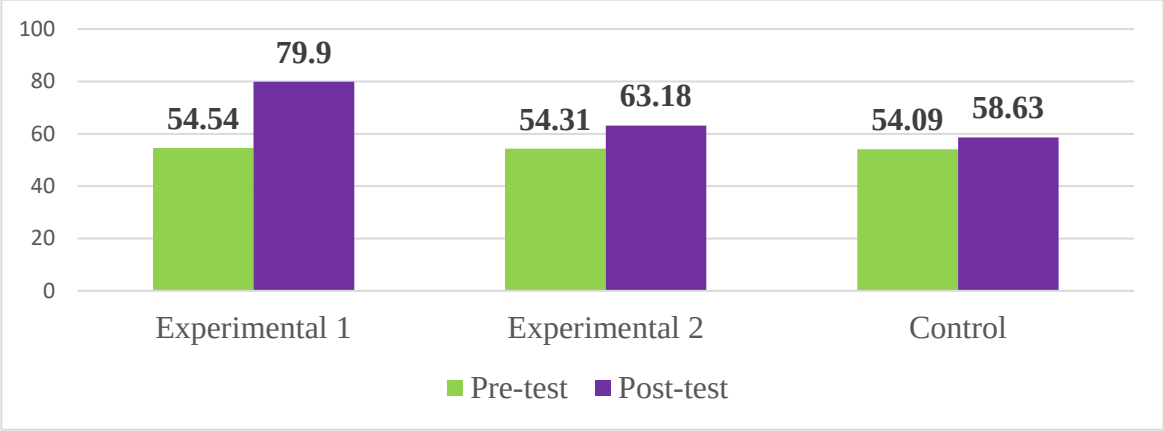


Figure 1. Comparison of scores among groups

Figure One displays that the first experimental group of students raised their speaking performance significantly. On the other hand, the second experimental and control group students could not elevate their levels as much as the first group, which is also acknowledged in descriptive statistics.

Table 6. *Results of Tukey test for the post-test*

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Exp 1	Exp 2	16.7273*	4.3412	.001	6.307	27.148
	Control	21.2727*	4.3412	.000	10.852	31.693
Exp 2	Exp 1	-16.7273*	4.3412	.001	-27.148	-6.307
	Control	4.5455	4.3412	.550	-5.875	14.966
Control	Exp 1	-21.2727*	4.3412	.000	-31.693	-10.852
	Exp 2	-4.5455	4.3412	.550	-14.966	5.875

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

On the other hand, a Tukey test was integrated into the research to determine whether the differences were noticeable between groups. As visualized in Table Six, a significant difference was measured between experimental groups, p. > .001 > 0.05. Accordingly, a highly significant difference was observed between the first experimental group, EC enriched education, and the control group, traditional curriculum, p. < .000 > 0.05. Considering all the figures, it is safe to conclude that all groups took advantage of the treatment period. However, control group students took advantage of the treatment with a slight rise in speaking performance. The second experimental group students' improvement was better than the control group's thanks to diving into doing research in the class; however, their progress could not be compared with the first experimental group, whose lessons were enriched with out-of-class curiosity-based instruction, so their progress was higher than other groups.

Qualitative Analysis

Semi-structured interviews uncovered students' sincere thoughts on the effects of EC-based language learning and the teaching process. Accordingly, the given questions were formulated:

Pre-test

- What do you think about EC-based language learning and teaching process?

Post-test

- How did this study affect your attitude toward EC-based instruction in English classes?

Interview Analysis

Students uncovered their genuine opinions about EC-based instruction boldly, the details of which were quoted below:

To name a few, they embarked on a knowledge-seeking journey about common phobias, Aesop's Fables, Neymar, Zimbabwe, Mark Boyle, Black Friday, top 10 in-demand jobs, Finland, Chris Hemsworth, Nautilus House, The Inuit, Life-threatening accidents or injuries, high tech life, Mozart, Albert Einstein, Edison, J.K. Rowling, Ada Lovelace, Louis Braille, Kirtin Nithiyanandam, Alma Deutscher, Mikaila Ulmer. Presentation topics were varied to learn about inventions, countries, prodigies, success stories of inspiring celebrities, countries, life-saving tips and promising occupations for the future.

We sparked our curiosity throughout the study because we were assigned to address a speech after researching on the web the day before the primary lesson. The topics intrigued us; our lecturer delved into Neymar in-depth. This research endeavor took me to many places, from Brazil to Spain. Additionally, I was inspired to learn that he was in poverty during his early years; however, he made a fortune through football after striving hard for many years. After that, one of my friends talked about the top 10 in-demand jobs, which was appealing. I could learn promising jobs for the future, thereby setting my future career accordingly. (St 4)

I am into biographies to get the inspiration. I was engaged with many famous figures in this study, such as Alma Deutscher and Mozart. Their problem-solving skills and incredible talents encouraged me to overcome my weaknesses and become a successful person in my field. I also learned that initiating the journey to play instruments at a young age matters to climbing the career ladder successfully in the years to come and being ahead of others with many unique compositions. Additionally, we thoroughly researched J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series. Although her book and movies were acclaimed globally, she was rejected many times by publishers in the past. She did not give up without a second until she realized her goals as an author. Now, she is regarded as one of the most-read and wealthiest authors. We also learned that she is a philanthropist who supports many charities with large donations. (St 8)

I want to be a nerd like my father, so I seek ways to expand my knowledge in many fields, particularly technology, communication, psychology, and sociology. In this respect, this study increased my knowledge of various topics. To illustrate, I gained much precious information about Albert Einstein's contributions to physics with the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics. Subsequently, I learned that Thomas Edison had over 1000 patents in his lifetime, including the light bulb, phonograph, motion picture, and electric power distribution. I also read about his conflict with Nikole Tesla, which was quite catchy. Overall, this study was very effective in positively changing my attitude toward English classes. (St 13)

My teacher granted permission to use our mobile phones for educational purposes in the class. We were informed about the topic so that we could express our ideas. Later, we visited various websites, including ChatGPT, Wikipedia, major newspapers, and blogs. However, our time was limited, so we could not get in-depth information about the topics. For example, we got information about life-threatening injuries and accidents but could not master it to compose our ideas. In other words, we had to read or watch more to get more information and arrange it in our minds with smooth organization. That is why time constraints affected us badly. I wish I had studied the topic at home and spoken more elaboratively in class. (St 16)

My passion is to explore different countries, people, and cultures. Throughout my studies, I embarked on many journeys to countries such as Finland, the USA, the UK, and Japan. We learned a lot about their customs, incomes, tourist attractions, social lives, and climate. I was also driven to watch further videos about those countries on YouTube. All activities increased my willingness to get more in-depth data about those countries. I am grateful to receive instruction to foster my learning out of curiosity with appealing and up-to-date topics. (St 19)

Discussion

The primary goal of the current study was to specify the relationship between curiosity-based instruction and speaking enhancement. The second goal was to compare the impacts of in-class and out-of-class curiosity-based activities to determine whether participants' speaking scores differed significantly. Additionally, students' genuine opinions about employing curiosity-based instruction were sought in detail. To fulfill this, quantitative and qualitative instruments were inserted into the study to get numerical and verbal data, thereby providing more reliable interpretations via triangulation. The former revealed that both experimental groups outperformed thanks to adopting the principles of EC-based education. However, control group students did not show substantial progress in speaking enhancement. The complementary statistical analysis unearthed that out-of-class EC-based instruction was more effective than in-class EC-based education. The rationale for this finding is that participants demanded extra time to research further and articulate their opinions more convincingly. Those findings align with the studies of Schutte and Malouff (2023), who asserted that inquiry-based instruction encourages learners to enrich their learning and develop good habits towards increasing knowledge incessantly. They also attested that well-established speaking assignments capture students' attention immediately because they have ample opportunity to reduce their speaking anxiety by making thorough preparations in advance. Align with other studies, Li et al. (2023) pointed out that curiosity-driven education breaks the monotony and supports creativity, so the positive cycle becomes prevalent as they quench the thirst for knowledge. Furthermore, Kara (2023) underlines that using mobile phones in classes for educational purposes can have some drawbacks because students may not have sufficient time to master and compose their ideas appropriately. Instead, he proposes that assigning manageable tasks as homework can have far-fetching effects on absorbing knowledge and exchanging ideas with their teachers and peers within a welcoming atmosphere. However, the study's findings are inconsistent with Katan and Baart's (2023) study, which hinted that curiosity-based instruction can be a huge burden for teachers if it is exaggerated and is seen over the official curriculum. He also conceded that taking turns frequently can be a demotivating factor for many students who are short of time due to other responsibilities for other courses.

Apart from quantitative statistical analysis, qualitative data through interviews highlighted significant themes. To name a few, students enjoyed their knowledge-seeking moments when the topics aligned with their interests. They appreciated that moment because it closed the global knowledge gaps about their favorite figures. In addition, students left positive comments about peer learning, which was routine for exchanging their ideas in a civilized format. Moreover, most students saw breaking the monotony with novel information through various means such as newspapers, online libraries, video-streaming sites, or blogs as a game-changer. Subsequently, students reiterated that they developed not only their linguistic skills but also some 21st-century skills, such as taking the initiative, developing critical thinking, assuming leadership, and boosting overall public speaking thanks to having oral presentations periodically. Qualitative findings are consistent with the assertions of Bilgin (2024), who stated that designing appealing presentations paves the way for sharpening many 21st-century skills because presentations urge the speakers to put many theoretical concepts into practice, thereby capturing the audience's interests. Similarly, Wilson (2024) elucidated that inquiry-based lesson plans positively affect students' oral and written performance because they need to elaborate their ideas in a systematic format.

Upon triangulating all data, it can be concluded that EC-based education can be used as a driving force to boost students' linguistic skills, mainly speaking. It was observed that adopting the principles of CLT through curiosity-driven tasks yields far better results when implemented under the guidance of a qualified and experienced supervisor.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of EC-based instruction on boosting students' speaking skills in a private university via a mixed-methods research methodology. Findings unearthed that curiosity-driven instruction paved the way for increasing speaking performance through well-balanced presentations on intriguing topics ranging from celebrities to life-changing inventions. Subsequently, curiosity-enriched lessons changed students' overall attitudes toward learning English because exchanging ideas with peers under the constant supervision of the lecturer fostered their learning in cooperation. Moreover, closing the knowledge gap raised students' enthusiasm to be life-long learners and seek novel information as a daily habit. Along with other gains, EC-based instruction sharpened students' 21st-century skills, such as leadership, responsibility, initiative, problem-solving, and public speaking.

This study provides some implications for stakeholders in charge of raising standards at educational institutions. To name a few, authorized governing bodies should recommend that school administrators increase the number of curiosity-based activities in English classes. In addition, more emphasis should be placed on conceptualizing curiosity-based instruction with practical implementations in in-service training sessions, internal seminars, and workshops. Subsequently, newly hired teachers should be trained by experienced colleagues to manage the curiosity-based instruction process professionally. Last, broadening the horizon with out-of-curiosity-based exercises should spread to other courses rather than solely English.

However, there are some limitations to the study. The first and major limitation of this study is that as it was conducted on a sample in Erbil, Iraq, the sample could not represent all EFL learners in Iraq. The second limitation is that only 66 participants were welcomed in the study; however, more participants are recommended to gain more evidence about the influence of

curiosity on developing learners' speaking skills. Additionally, this study sought the impact of EC on speaking enhancement, which can be expanded to other skills, such as reading, writing, or listening.

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EFL Students' Perception and Attitude towards the Use of ChatGPT to Promote English Speaking Skills in the Saudi Context

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Abstract:
This study aims to investigate English as a Foreign Language students' perceptions and attitudes towards using ChatGPT to enhance their English-speaking skills in English as a foreign language classroom. The study is significant as it contributes to the body of research on Artificial Intelligence in teaching and learning in English as a foreign language context in general and Saudi higher educational institutions in particular. 74 students from three public universities in Saudi Arabia participated by completing a five-point Likert scale questionnaire after carrying out oral tasks for six weeks using ChatGPT. The purpose of students' responses is to answer the research questions: What are students' perceptions and attitudes towards the use of ChatGPT to promote their English speaking skills? The Participants in the study were all female students majoring in English language in their departments at their educational facilities. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the questionnaire data. Results generally indicated a high-level of perception and a positive attitude toward using ChatGPT in English-speaking classes. The findings of this study will hopefully further the understanding of students' beliefs about ChatGPT and how this technology can be best employed for the advancement of English learning and teaching.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, English as a Foreign Language, English speaking skills, Saudi context, EFL Students' Perception

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Introduction:

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has a rich and fascinating history, dating back to the 1960s with the advent of computer-based instruction (CBI) systems. These early systems provided interactive learning experiences through programmed instruction, laying the groundwork for AI's transformative role in education. Over the decades, AI has evolved through groundbreaking innovations, offering a wide array of solutions to enhance teaching and learning.

One of the most impactful applications of AI in education is Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS), which deliver personalized and adaptive learning experiences by assessing students' knowledge and abilities. Similarly, adaptive learning platforms adjust content and activities based on individual performance and progress, ensuring a tailored educational journey. Advances in Natural Language Processing (NLP) have enabled computers to understand, interpret, and generate human language, facilitating more intuitive interactions between technology and learners.

AI's capacity for data-driven insights is further exemplified by machine learning for personalization, which analyzes students' behaviors, preferences, and performance data to anticipate their learning needs. In tandem, educational data mining (EDM) draws on information from sources like learning management systems and educational apps to identify patterns and inform instructional strategies. AI has also introduced virtual teaching assistants—AI-powered chatbots and agents that provide students and educators with real-time support, answer questions, offer guidance on assignments, and foster communication in online learning environments.

Among the myriad AI technologies reshaping education, ChatGPT, a language model developed by OpenAI, has gained remarkable popularity. Its versatility stems from its ability to personalize and adapt learning experiences, offering immediate feedback, explanations, and assistance across a wide range of subjects. This makes it an invaluable tool for catering to diverse learning styles and needs. Its 24/7 accessibility allows students to access support at any time, breaking down barriers related to time zones or rigid schedules.

Moreover, ChatGPT's conversational interface creates a more engaging and interactive learning environment. By simulating discussions, asking questions, and providing explanations in a natural, conversational manner, it enhances students' motivation and interest. As a supplemental learning tool, ChatGPT reinforces traditional teaching methods, offering practice exercises and additional resources to solidify understanding. Finally, its capacity for continuous improvement, driven by ongoing updates and user feedback, ensures that ChatGPT remains at the forefront of educational innovation, adapting to the ever-changing needs of students and educators.

From its early beginnings to its modern applications, AI continues to revolutionize the educational landscape, making learning more accessible, personalized, and engaging for all. Therefore, a number of research studies have been interested in exploring and investigating the merits and values of using ChatGPT. Many of these studies suggest that using ChatGPT and similar AI chatbots in EFL contexts can enhance students' English fluency, writing skills, grammar, vocabulary, and motivation, as well as reduce their fear of speaking, and improve their overall language proficiency and confidence. (Woo & Choi, 2021).

Literature Review

ChatGPT in EFL Contexts

Meniado (2023) conducted a literature review to investigate the effect that ChatGPT has on language learning, teaching, and assessment. The study reported that ChatGPT can foster English language learning and teaching by providing comprehensible language and feedback,

promoting fluency development but faces challenges such as inaccurate responses, non-emotionality, and technical limitations. In addition. Song & Song (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study to investigate ChatGPT's role in improving writing skills and motivation among 50 EFL students. The result indicated that the experimental group that received AI-assisted instruction showed significant improvement in writing skills and motivation compared to the control group.

Similarly. Haggag (2023) conducted a quasi-experimental study to assess the efficiency of utilizing a ChatGPT-powered program in facilitating descriptive writing ability and improving the use of English grammar. Results showed significant improvement in the participants' writing skills and grammar use after being introduced to ChatGPT. Shaikh et al. (2023) conducted a quantitative research study using a standard questionnaire-based approach to obtain the participants' feedback about the usefulness and effectiveness of ChatGPT in learning formal English. The findings from this study revealed that ChatGPT can be an effective tool for formal English language learning. Utilizing a desk research approach, Fauzi et al. (2023) examined the impact of ChatGPT on enhancing student efficiency in higher education. The study concluded that ChatGPT provides students with useful information, resources, and support, facilitating collaboration, increasing time efficiency, and enhancing motivation.

Overall, these studies contribute to the fast-growing research domain focused on using ChatGPT to improve EFL students' writing style, enhance accurate grammar use, and expand vocabulary.

ChatGPT to Improve English Speaking Skills

In EFL-speaking classes, opportunities to carry out additional practice after class with a regular partner are quite few (Ye et al., 2022). However, ChatGPT and chatbots like Microsoft Xiaoying offer EFL learners access to a virtual companion for practicing conversations, enabling them to engage in language learning at their convenience, regardless of time or location, making AI a useful tool for after-class oral practice (Alafnan et al., 2023). To investigate the potential use of chatbots to enhance learners' language production, Yang et al. (2022) and Jin et al. (2019) explored the use of AI chatbots as English conversation partners in EFL speaking classes. In Yang's study, findings showed that the chatbot encouraged student engagement and had a high task success rate, while Jin's study highlighted some difficulties with voice recognition and lengthy utterances. Young and Shishido (2023) further investigated the potential of AI chatbots, specifically OpenAI's ChatGPT, in producing refined conversational materials for EFL students. This study reported that the system's dialogues were well-suited for elementary and intermediate-level students. These studies collectively suggest that AI chatbots have the potential to enhance EFL speaking classes, but also highlight the need for further research and development to address technical challenges and ensure the quality of dialogue materials.

Perception and Attitude with respect to ChatGPT

Regarding learners' perception of chatbots, Darma et al. (2023) carried out a descriptive quantitative study investigating EFL students' perceptions of using ChatGPT at a university in Indonesia. The study explored students' beliefs in three areas: their overall understanding of the use of ChatGPT, their views about the advantages of ChatGPT and their perceptions about the disadvantages of ChatGPT. The study concluded that the participants supported the incorporation of ChatGPT into their instruction and seemed to acknowledge both the merits of ChatGPT (e.g., promoting language proficiency, problem-solving abilities, and critical thinking skills) and its

demerits (e.g., academic integrity and over reliance). Consistent with the previous study, Song & Song (2023) employed semi-structured interviews to elicit students' perceptions about AI-assisted instruction using ChatGPT. Qualitative results again revealed a range of viewpoints, from acknowledgment of AI's innovative instructional function and its beneficial impact on writing skills and motivation to apprehensions regarding contextual precision and excessive dependence.

Taecharungroj (2023) collected tweets about ChatGPT during the first month after its launch to elicit people's opinions about what this chatbot can do. 233,914 English tweets were analyzed using latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA). The analysis revealed once again that ChatGPT was believed to have potential positive and negative effects on humans and shed light on the multifaceted abilities of ChatGPT and the implications it may have in various domains. In addition, Keleş & Aydın (2021) conducted a survey of 130 students at a university in Anatolia. Results revealed both positive and negative reactions to the use of AI. Again, Bii et al. (2013) investigated students' attitudes towards the use of a chatbot named Knowie in high school instruction, and the findings indicated that students maintained a positive attitude towards using this chatbot during class instruction and seemed to recognize the potential value that Knowie offers in improving their learning.

Finally, mixed findings were reported in Gallacher et al. (2018), whose work is especially relevant to the present study as it concerned student perceptions about speaking. The researchers investigated the perceptions of 253 Japanese students towards using chatbot partners to improve their English conversation skills. Findings revealed that the participant students perceived AI as an innovative technique in learning, but felt it lacked richness and genuineness in interaction.

The ongoing discussion suggests that there is a gap in exploring how learners perceive ChatGPT's conversational abilities and whether these perceptions evolve with increased exposure to the tool, and how broader cross-cultural studies are needed to determine whether perceptions of ChatGPT in speaking classes differ by region, cultural attitudes toward AI, or educational systems.

Overall, students' perceptions and attitudes concerning the introduction of AI into their learning are varied. This is important since student beliefs influence how successfully AI can be integrated into their learning process and how beneficial such technology will be for them. Therefore, this study sought to further ascertain the attitudes and perceptions of EFL students with respect to the use of AI, specifically ChatGPT, in order to inform the establishment of best practices for its implementation in teaching and learning in the Saudi context. The specific focus is on oral interaction since that is a well-known problem skill for students in a country like Saudi Arabia where English is not widely heard and spoken outside the classroom. Furthermore, it is an area informed by fewer previous studies of student perceptions and attitudes, whose focus, as shown above, has more often been on AI assistance in writing, grammar and vocabulary.

Method

In order to o investigate students' perceptions and attitudes concerning the use of AI in promoting English-speaking skills, three AI chat/assistant software packages associated with automatic speech recognition (ASR) technologies were initially considered: Alexa, Google Assistant and ChatGPT. According to Dizon (2020), Alexa (https://developer.amazon.com/alexa) offers learners a range of features that can support English-speaking practice and language learning for users of all levels. Similarly, Chen et al. (2023) stated that Google Assistant (https://assistant.google.com/) can engage users in conversation to practice speaking English. Learners can ask questions, hold discussions on various topics, and receive feedback on

their pronunciation and grammar. As for ChatGPT (https://chat.openai.com/), research findings indicate that it enhances student engagement and interactivity, making the learning process more captivating. When linked to speech-to-text and text-to-speech software, as in the mobile app version used in this study, it can mimic spoken dialogue, pose inquiries, and deliver explanations in a conversational style, thus boosting student motivation and fostering a deeper interest in learning (Kim et al., 2021, Wang et al., 2021). Based on that research, ChatGPT was chosen to be used in this study.

Participants

The initial pool of participants was 88 students who enrolled in a Listening and Speaking course in their departments of English Language at three public universities in Saudi Arabia. However, a total of 10 students withdrew from the course in the various departments, and four students declined to take part in the study. Hence, in the end, 74 EFL students voluntarily participated by engaging in extra speaking practice via ChatGPT and then completing a questionnaire concerning their beliefs and feelings about using this app. All student participants were Saudi females at levels three, four, and five (second and third year BA) in departments dealing with English Language. The Listening & Speaking course in all these departments uses the textbook Mosaic 2 Listening and Speaking. The course instructor in each department cooperated with the researcher by following up classes with ChatGPT speaking tasks done at home, and encouraging the participants verbally to complete the questionnaire. Table 1 provides demographic information about the participants.

Table 1. *Participant demographics*

#	Educational Facility	Department	No. of Participants	Nationality	Gender	level 3	level 4	level 5
1	Uni A	English Language & Translation	34	Saudi	F	7	21	6
2	Uni B	Applied Linguistics	26	Saudi	F	5	16	5
3	Uni C	English Language	14	Saudi	F	2	10	2

Instrument

The current study implemented a quantitative survey, through a questionnaire. Questionnaires are popular tools in studies in the research area as they allow a great deal of attitude and perception information to be elicited from many participants in a short time (Dornyei &Csizer, 2012). Aside from background and demographic questions, the questionnaire included 20 items about ChatGPT and English speaking, each with a 5-point Likert scale response. The items were designed in a number of subcategories (described with Results below) to elicit participants' perceptions and attitudes concerning the use of ChatGPT to enhance their English-speaking skills.

To ensure the questionnaire's quality, first, face and content validity were enhanced by showing the items to two professors of applied linguistics. They checked the questionnaire items, and their suggestions were taken into consideration. Second, in order to assess the questionnaire's reliability, internal consistency among the 20 questionnaire items was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A reliability value of .98 was obtained, which signifies a very high degree of consistency among the 20 items.

Procedure

In the third week of the second semester of the academic year 2023, an online session was conducted via Zoom to meet with the potential participants and explain to them the purpose of the study and how to use ChatGPT to practice English speaking after school hours. Students who agreed to participate were asked to download the ChatGPT app on their mobile or smart devices and to set up their accounts. Next, they were given clear instructions on how to type the prompt for each interactive session, telling ChatGPT about the desired interaction (Table 1 below). Students were given a practice prompt to type and converse with their virtual partners. Prompts were designed based on the course topics, and each prompt was sent after they covered the topic in class. Prompts were set by the researcher to ensure the appropriateness and accuracy of the language used because well-designed prompts yield a better interaction with ChatGPT. All prompts were carefully worded and tested. Students were given 6 weeks to practice additional English interaction with a virtual partner. After finishing all their tasks, the participants responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was presented online via Google Forms. This was more convenient and practical for two reasons. First, it enabled me to contact participants from different universities in Saudi Arabia. Second, it ensured the privacy and anonymity of the participants. Table 1 represents the timeline of the study.

Table 1. *Timeline of the study intervention*

Week no.	Task	Prompts
1	Orientation	Ø
2	Regular class	Ø
3	Regular class + online session to introduce the use of ChatGPT and mock practice	I want you to act like my class mate. You will ask me questions about how a language is acquired and learned. Do not exceed five questions. Do not ask me all the questions at once. Ask me the questions one by one and wait for my reply.
4	Regular class + additional practice Topic: Danger and Daring	I want you to act as an English teacher. I will be the student, and you will ask me questions about the topic of extreme sports. Ask me to discuss the risks and thrills associated with activities like skydiving, rock climbing, or BASE jumping. Do not exceed ten questions. I want you to only reply as a teacher. Do not ask me all the questions at once. Ask me the questions one by one. Ask me a question and wait for my answer. If I make any English mistakes, I want you to correct me and explain the correction. After the tenth question, give me feedback on the whole discussion. Let's begin.
5	Regular class + additional practice Topic: Gender and Relationship	Same prompt, but change the topic to raising boys vs. raising girls in Saudi Arabia.
6	Regular class + additional practice Topic: Transitions	Same prompt, but change the topic to how I became different as I grow up
7	Regular class + additional practice Topic: Working	Same prompt, but change the topic to what would be my future career
8	Regular class + additional practice Topic: Breakthroughs	Same prompt, but change the topic to technological Innovations: explore emerging technologies that are reshaping industries and society, such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, or 3D printing
9	Regular class + additional practice Topic: Art and Entertainment	Same prompt, but change the topic to wedding ceremonies in Saud Arabia and how they are culturally

		different from other wedding ceremonies around the world
10	Filling out the questionnaire	Ø

Data Analysis:

The data was analyzed quantitatively using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the participants' responses to the 20 items on the 1-5 Likert scale in the perception and attitude questionnaire. For descriptive purposes, this was summarized using means and standard deviations (SD) for each item.

Results:

The questionnaire covered a considerable range of areas of students' perceptions and attitudes. In order to effectively interpret the responses of the respondents, the items were divided into two main categories: perception and attitude. Students' perception items were then classified into thematic subcategories to gain a better understanding of the participants' beliefs.

Table 2. *Questionnaire Item Results*

#	Statement	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Using ChatGPT has improved my confidence in speaking English.	74	3.57	.760
2.	ChatGPT has helped me practice English speaking in a convenient and accessible way.	74	3.95	.792
3.	Interacting with ChatGPT has enhanced my vocabulary and language skills.	74	3.11	1.504
4.	ChatGPT has provided useful feedback on my English speaking abilities.	74	3.46	1.377
5.	I would recommend using ChatGPT to others as a tool for improving English speaking skills.	74	4.01	1.199
6.	ChatGPT has increased my motivation to practice English speaking regularly.	74	3.82	.998
7.	Using ChatGPT has helped me overcome hesitation and fear when speaking English.	74	3.39	1.259
8.	ChatGPT provides a comfortable environment for me to practice speaking English without judgment.	74	4.43	.760
9.	I feel more fluent in English after using ChatGPT for speaking practice.	74	3.26	1.239
10.	ChatGPT accurately understands and responds to my English speech.	74	3.93	1.102
11.	Using ChatGPT has helped me identify and correct errors in my English pronunciation.	74	3.76	1.203
12.	I enjoy the interactive nature of practicing English speaking with ChatGPT.	74	4.34	.603
13.	ChatGPT has broadened my understanding of colloquial and informal English expressions.	74	3.42	1.216
14.	Using ChatGPT made me feel more comfortable engaging in English conversations with English speakers.	74	3.53	1.219
15.	ChatGPT has effectively supplemented my traditional English learning methods (e.g., classroom instruction, textbooks).	74	3.96	1.013
16.	I want ChatGPT to be used regularly in my English-speaking classes.	74	3.72	1.104
17.	I like conversing with a virtual partner.	74	3.73	1.242
18.	I prefer to interact with a human partner.	74	4.70	.918
19.	I feel excited when using ChatGPT to practice my English-speaking skill.	74	3.66	1.162
20	I feel anxious when I practice English conversation with my virtual partner.	74	2.16	1.228

As table 2 shows, students generally believe that ChatGPT helps in improving specific aspects of English proficiency relevant to English speaking. In descending order of approval, they are: pronunciation (item 11, Mean 3.76), colloquial language (item 13, mean 3.42), fluency (item

9, mean 3.26) and vocabulary (item 3, mean 3.11). The last is relatively one of the least endorsed of all the questionnaire items, but still clearly above the mid rating of 3.

Perceived usefulness and accuracy of ChatGPT feedback for speaking development in general are also endorsed (item 4, mean 3.46; item10, mean 3.93; and item 11, mean 3.76). ChatGPT's value as a convenient and effective adjunct to the usual taught course was also recognized (item 2, mean 3.95; item 15, mean 3.96).

Furthermore, there was a very positive perception among the participants of the affective role that ChatGPT plays in combating English speaking anxiety (item 7, mean 3.39; item 20, reverse worded, mean 2.16). Correspondingly, students reported increased confidence and a feeling of comfort when speaking English (item 1, mean 3.57; item 14, mean 3.53; item 8, mean 4.43). Item 8 referred specifically to the non-judgmental nature of ChatGPT, and gained the second highest of all the approval ratings in the study. Consistent with those findings, motivation and enjoyment associated with speaking were also reported to be enhanced (item 6, mean 3.82; item 19, mean 3.66). Enjoyment was especially generated by ChatGPT's interactive nature (item 12, mean 4.34). Generally, the high mean responses (all > 3) suggest that the participants have a highly positive perception of the use of ChatGPT in association with speaking classes.

Consistent with the above, students' overall attitudes toward the use of ChatGPT in relation to English speaking also suggest strong endorsement speaking English with ChatGPT both currently (item 17, mean 3.73) and going forward (item 5, mean 4.01; item 16, mean 3.72). However, when it comes to spoken interaction, the student participants report an even greater preference for having a human partner, with the highest endorsement in the whole study (item 18, mean 4.70), compared with a virtual one (item 17, mean 3.73).

Discussion

The findings of the current study can be compared with those of studies such as the ones reviewed above which described both objective and student-reported features of AI that are relevant to learning foreign language speaking. Although the present study is in a different context from those studied before, many of the findings are similar.

The present findings agree with Meniado (2023) with respect to AI providing good feedback and enhancing fluency. Young and Shishido (2023) found ChatGPT especially suited to students of elementary and intermediate levels, which are the levels of students in the present study, and the responses of the students in this study echo that. However, it is worth noting that suitability of level is perhaps ensured as much by the nature of the prompts that the teacher has the students use to guide ChatGPT as by the AI program acting alone. In the present study, the prompts largely restricted the spoken interaction to archetypal 'classroom language' exchanges where the teacher asks a question, the student answers, and the teacher provides feedback on the answer (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). While suitable for the student level in the present study, that is not very like normal conversation with native speakers so it remains uncertain how well ChatGPT would deal with that with higher proficiency students.

Alafnan et al. (2023) among others pointed out the convenience of AI support for speaking and again my participants strongly endorsed that (item 2). This is perhaps notable because using ChatGPT there is an initial slight inconvenience for the student in needing to type the teacher-provided prompt for ChatGPT. In contrast, one can start a spoken interchange with applications like Alexa immediately without typing such a prompt.

With respect to affective impact, the present study resembles studies such as Woo and Choi (2021) in finding that AI support for speaking helps allay the fear of speaking. No doubt this is because of the non-judgmental tone adopted by ChatGPT in its feedback as well as the fact that the students know they are not talking with a real person. It is that ambience that generates the enjoyment reported by our students which in turn encourages continued use of ChatGPT for speaking practice, Yang et al. (2019) for example also refer to improved engagement which is supported by our students reporting the enjoyment and motivation associated with ChatGPT speaking practice (items 12, 6).

Previous studies have not, however, been unequivocally favorable to AI as an aid to speaking. It has been found or reported to be sometimes inaccurate or suffer voice recognition problems, be unrealistically unemotional, and lack richness and genuineness of interaction (Meniado, 2023; Jin et al., 2022; Gallacher et al., 2018). In the present study accuracy was endorsed (e.g. items 10, 11), but of course the students responding may not have identified some subtle forms of inaccuracy in what they heard from ChatGPT. With respect to the richness and realism of the content that they received, it seems likely that they held the same view as earlier studies and this was what led them to so strongly prefer a human interlocutor over ChatGPT (item 18 being the only proposition that they strongly agreed with).

Finally, it is worth pointing out that some more fundamental objections to AI in language teaching and learning voiced in the literature do not really apply to its use in activities like those in the present study. The complaints that students over-rely on it and that it damages academic integrity (Darma et al., 2023; Song and Song, 2023) are very relevant for example in relation to writing, where ChatGPT can be used to compose an entire essay for the writer/student, which is widely seen as 'cheating'. However, in the case of ChatGPT supporting interactive or conversational speaking in the manner of the present study, the AI assistance is not of that sort. AI is the interlocutor and does not play the role of the student speaker who still has to do all the work to produce their own responses to what ChatGPT says. Hence there is no 'cheating' involved and indeed it is hard to see how one could regard a student as ever 'over-using' this sort of practice, provided the prompts to ChatGPT are such as to generate interchanges consistent with the student proficiency level. English teachers in Saudi Arabia are typically delighted at any evidence of students engaging in English speaking of any sort outside the classroom.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insight, in a less studied EFL context, into students' perceptions of ChatGPT's English-speaking skills and value as a provider of practice in interactive English speaking. The findings indicate that ChatGPT is generally perceived as a convenient and accurate tool to improve English-speaking skills among EFL students, especially in pronunciation, colloquial language and fluency. It is also evident that ChatGPT helps students emotionally, reducing anxiety and enhancing enjoyment and motivation. Nevertheless, it is not regarded as superior to a human interlocutor.

The implication for teachers and students is clear. Unlike some other uses of AI, e.g. in relation to EFL writing, the use endorsed in this paper seems innocuous with respect to violation of principles of academic fairness. Therefore, its use in the oral interlocutor role should be encouraged to help students become more fluent interactive English speakers. The only caution is that the teacher still needs to be involved. If EFL students are left to engage in spoken interaction with ChatGPT entirely unsupervised they may engage at a level that is too easy. In that case their

ability may fossilize as they do not progress (Krashen, 1982). The teacher needs to be involved in guiding the initial prompts that students provide to ChatGPT so that the interactions are suitable for the student level, i.e. provide some challenge, and progress towards more normal conversation with native speakers.

Finally, the implication for researchers is also clear. It is by now clear that ChatGPT can play the role of interlocutor in EFL speaking, and indeed is seen by students around the world to help, but is not superior to a native speaker interlocutor. Studies therefore need not replicate studies to confirm that general conclusion. Rather we need to explore the different kinds of prompt to ChatGPT that can generate the many different kinds of spoken interaction that a learner of English may eventually need to engage in. Such expertise as 'prompt engineers' is not only important for teachers but also for students themselves so that they can eventually take full control of their use of ChatGPT to enhance their oral communicative ability.

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What English Articles Say about Nursing Postgraduate Thesis Writing: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract
Advancement in nursing has been of considerable importance, especially after the pandemic, which necessitates a parallel upgrade in postgraduate nursing programs. Similarly, there is a need for studies related to the nature of the postgraduate nursing thesis/dissertation as it is the landmark of their academic achievement. This paper aims to fill this gap by presenting a literature review on graduate nursing students' writing experience. A thorough systematic review of the literature yielded 22 studies related to nursing thesis writing. This paper presents critical themes from reviewing these studies and draws out significant implications for nursing education. The findings are grouped under five categories: challenges, feedback, support, needed skills, and thesis writing. Based on these findings, gaps are identified, and recommendations for further development of nursing students' graduate education are suggested. This literature review is expected to contribute to the development of students and supervisors as well as course content in graduate nursing programs.
***Keywords**:* academic dissertation, nursing, nursing research, postgraduate nursing education, systematic literature review

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Introduction

The growing interest in obtaining a postgraduate degree has been a wide requirement in all fields. Students are required to learn how to conduct research, which is a new field for them. This has necessitated devoting more time to immersing in the research field. Nursing postgraduates may be considered as a unique case. Since the breakout of COVID-19, there has been a great demand for nurses at hospitals as their role is critical in confronting this pandemic. Those postgraduate nurses face many difficulties. On the one hand, they need to be at the hospital, which takes much of their time. On the other hand, composing a well-written thesis presents a main challenge for postgraduate nurses as it is a new genre they must master. Composing a successful dissertation is comprised of several factors, such as content, language, and sources. It also requires substantial knowledge of the content that may be achieved professionally when owning academic experience. Nevertheless, it may not be available for all learners as Bichener and Basturkment (2006) consider. Therefore, writing a thesis successfully is a landmark in postgraduate students' education. It requires a high level of dedication but offers invaluable opportunities to develop research skills and academic writing. This shows that nursing postgraduate production is critical since it tells what has been studied, and what is needed to be covered in future studies. This can save the time of postgraduate nurses who can focus on the things needed in their field as researchers without being lost and doing studies that have already been published.

Literature review

English has become the medium of instruction in the academic world (Zhu, 2004). This increases the challenge to the next level where learners, especially non-native speakers of English, need to have good English writing competency that enables them to compose their theses successfully. This challenge is for both non-native speakers of English and, to a lesser degree, native speakers. Comparing first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) learners, L2 supervisees tend to have more difficulties in the sentence level than the paragraph level when composing their theses (Casanave & Hubbard, 1992; Cooley & Lewkowicz, 1997; Dong, 1998). The nonnatives encountered problems in grammatical accuracy, word choice, spelling, and punctuation. On the other hand, both L1 and L2 supervisees have the same difficulties regarding the paragraph level and genre (Allison, Cooley, Lewkowicz & Nunan, 1998; Bitchener & Baştürkmen, 2006; Casanave & Li, 2008; Dong, 1998; Paltridge, 2003). The aforementioned challenges, for both natives and non-natives, indicate the necessity for enculturing postgraduate students with thesis writing in order to guarantee optimum findings in the research conducted by those students.

Thesis writing and nursing students

Writing a thesis by nursing students has always been a challenging task since their focus is split between theory and practice (Whitehead, 2002). The recent developments in the world have led to an increase in the need for research in varied fields, increasing the requirements of graduates competing for a proper career. Furthermore, nurses, in particular, have been required to do much more than in other fields due to the increasing need for their efforts, especially after the worldwide spread of COVID-19. This has been a dilemma for nurses who opt to receive postgraduate degrees in their fields and improve academic research in their area. On the one hand, the hospital's practical challenges requiring extensive efforts from nurses represent their main focus. On the other hand, there is a need to bridge the academic gap in order to produce a well-written thesis that includes valuable results.

Although many studies in the literature investigate thesis writing from different perspectives, they remain general and do not focus on nursing students. This "dearth of studies reporting on academic writing in nursing programs" has also been mentioned by Malveira Orfanò & Wingate (2023, p. 119) who address this research gap in their study. Nevertheless, it is promising to see studies emerging that address this need. One such study is by Wong et al. (2025) who focus on providing recommendations to "guide the provision of effective support addressing nursing and midwifery doctoral students' needs in academic writing" (p. 1). Their findings revealed that face-to-face and online writing support groups have a positive impact on doctoral students' motivation and confidence in writing. Another recent study that focuses on the needs of nursing students is by Akingbade et al. (2024), who have found three themes in their study: "challenges of Nigerian postgraduate students before the pandemic, the impact of the pandemic on postgraduate education, and innovations to improve postgraduate education in Nigeria" (p. 1). Due to the sensitive role of nurses, especially after the pandemic, their challenges in bridging their academic gap are heavy, and there is a need to conduct empirical studies about the enculturation process that enables them to compose a well-written thesis and graduate from their master's/doctoral programs. Furthermore, the academic production of postgraduate nurses, in the form of a thesis/dissertation, is quite essential, especially after the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Towards this end, this study is designed in the systematic literature review form aiming to investigate the empirical article studies published about thesis writing for nursing students in Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus. We believe this study's results can shed light on the current studies. Researchers should target missing studies to fill those gaps and provide nursing postgraduate students with sufficient knowledge to help them with their thesis writing.

Methodology

We broadly followed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2015) to systematically review the scholarship about the role pre-doctoral publications play in scholars' future careers. The systematic review approach was chosen because we aimed to produce a critically appraised answer to a pre-determined narrow question through a synthesis of the available evidence rather than identify modal trends or map overall characteristics/concepts in a given field or on a given topic to which a scoping review would have been more appropriate (Munn et al., 2018).

Systematic Review Method

Following the PRISMA guidelines of systematic reviews (Moher et al. (2015), which aim to "facilitate the preparation and reporting of a robust protocol for the systematic review", the current study adopts the systematic literature review to report the empirical studies conducted about dissertation/thesis writing. Towards this end, two databases were searched (Scopus and Web of Science) to find the journal articles published. The researchers initially started with general readings in the literature to define the main keywords to be used in the research. The following keywords, consequently, were identified for the research use:

"Thesis writing OR Dissertation writing OR Thesis OR Dissertation OR Academic writing AND Postgraduates OR Postgraduate students OR Master students OR Doctoral students OR PhD students AND Nursing"

The search was completed on November 11, 2022, and it was delimited to articles published before November 10, 2022. The search yielded 5010 articles from the Web of Science and 239 from

Scopus (total: 5249 articles). The filtering process started by excluding the publications that were not journal articles (e.g. editorial, commentary, note n=1500), followed by the language filter to exclude the non-English articles (n=561). The researchers also excluded the duplicated articles and found (n=12), which finally made the article number 3176.

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

This study followed the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion:

- Qualitative papers about thesis/dissertation writing by nursing students
- Quantitative papers about thesis/dissertation writing by nursing students

Exclusion:

- Non-empirical studies about thesis/dissertation writing by nursing students

The screening phase had three stages, in which the authors excluded the unrelated articles by title, abstract, and full text respectively. In other words, the researchers read the articles and decided on those that were clearly out of the scope of the study (n=2784). Then, the abstracts of the remaining articles were also read to decide if they were related to the study or not, and the unrelated ones were also excluded (n=272). Finally, the articles that were unclear from the abstract level were decided on by reading the whole article (n=104). The final stage of the screening process yielded 16 scientific articles.

To widen the resources, the research included references and citations of each of the 16 articles resulting in the exclusion phase, and this also resulted in six more articles. Hence, the total number of articles became 22 (Figure 1).

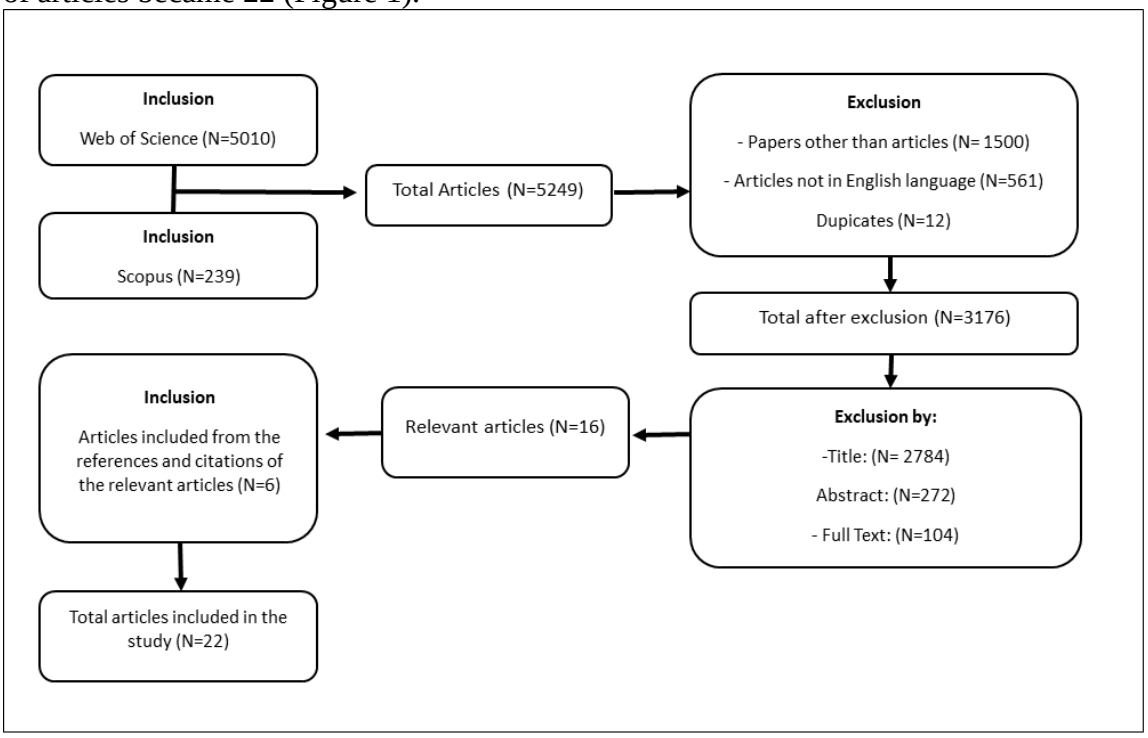


Figure 1. Inclusion and Exclusion

Data analysis

The study employed thematic analysis which is "a method for analyzing qualitative data that involves searching for recurring ideas (referred to as themes) in a data set." (Jason & Glenwick, 2016, p. 33). It is "usually applied to a set of texts, such as an interview or transcripts, where the researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes: topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly with the aim of drawing interpretations from the data." (Castleberry & Nollen, 2018) Thematic analysis has a six-step process: "familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up" (Caulfield, 2023, p.1).

The articles from the inclusion and exclusion phases were thoroughly examined to extract the data using the screening process. This included the article title, author's name, participants' type (students, supervisors, etc.), participants' number, context, method, research tools, and major findings. Then, the authors started analyzing the results using thematic analysis, which "moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas" (Namey et al, 2008, p. 138). Adopting this analysis method helped the authors highlight the major themes resulting in each article.

Results

After finalizing the inclusion/exclusion process, the remaining articles were thoroughly read to highlight their significant findings. Based on the information in the articles, the content is analyzed for themes and recurring patterns of meaning using thematic analysis. We grouped the recurring patterns into five main categories: (1) *challenges, (2) feedback, (3) support, (4) needed skills, and (5) thesis writing* (Table 1). First, the theme 'challenges' includes challenges faced by both supervisors and supervisees. The sub-themes such as heavy workload, the need for in-service training for mentoring graduate students, incongruence between the needs of students and teaching in practice, and burnout syndrome are grouped under the challenges. Second, the theme 'feedback' involves a few sub-themes such as collaborative supervision, factors that affect the success of supervisors, and the kinds and quality of feedback provided. Third, the theme 'support' involves providing graduate students with training and workshops in writing and research. Fourth, the 'skills' theme consists of a number of sub-themes such as considering writing as a life-long process, improving higher-order thinking skills, conceptual skills, exploration and interpretation. Finally, the 'thesis writing' theme includes the two types of thesis writing: dissertation format and manuscript, the use of documentary analysis in postgraduate programs, and the focus of research in postgraduate theses.

Table 1. *Results*

Theme	Sub-themes
Challenges	• Challenges Encountered by Supervisors: - Anderson et al. (2019) • Challenges Encountered by Supervisors and Supervisees: - Mete & Isbir (2015) • Challenges Encountered by Supervisees: - Bower & Timmons ((1999) - Galdino et al. (2016) - Johansen & Harding (2013) - San Miguel & Nelson (2007) - Sun et al. (2018)

Feedback	• Preferred Supervision Type: - Kayama et al. (2013) • Aspects Affecting Providing Feedback: - Kirton et al. (2011) • Effect of Feedback on Students' Performance: - Jackson et al. (2021) • Perspective of Supervisees about the Received Feedback: - Eyres et al. (2001)
Support	• Workshops: - Kulage et al. (2020) - Micsinszki & Yeung (2021) • Courses: - Azuero et al. (2013) - Koszalinski & Lindley (2021) - Hershberger (2021) • Needed Support: - Graves et al. (2018)
Skills	• Adopted Skills: - Shellenbarger et al. (2015) • Mismatch between Theory and Practice: - Roets & Maritz (2017)
Thesis Writing	• Thesis Format: - Graves et al. (2018) • Analysis Method: - Andrade et al. (2018) • Published Theses Content: - Taş et al. (2019) - Munari et al. (2014)

Challenges

As thesis writing needs collaboration between supervisors and supervisees, the challenges of both sides were examined in the data elicited in this study. To start with, supervisors are an important aspect of the thesis writing process because they directly support postgraduate students with mentoring tips and guidance. Anderson et al. (2019) stated that supervision, along with the current duties, prevents supervisors from offering sufficient feedback to students in their theses. Furthermore, the study reported the lack of preparation programs that can equip supervisors with sufficient knowledge for mentoring graduate students.

Mete and Isbir (2015) examined the barriers encountered by 10 Ph. D. nursing students and their five supervisors, and they found that most of the students and their advisors were inexperienced with using theories and models in research and reported having barriers in language, lack of resources, and other factors. Still, these challenges were availed when students gained access to sources, contacted experts and developed their nursing paradigm, and improved their analysis and synthesis skills by conducting theory and model-based research.

Several studies examined the challenges encountered by nursing postgraduate students in accomplishing their dissertations. One such study is by San Miguel and Nelson (2007), where the authors examined the challenges encountered by Ph.D. nursing students in writing their theses. They found that there is a significant gap between theoretical knowledge and actual writing. Students learn how to academically write using sources that do not excessively explain the way the students need to learn in order to gain a successful writing style. In the same vein, Johansen

and Harding (2013) considered that academic writing is a weakness for postgraduate nurses, whose primary focus is clinical expertise. Hence, this gap, participants suggest, should be targeted in the assessment system adopted by universities in order to equip the learners with sufficient knowledge to target the research problems successfully, which in turn leads to better performance in their postgraduate studies.

A very essential part of the student's challenges in conducting their research for their postgraduate studies is caused by their lack of knowledge, which they are expected to receive during their studies (Sun et al., 2018). The study examined the needs of Taiwanese nursing students in choosing the appropriate method for their theses. Not having sufficient knowledge from the courses offered at the university, the students cast doubts about the importance of qualitative research. The study called for improving the research method books in order to equip the learners with sufficient knowledge needed for their theses.

Furthermore, Bower and Timmons (1999) reported the mismatch between the students' needs and the actual teaching. They say: "The research preparation of nurses in the United States is not consistent with the expectations outlined by the Essentials of Master's Education for Advanced Practice Nursing" (p. 131). One essential consequence of the challenges encountered during the MA/PhD career is burnout syndrome. In a study (Galdino et al., 2016) conducted on 129 MA and PhD students, the participants reported that 11.6% had burnout due to lack of support and dissatisfaction with the study topic.

Feedback

Providing feedback to doctoral students represents a milestone for sharpening the supervisees' academic skills and assisting them in accomplishing their thesis successfully. Kayama et al. (2013) analyzed the role of supervisors in giving feedback to their students. The study examined the current trend in the context of the study, Japan, and found that individualized supervision is the most common. Yet, there is an emerging trend of turning towards the collaborative supervision mode, in which group activities are facilitated in order to urge the students to work collaboratively. In the same vein, Kirton et al. (2011) listed several aspects that can significantly affect the performance of supervisors in providing mentorship. This includes having experience in research, age, knowledge of a particular area, supervision, compassion, and understanding.

Furthermore, Jackson et al. (2021) examined feedback given to postgraduate nursing students and its effect, positive or negative, on accomplishing thesis writing. The study highlighted two main types of feedback received by the 400 participants in their thesis writing: enabling feedback and disempowering feedback. The study also revealed that factors are related to both the supervisors and students alike. Supervisors' feedback may be overprotective and prevent students from encountering the real challenges of research, especially when supervisors are offering the students everything they need.

The last study examined the perspective of supervisees on the feedback received from their mentors in their academic writing (Eyres et al., 2001). The findings of this study reveal that supervisors should improve the type of feedback given to their supervisees in three major aspects: assignments, response to writing, and response to writers. The doctoral students believe that assignments should have a rationale instead of just giving an assignment for a grade. In other words, the instructors should design the assignment in a way that improves the students' expertise in their weak areas of academic writing, which is an essential aspect of sharpening the students'

thesis writing skills. Furthermore, the participants reported the need for further clarification when giving comments to supervisors. They may know that there is a problem in a highlighted part, but they need to know how it should be solved. Finally, the supervisees would like to know if their writing is clear or not. If yes, they need to receive clear and specific feedback from their supervisors as this can significantly increase their attitude towards accomplishing their work. If not, they expect to have better comments that can guide them to find the right path to follow.

Support

Since the postgraduate students are still novice authors and may not have sufficient expertise in thesis writing, receiving support in the form of training sessions or workshops is mandatory to increase their thesis writing expertise. In total, two studies were conducted after a workshop designed to foster academic writing (Kulage et al., 2020; Micsinszki, & Yeung, 2021). Participants of both studies (24 MA students and 26 PhD students respectively) have positively benefited from the workshops and reported the importance of these activities in sharpening the academic writing expertise of the postgraduate students. Despite the significant effect of these workshops, the participants of Micsinszk and Yeung (2021) opted for some changes that may increase the benefits of the workshop. In detail, the participants suggested having a formal evaluation at the end of the course to show the level of improvement of the students in their academic writing.

In line with these two workshops, one study examined the effect of a research methodology course on improving the academic writing of 27 doctoral students (Azuero et al., 2013). The participants also stated that they have benefited from the course, but they still feel there is room for improvement and addition in order to maximize the benefits of the course. Thus, the participants suggested increasing the interaction among the participants as it is considered a skill that can broaden their horizons and enable them to grasp the meaning of each method successfully.

Another study is by Koszalinski and Lindley (2021) who report on the use of a PhD level quantitative nursing research course using the Andersen Behavioral Model of Health Services to guide data assignments, which offered students the opportunity to operationalize, code, and manage the variables in their models. The students found the course positive and they commented that it enabled them to have more confidence in planning and conducting their dissertation because they understand how a study could be guided and conducted while grounded in theory.

Another study was conducted by Hershberger (2021) who was asked to design a practical course for doctoral students. The author chose the practical way of disseminating the literature review of several studies with students in order to learn how to compose a state-of-art literature review in their theses/dissertations. The results were very promising since many students were able to publish systematic literature reviews in journals or present them at conferences.

In the same vein, Graves et al. (2018) examined the types of support needed by postgraduate nursing students in order to improve their academic expertise. The study reported the need for additional writing skills for students to improve their academic writing skills. The participants considered that thesis writing needs prior preparation with smaller bits of academic writing. This can come in the form of assignments or cooperative work with mentors.

Skills

Adopting skills to mitigate the thesis writing process represents an important aspect that is tackled in the studies. To start with, Shellenbarger et al. (2015) examined the significant skills

and techniques used by postgraduate students, and they were listed by six doctoral students during the interviews. The participants considered learning academic writing as a life-long process, which needs patience and practice. Feelings were also reported to have a critical role in the performance of the students and their interest in writing. For them, the type of feedback they receive plays an essential role in motivating/demotivating them.

A study by Roets and Maritz (2017) explores the match between the theses of 10 postgraduate nursing students and the Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). The findings revealed that there is a gap between what students theoretically receive and what they actually apply when writing their theses. This includes the lack of conceptual skills, logical order of thought and congruency, and limited ability of novice scholars to explore the nature of information and interpret and manipulate data in a novel way. Finally, the authors mention that language and possible cultural challenges could be a barrier to learning and communication. The authors express their concern about the relatively high marks awarded for theses which were deficient in HOTs.

Thesis Writing

Several studies tackled the thesis writing itself in terms of format, analysis method, and content. In their study, designed as a cross-sectional survey, Graves et al. (2018) explored the advantages and disadvantages of the traditional dissertation format and manuscript (Thesis by Publication) option for dissertations among nursing PhD programs in the USA. The majority (59%) preferred both formats, while the minority (11%) favored the manuscript option only. The study reveals that lack of faculty support was the main factor in choosing the manuscript option. It is stated that although the manuscript option provides benefits, its implementation is critical. Students who choose the manuscript option need additional writing skills and thus faculty need mentorship in advising these students.

The study of Andrade et al. (2018) focused on the use of documentary analysis in theses defended in the postgraduate programs in nursing in Brazil. The authors conclude that documentary analysis contributes to the nursing profession by making it possible to formulate empirical evidence by examining documents elaborated by nurses. Yet, the majority of the 95 analyzed theses (N=81) used documentary analysis as the technique for collecting and analyzing data while only 14 theses used it as the main research method.

In the study of Taş et al. (2019) examined the postgraduate theses in the field of mental health and psychiatric nursing in Turkey between 1980 and 2018. Post-graduate theses in Turkey mostly focus on the field of preventive mental health of individuals with no mental health problems and the increase in the elderly population made neuropsychiatric nursing popular in Turkey. The authors recommend that experts work more with patients with health disorders in clinics. It is also pointed out that there is a need for studies in the fields of child and adolescent psychiatric nursing, as well as studies on alcohol/substance abuse, forensic psychiatric nursing and evidence-based experimental studies. In the same vein, a study conducted by Munari et al. (2014) examined the publication trends of 212 MA nursing dissertations. The results have revealed that researchers prefer practical research in hospitals, and the majority of the studies were qualitative.

Discussion

Examining the results of the reported studies reveals a growing interest in studying thesis writing by nursing postgraduate students. The main categories listed in this study are challenges, feedback, support, skills, and thesis writing. Obviously, there is more focus on reporting the

challenges encountered by both supervisors and supervisees alike. Yet, there is still a need to increase the quality and quantity of challenges. On the one hand, more mixed-method studies that tackle the thesis writing challenges of nursing postgraduates would be a beneficial research area. On the other hand, the studies are still few, and there is a need to expand the contexts to measure what challenges are encountered by nurses who have to focus on clinical work as well as academic research. Moreover, it is necessary to increase the studies related to psychological problems due to thesis writing. The psychological aspect plays a vital role in completing the thesis writing, and the only study (i.e. Galdino et al., 2016) that examined this topic does not suffice.

Feedback is also an area that was examined by several studies as it is a pillar for assisting students in accomplishing their academic mission. Nevertheless, more document analysis studies are needed, especially those that can investigate the quality and quantity of feedback given to students on paper and the effect of the written corrective feedback in progressing the thesis writing. In detail, studies such as Eyres et al. (2001) are needed since they highlight the importance of being involved in the writing process through multiple drafts and receiving specific and constructive feedback, which is emphasized by doctoral students. More studies on feedback from the perspectives of supervisors and supervisees will yield beneficial insights for the field of nursing research. Seeing the process of giving and receiving feedback will shed light on the process of feedback central to producing a doctoral thesis. Our review reveals the educative aspect of feedback and the lack of discourses related to feedback at the doctoral level in nurse education.

Speaking of support, many studies examine the role of workshops and courses in improving the thesis writing expertise of nursing postgraduates. Nevertheless, less attention is paid to the importance of other types of support needed by students from the university administration, instructors, and even family. Restricting the support to the one provided by supervisors may keep the vision unclear for the students, who may not know what sort of support they are expecting and from whom they need to receive it.

Furthermore, the studies have not targeted the linguistic challenges encountered by non-native English nursing postgraduates who are supposed to compose their theses/dissertations in a language other than their L1. The blooming of English as the language of science necessitates the proficiency of the English language, regardless of the first language of the postgraduates. Hence, studies should be conducted about the linguistic challenges and the strategies to adopt in order to avail these challenges. One more area that has not been examined and needs to be targeted in future studies is fostering the academic literacy of postgraduate nursing students. Being novice authors with barely sufficient expertise in the academic writing field, there is a need for studies (especially longitudinal ones) that show how students can improve their academic writing skills in order to accomplish their thesis completion.

Study limitations

Despite the variety of findings in this study, there were several limitations. First, the articles were derived from two search engines (Web of Science & Scopus), and other sources need to be included to guarantee the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the related literature included several studies that covered the same topic but were not empirical research articles (e.g. book chapters, theses, dissertations, conference papers, etc.). Therefore, it is recommended for future studies to include other sources to guarantee more comprehensive results from varied sources.

Recommendations

In light of the articles reviewed, several recommendations can be made to make thesis writing for postgraduate nursing students a successful journey and a better supervision process for supervisors. The recommendations can be listed as:

- Revising the workload of supervisors to enable them to give sufficient feedback
- Providing in-service training for mentoring graduate students
- Aligning the students' needs and the actual teaching
- Providing support to graduate students to prevent burnout
- Following the emerging trend of collaborative supervision
- Having compassion and understanding in addition to experience in research and supervision
- Improving the type and quality of feedback provided to graduate students
- Providing training sessions or workshops in writing and research to postgraduate students to improve their academic writing skills and their expertise
- Bridging the gap between theory and application to enable students to perform higher-order thinking skills, exploration of information, and interpretation of data.

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Ukrainian EFL Learners' Perception towards the Use of Subtitles to Improve Their Listening Skills: a Case Study

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Abstract
Watching English videos is a powerful and popular tool for learning English as a foreign language, and teachers and researchers should pay close attention to it. The research paper investigates current EFL learners' attitudes towards using subtitles when watching English audio-visual materials. The authors attempt to answer the following question: What are Ukrainian EFL learners' perceptions of using subtitles to improve their listening skills? The significance of this study is that understanding the learners' preferences and support for subtitles would help find effective teaching practices. We used a quantitative method to collect research data through online tools (Google Forms). The third-year students training in the BA program to become interpreters were under research. The findings suggest that students agreed on the importance of listening skills. Moreover, almost all participants are convinced that watching audio-visual materials with English subtitles improves their English proficiency. An area worth further investigation is the effect of subtitles on listening and reading skills, which is necessary as it would shed more light on using videos with and without subtitles in EFL acquisition.
Keywords: Case study, English as a foreign language, listening skills, subtitles, Ukrainian EFL learners
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Introduction

The researchers argue that "the system of higher education in Ukraine is experiencing some constructive changes since its traditional model does not meet the current needs of society" (Ivanytska, Dovhan, Tymoshchuk, Osaulchyk & Havryliuk, 2021, p. 476). Modern foreign language teaching is closely related to innovative processes in education. Scholars suggest that the implementation of innovative pedagogical technologies and techniques in foreign language classes increases the foreign language proficiency of students, provides the best conditions for gaining listening and reading skills, increases motivation for learning, promotes the personal development of students, and makes the teaching and learning process student-oriented (Zamkova, Tymoshchuk & Havryliuk, 2023). No method is considered to be more effective for teaching and learning EFL (Alzamil, 2022; Zahorodna, Saienko, Tolchieva, Tymoshchuk, Kulinich & Shvets, 2022; Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2021; Rokni & Ataee, 2014), but there are varieties of technical materials that should be used (Rokni & Ataee, 2014; Tymoshchuk, 2022). Improving the four primary skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) is the critical objective for teachers and learners (Metruk, 2018). Some scholars believe that listening skills are the most important one. Hasan (2000) argues that listening comprehension is the key to language acquisition and improving other skills. Brownell (2016) suggests that listening might be the most vital skill for fostering personal and professional growth, as it significantly affects how effectively individuals work and learn. Korkmaz and Güneyli (2017) maintain that listening comprehension is more important than others as it is the first acquired skill.

According to Metruk (2019), listening comprehension continues to be one of the least-developed abilities of foreign language learners. Holden (2008) highlights that fostering listening proficiency in students has consistently been a challenging aspect of foreign language instruction, mainly due to the complexity of the cognitive processes involved. These interconnected processes must occur almost instantaneously to ensure accurate message interpretation. Thus, students must watch movies and materials containing clear and authentic input. Films with subtitles or captions can promote listening by helping learners associate gestural with spoken language (Faqe, 2020; Richards, 2002). The significance of this study is that understanding the learners' preferences and support for subtitles would help find effective teaching practices.

To our knowledge, there are no studies that have examined Ukrainian EFL learners' attitudes toward English subtitles. This study attempts to fill the gap by investigating the following research questions: 1. What are Ukrainian EFL learners' perceptions of using subtitles to improve their listening skills? 2. What are the viewpoints of Ukrainian EFL learners on the benefits and drawbacks of subtitles? 3. Do they use English films to improve their language skills? 4. What are Ukrainian EFL learners' subtitle preferences?

Literature Review

There has been a growing interest in using English movies to develop the listening skills of EFL learners for the past two decades. Researchers have explored the theoretical and practical aspects of implementing these methods for educational purposes. Many scholars argue that films are profoundly valuable resources for learning English. They are more effective at keeping learners interested than textbooks or educational videos. Furthermore, they help learners to get a clear picture of the content through these visuals. According to Safranj (2015), using films effectively improves listening skills and contributes to a better understanding of English culture. A large-scale Canning-Wilson survey (2000) illustrates students' preference for learning a language through

video. Mekheimer (2011) claims authentic videos represent a valuable approach to whole language learning.

There have been several studies examining using subtitles in foreign language learning. Zanon (2006) investigated the contribution of computer-based subtitling to foreign language learning and concluded that subtitling motivated learners to appreciate the film's vast content that only reaches the audience when dubbed. Hayati and Mohamadi (2011) investigated the effectiveness of using documentaries with and without subtitles. According to their research results, the English subtitles group performed better than the Persian one, which performed substantially higher than the no subtitle group on the listening test. Ghoneam (2015) has examined the effect of feature movies with and without subtitles on Egyptian EFL learners' listening comprehension. Alkhatnai (2010) studied the effectiveness of subtitles in aiding non-native Saudi speakers to understand English, and research results indicated that subtitles improved the learners' listening comprehension. The findings of the Thai scientists (Napikul, Cedar, Roongrattanakool, 2018) study revealed that "Thai subtitles affect tenth-grade students' listening comprehension more than English subtitles and not having any subtitles at all" (p. 104).

Dizon and Thanyawatpokin (2021) researched if there were significant differences in listening comprehension and vocabulary learning between EFL students who watched second-language (L2) videos with first-language (L1) subtitles, L2 captions, and dual subtitles. According to their research data, "the participants who viewed the episode with dual subtitles did significantly better than the other two groups in listening comprehension" (p. 52). Saragih, Matondang, and Purba (2022) have analyzed the correlation between watching films with and without subtitles on students' listening comprehension. The scholars concluded that "watching movie with subtitle is better on students' listening comprehension" (p. 524). Thus, the reviewed studies revealed the positive effect of using authentic visual materials with subtitles on listening comprehension. Movies also help create a learning environment with content-rich contexts and a motivating atmosphere.

Several studies have shown learners' attitudes toward using subtitles to improve their listening skills. According to these researches, students adopt positive attitudes toward using English subtitles and their potentially positive impact (Rokni & Ataee, 2014; Kadem, 2020; Alzamil, 2022). Alzamil (2022) claims that research results "indicate that curriculum designers in Saudi Arabia and around the world should take into consideration that L2 learners link their use of subtitles to improvements in English in general and listening skills in particular" (p. 492).

The scholars claim that "the educational events of the last decade have given impetus to significant changes in the education system in Ukraine" (Zahorodna, Saienko, Tolchieva, Tymoshchuk, Kulinich & Shvets, 2022, p. 78). Research in this field still needs to be improved in Ukraine compared to those conducted in other countries. There have yet to be any previous attempts to investigate the use of subtitling in movies in Ukraine using both Ukrainian and English subtitles. Moreover, no studies have examined Ukrainian EFL learners' attitudes toward using movies with subtitles (Ukrainian, English, or both) to improve their listening skills. The present study aims to address a significant gap in the literature.

Methods

We have used theoretical methods to analyze scientific literature on teaching EFL, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), emergency remote English learning and teaching, and the challenges and benefits of subtitling in movies in Ukraine using both Ukrainian and

English subtitles. We conducted an online survey at Vinnytsia Institute of Trade and Economics of the State University of Trade and Economics (VITE SUTE, Ukraine) in September 2023. We used online tools and techniques to obtain data; we analyzed research data employing computer-aided software; we interpreted the research results using texts and numerical information.

Participants

We selected the study population in a non-probabilistic way. The third-year students training at VITE SUTE to become interpreters in the BA program (Philology, Germanic languages, literature (including translation), first foreign language – English) were under the research. A total of 32 students participated in the interview.

Research Procedures

We have used a student questionnaire to collect quantitative data on the attitudes towards electronic dictionaries, preferences, and the frequency of their implementation. It has been created using Google Forms and administered online in a randomized and equal way to the students of VITE SUTE. We have reviewed the questionnaires of Alzamil (2022), Ghoneam (2015), Aksu-Ataç and Köprülü-Günay (2018). We have used particular criteria relevant to the learner questionnaire for our study. We measured part of the questions using a Likert-scale survey. We had the items related to the learner's agreement, i.e., "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree", and "Strongly Disagree". We also had items related to the frequency of EFL learners' watching movies and their preferences.

Results

This section presents the findings of the gathered data and the analysis of the results obtained. Many students (34.4%) have mentioned that they watch a movie once a month, and 9.4 % (N=3) said they watch a movie less than once a month. The most significant part, with a total of 20 participants and a percentage of 56.2 % of the population, is watching movies more frequently (once a week, three to five times a week, or every day). For more detailed information, see Figure One.

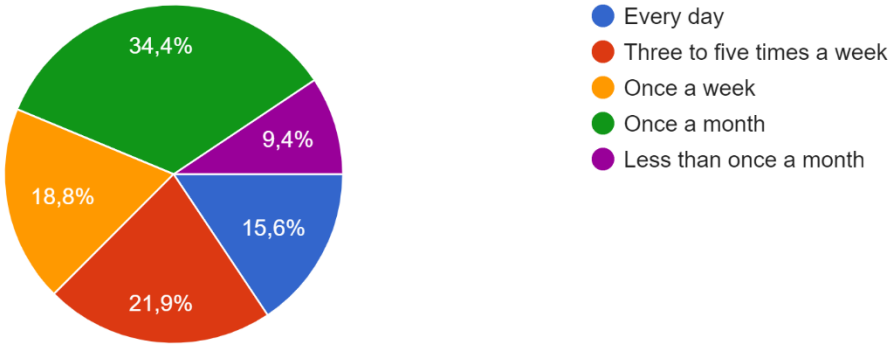


Figure 1. Movie watching frequency

According to Figure Two, the items "Less than once a month" and "Once a month" were the most frequent responses, scoring 37.5 % (N=12) and 25 % (N=8), respectively. While 21.9% (N=7) of the students have been watching an original English movie once a week, 12.5% (N=4)

said they watch original English movies three to five times a week. One respondent (3.1 %) has ticked "Every day".

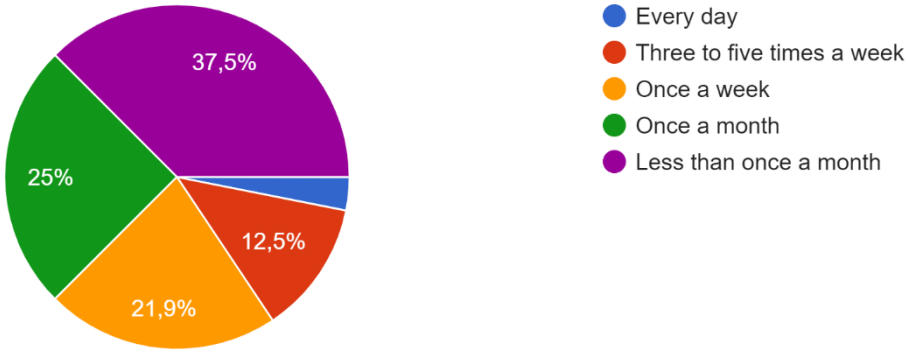


Figure 2. English movie-watching frequency

Figure Three demonstrates the learners' responses to whether they prefer watching films with subtitles. 81.3 % of students who have participated in the questionnaire prefer subtitles while watching movies.

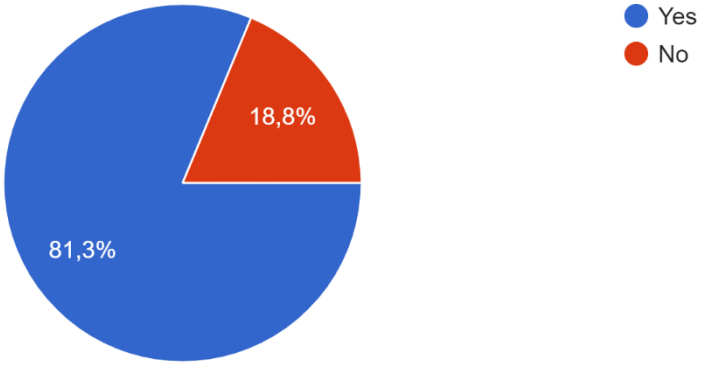


Figure 3. Subtitle preference

Most students (Figure Four) have claimed that they prefer English subtitles.

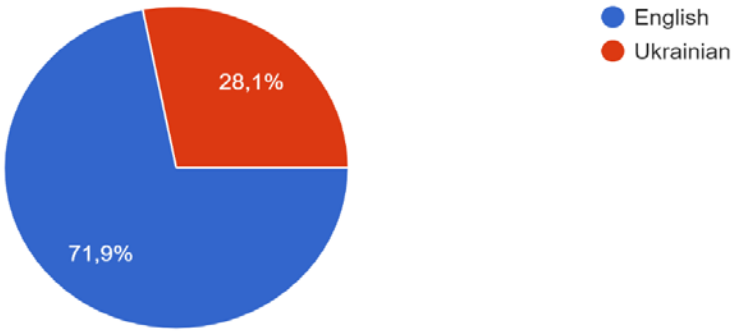


Figure 4. Language of the subtitle

Most students (51.6%) prefer English subtitles to see the equivalents of the words they hear. Many learners (41.9%) also prefer English subtitles to understand the dialogues while watching movies (see Figure 5).

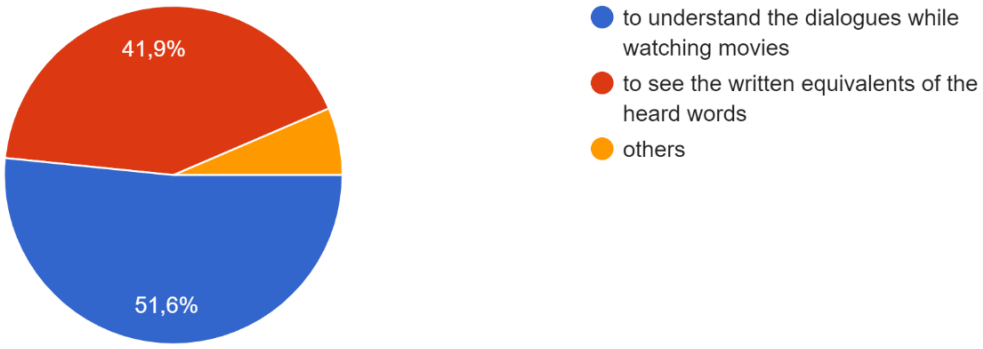


Figure 5. Reason for English subtitle preference

According to Figure Six, 36.7 % of students prefer Ukrainian subtitles to see the Ukrainian equivalents of the words they hear, 20% of learners prefer Ukrainian subtitles in order to understand the dialogues while watching movies, and again 20% of learners prefer Ukrainian subtitles in order to understand the film.

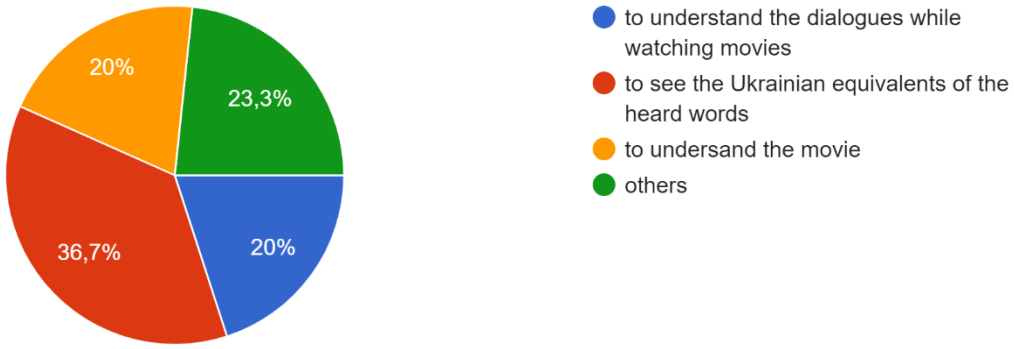


Figure 6. Reason for Ukrainian subtitle preference

According to the research results, most students agree with all statements. Learners agree that original English movies can improve their listening skills more than other English media typically used in class. For more detailed information, see Table 1.

Table 1. *Learners' opinions on the effects of movies and subtitles on language learning skills*

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. English subtitles help me understand conversation in the movies better	n	0	1	3	**19**	9
	%	0	3.1	9.4	**59.4**	28.1
2. English subtitles help me learn correct pronunciation through movies	n	0	0	6	**17**	9
	%	0	0	18.8	**53.1**	28.1
3. English subtitles help me understand unfamiliar accents and dialects better	n	0	1	4	**17**	10
	%	0	3.1	12.5	**53.1**	31.3
	n	0	1	5	**17**	9

4. I learn new words by watching movies in the original English language,	%	0	3.1	15.6	**53.1**	28.1
5. I learn new words by watching English movies with Ukrainian subtitles	n	1	6	8	**12**	5
	%	3.1	18.8	25	**37.5**	15.6
6. I find Ukrainian subtitle translations sufficient	n	1	2	14	**12**	3
	%	3.1	6.3	43.8	**37.5**	9.4
7. English subtitles help me understand unfamiliar idioms and slang better	n	0	0	7	**13**	12
	%	0	0	21.9	**40.6**	37.5
8. Authentic English movies can enhance my listening skills more effectively than other English media commonly used in class.	n	0	2	9	9	**12**
	%	0	6.3	28.1	28.1	**37.5**
9. Original English movies are good for teaching listening to students	n	0	0	8	**13**	11
	%	0	0	25	**40.6**	34.4
10. Watching English movies can benefit the use of English in everyday life.	n	0	1	3	**20**	8
	%	0	3.1	9.4	**62.5**	25

The participants agreed that improving their listening skills is essential. They also expressed positive attitudes toward teachers' help in improving their listening skills (Table 2).

Table 2. *Learners' opinions on listening skills*

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Improving my listening skills makes me proficient in English	n	0	1	8	**13**	10
	%	0	3.1	25	**40.6**	31.3
2. It is essential to improve my listening skills in English	n	0	0	3	11	**18**
	%	0	0	9.4	34.4	**56.3**
3. Improving my listening skills is not important	n	11	**15**	3	1	2
	%	34.4	**46.9**	9.4	3.1	6.3
4. My teacher should not focus on improving my listening skills	n	8	**14**	9	0	1
	%	25	**43.8**	28.1	0	3.1
5. I like my teacher to focus on improving my listening skills	n	0	1	7	**17**	7
	%	0	3.1	21.9	**53.1**	21.9

The study intends to investigate learners' opinions on the potential impact of subtitles on learning English. The findings presented in Table 3 show that the participants expressed positive attitudes toward using both English and Ukrainian subtitles to improve their English proficiency. The students need to be more confident about watching audio-visual materials without subtitles.

Table 3. *Learners' opinions on the potential impact of subtitles on learning of English*

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Watching audio-visual materials with Ukrainian subtitles improves my English	n	1	3	11	**12**	3
	%	3.1	9.4	34.4	**37.5**	9.4
Watching audio-visual materials with English subtitles improves my English	n	0	0	4	**21**	7
	%	0	0	12.5	**65.6**	21.9

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Watching audio-visual materials without subtitles improves my English	n	1	6	**13**	10	2
	%	3.1	18.8	**40.6**	31.3	6.3

Discussion

Our study demonstrates that more than 90% of the students agreed on the importance of listening skills. More than 75% of the participants supported the idea that teachers should assist them in enhancing their listening skills. The research findings concur with those of previous studies (Ghoneam, 2015; Metruk, 2018; Metruk, 2019; Alzamil, 2022), emphasizing the significance of enhancing listening skills. Concerning their attitudes to using subtitles, more than 87 % of the participants had positive ones about using English subtitles. In comparison, 37.3% were optimistic about watching audio-visual materials without subtitles, and 46.9% about using Ukrainian subtitles. Research data demonstrate a preference among the participants for watching audio materials with Ukrainian subtitles rather than without subtitles.

The students usually watch various movies once a month. The frequency of watching an authentic English movie is less than once per month. The vast majority of participants subtitles. The majority of people watch movies for language development, and they prefer subtitles. Although there is no significant difference between the preference for English and Ukrainian subtitles, English subtitles are preferred because they want to see the English equivalents of the words they hear to understand the dialogues and see the spellings. Ukrainian subtitles are preferred to understand the meanings of the words they hear. These results coincide with the results obtained in similar research by Aksu-Ataç and Köprülü-Günay (2018) on the role of subtitles in foreign language teaching.

Concerning the relationship between the use of subtitles and improved English proficiency, almost all participants (87.5%) thought that watching audio-visual materials with English subtitles improves their English proficiency. These results coincide with similar research by Alzamil (2022) on Saudi students' attitudes to using subtitles to improve their listening skills. However, 37.6% of learners have not linked using subtitles with language improvement compared with 46.9% of participants who have linked using Ukrainian subtitles to improvement in English. These findings support Ghoneam (2015) and Metruk (2018), who also found that their participants benefited more from using L1 subtitles.

The findings obtained from the analysis of the questionnaire revealed Ukrainian students' positive attitudes to the importance of listening skills, the use of English subtitles, and their potentially positive impact. Several surveys (Alzamil, 2022; Alabsi, 2020; Faqe, 2020; Ghoneam, 2015) have revealed that subtitles improve learners' English proficiency. Thus, viewing audio-visual materials with subtitles can positively impact students' learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Listening is a skill of crucial importance that deserves serious attention from EFL teachers and learners. Foreign language learners can enhance this skill by practicing extensive listening. This study focused on the attitude of Ukrainian learners towards developing their English language skills and the viewpoints of Ukrainian EFL learners on the benefits and drawbacks of subtitles. The research found that learners agreed on the importance of listening skills. Moreover, almost all participants are convinced that watching audio-visual materials with English subtitles improves their English proficiency. Implementation of innovative pedagogical technologies and techniques

in foreign language classes, such as watching movies with subtitles, has increased the foreign language proficiency of students, providing the best conditions for gaining listening skills, increasing motivation for learning, promoting the personal development of students and making the teaching and learning process student-oriented.

One of the limitations of this study lies in employing a small sample size, which can lower the generalizability of the findings. Thus, performing the study on a larger sample size would prove valuable and helpful.

It is a fact that watching authentic English is gaining increasing popularity among English learners in Ukrainian and foreign educational institutions. It profoundly influences users' preferences and ought to be devoted considerable attention by teachers and researchers. To conclude, an area worth further investigation is the effect of subtitles on listening and reading skills, which is necessary as it would shed more light on using videos with and without subtitles in EFL acquisition.

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The Impact of Teacher-generated Quizzes of Raz-Kids in Cultivating Primary School Students' Reading Skills

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Abstract

Many schools integrate technology into their curriculum to reap the benefits incessantly. Thanks to unprecedented technological breakthroughs, the popularity of e-books has increased significantly. As a result, the market for e-book apps has expanded exponentially. Although multiple studies have been conducted on the widely used reading program Raz-Kids, there has been no study regarding teacher-generated quizzes on Raz-Kids in Iraq. With this fact in mind, this study explored the effects of teacher-created quizzes on improving the reading skills of third-grade students during the fall and spring semesters of the 2023-2024 academic year. Forty-four students from a private international primary school in Iraq were selected via convenience sampling to represent one of the groups. The control group engaged with the books and answered standard quiz questions via the Raz-kids app. On the other hand, the experimental group studied the books and completed teacher-generated quizzes. The data were collected via reading examinations and surveys to be analyzed by either SPSS 29 or MAXQDA. Exams and surveys were used to compare students' reading performance and analyse their perceptions in-depth. Quantitative data showed that students in the experimental group efficiently utilized teacher-created quizzes, resulting in exceptional performance in reading assessments. Moreover, composing balanced, coherent, engaging questions influenced students' written and spoken English proficiency. Thus, the findings of this study may guide stakeholders seeking to include e-book applications in English classes.

Keywords: E-book applications, Erbil primary school, Iraqi private school, Raz-Kids, reading skills, teacher-generated quizzes

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Introduction

English has emerged as a predominant lingua franca globally, significantly influencing communication, commerce, scientific pursuits, and the educational landscape. English has almost 1.5 billion speakers; it is the official language in 76 nations, representing 40% of the global population, and more than 755 million individuals use English as a foreign language (Lee & Kim, 2023). The increasing trend of capitalizing on the advantages of English has numerous practical implications. For instance, English is the predominant language in educational institutions worldwide. Subsequently, almost 60% of the websites are administered in English to increase page visitors. Additionally, around 65% of scholarly works are disseminated in English to garner more readership (Tayirovna, 2024). Moreover, the United Nations and the European Union cannot be conceived without English, one of the official languages of both prominent organizations. Subsequently, English serves as the primary language for numerous global employment recruitment websites (Issa, 2024). The acknowledgement of English can be ascribed to its adaptability, the significant influence of British colonialism, and the dominance of the United States (Heinzmann et al., 2024). Recognizing the significance of English, individuals from many backgrounds expedite their language acquisition to attain a crucial position in a market characterized by intense competition at all levels.

The approaches to language teaching have shifted significantly in this century thanks to the release of advanced technological gadgets, which have affected methodology, materials, classroom atmosphere, and the function of the teacher (Kucuk, 2024). To illustrate, the grammar-translation was more convenient for teachers in the 1960s. However, it has lost its popularity to communicative language teaching, which is popular in using multimedia in classes. Thus, the first-hand experience of professionals can be shown via various means, which drives the learners to express their brilliant ideas unhesitatingly (Gilakjaniv & Sabouri, 2017). Subsequently, multimedia utilization in classes has changed the focus from the educator to learners, as teachers are not regarded as the single information provider. On the contrary, they function as a facilitator to guide learners' activities so that each student can participate actively in the sessions and get satisfaction. Afterward, the transition from flipcharts to smart gadgets has boosted students' performance because smartboards are awesome devices with many innovative features. Furthermore, offering online, semi-online, or one-on-one courses has offered countless flexibility for teachers because designing lessons with varied means inspired teachers to meet students' needs, thereby closing the gaps among students. Next, online learning apps, particularly e-book apps, have become common in EFL classes because they have a reasonable annual fee and are catchy, up-to-date, accountable, and useful in many ways (Gultom, 2016). As it is unambiguous, technology utilization in classes has tripled in classes to take advantage of them in various ways.

Evaluating students' learning rates serves multiple purposes throughout educational institutions. Initially, it is essential to ascertain whether learners comprehend subjects in class, enabling potential alterations to raise the quality of education. Furthermore, it guarantees accountability for both students and educators, as assessments provide an opportunity to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the implemented technique (Schuller et al., 2017). Moreover, policymakers, administrators, families, and educators can collaborate to eliminate deficiencies and raise educational outcomes by analyzing the assessments (Ashraf & Zolfaghari, 2018). Furthermore, evaluations can reveal critical insights to identify children requiring differentiated learning, enabling teachers to customize their instruction to address those needs better and offer additional support. In this context, e-book application quizzes can facilitate formative and

summative examinations. Formative assessments can be employed to evaluate student progress during instruction, while summative assessments can be administered after the academic year to ascertain the achievement of learning objectives in reading. In this context, e-quizzes on reading platforms fulfill enormous functions for formative and summative assessments.

This study is significant as it represents an effort to replace the original quiz questions of a well-known reading app, Raz-Kids (RK hereafter), with teacher-generated alternatives in Iraq, where it has been observed that the existing quiz questions exceed students' capabilities. This discrepancy arises from the insufficient development of students' inferential and elaborative competencies during the primary school phase (Celik & Kara, 2024). Reading has a crucial role in enhancing kids' linguistic abilities. E-books possess distinct advantages over traditional printed books. Furthermore, comprehension questions are constructed from reading passages, thereby evaluating students' learning rates and facilitating modifications to the lesson plans. Conversely, the inability to comprehend reading passages and accurately respond to questions is a prevalent challenge in reading classes. This study aims to address the gap in the literature by enhancing learners' reading performance through teacher-created quizzes on RK in a primary school in Iraq.

Correspondingly, the following research questions are addressed:

1) What are the students' sincere thoughts regarding teacher-generated quizzes of Raz-Kids?
2) How effective is Raz-Kids in improving students' reading grades?

Literature Review

E-books have acquired significant momentum due to unprecedented advancements in technology. For instance, Project Gutenberg was the pioneering project in the 1970s that digitized paper-based content. Subsequent years saw the emergence of Sony Discman and Dynabook as the other examples of the e-book revolution. Consequently, PDF and LIT facilitated the proliferation of e-books by simplifying their manufacturing, enabling readers to access books on electronic devices effortlessly. Furthermore, *Riding Bullet* by Stephen King received widespread acceptance, making significant contributions to the e-book industry. Subsequently, Nook, Amazon Kindle, and Sony Librie have revolutionized the e-book business due to substantial investments to expand their global audience. Additionally, mobile devices have been manufactured in escalating quantities, enabling immediate access to billions of books. Recognition of readers' desire to interact with electronic literature results in the emergence of both commercial and non-commercial initiatives. Consequently, e-books have gained prominence via bookshop chains, application stores (e.g., App Store, Google Play), and digital libraries (e.g., Google Books, Internet Archive). Moreover, various commercial enterprises (e.g., Epic, My On) have arisen to sharpen time management and examine students' performance using e-book applications. RK has attained popularity due to its comprehensive features that serve instructors, parents, and students since its establishment in 2002. Almunawaroh (2020) asserted that RK's capacity to display graphics with text represents a significant innovation in the e-book industry. She also affirmed that the documentation of the books and receiving feedback from the teacher are advantageous components of RK. In addition, Park et al. (2015) noted that RK is user-friendly, enabling students to take notes and underline with flexibility on their mobile devices.

RK's approaches to software organization share numerous similarities with the views of distinguished linguists and educators. Piaget's Learning Theory advocates for students to engage in the learning and teaching process through observation, active participation, and knowledge acquisition (Waite-Stupiansky, 2022). This concept is implemented in the platform through the

activation of audiobooks, the completion of quiz-based exercises, and the recording of their voices for feedback from the supervisor (Bilgin, 2024; Chen et al., 2022). This cycle can cultivate an inviting environment to foster their learning at every stage. Consequently, they might perpetually multiply their information gain. The Input Hypothesis, formulated by Stephen Krashen in 1985, underscores the importance of balancing familiar and unfamiliar information to facilitate the seamless absorption of new knowledge (Kucuk, 2023; Luo, 2024). Considering this generally accepted notion, books are categorized based on students' proficiency levels, enabling them to master one level before advancing to the subsequent level with confidence. Subsequently, Bruner's Scaffolding Theory suggests that students require appropriate guidance when encountering unfamiliar subjects, establishing a robust basis for more confident advancement (Xi & Lantolf, 2021). In this regard, RK effectively prepares learners with the present letter before advancing to a more challenging letter to alleviate anxiety and eliminate other educational obstacles. After that, John Dewey's Learning Theory emphasizes practical activities, minimizing the discrepancies between real-life examples and the curriculum (Latasha, 2020; Yildiz, 2020). In this regard, RK possesses numerous works that provide direct insights into the lives of ordinary individuals, enabling students to discern many vital concepts and teachings applicable to real life.

Moreover, Maria Montessori's Method indicates that a positive cycle may be prevalent when students are curious to learn independently (Aghajani & Salehi, 2021; Karam, 2023). Following her instructions, each book on RK is essential as it paves the way for expanding knowledge regarding wildlife, nations, civilizations, notable individuals, success narratives, and other relevant topics. Likewise, Lev Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory distinguishes between acquiring knowledge independently and guided activities (Celik, 2024; Newman & Latifi, 2021). As a result, educational goals can be attained more instantly. RK allows the instructor to tailor students' learning to their speed via interactive tasks. Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy, alongside other theories, profoundly impacts all phases of reading and writing, offering crucial information required for understanding particular topics before advancing to more challenging levels (Abdulrahman & Kara, 2023; Gultom, 2016).

An increasing amount of research has focused on evaluating the RK's effectiveness in improving learners' language skills and motivation. Park et al. (2015) put an intensive program into practice through the app to sharpen oral proficiency and reading performance among primary school children. This illustrates that RK is an effective tool for enhancing learners' oral performance and comprehension levels. Huang (2013) found that RK improves students' pronunciation following lengthy reading, listening, and recording activities. A significant study by Rose (2022) in Japan demonstrated that university students enhanced their listening skills by RK while reading books. Kim (2021) subsequently examined the RK's influence on writing competency, observing that the platform facilitates the improvement of writing skills among students in a primary school in the UK. Yufen and Siouwun (2020) probed RK's influence on augmenting first-year learners' motivation and word power, demonstrating that RK facilitates an increase in motivation and an expansion of their linguistic repertoire. Moreover, Ikpeze's (2018) study in the United States revealed that RK improves students' ICT skills, allowing them to adapt to information and communication technology changes. The platform's impact on cultivating students' varied skills has also been examined in Iraq. In this respect, Celik and Kara (2024) proposed that RK may thoroughly improve primary school students' skills holistically by instructing them from several angles. In alignment with previous studies, Nawe and Amin's (2020) research indicated that platforms like Epic have much potential to raise students' enthusiasm for

lifelong learning, promoting more ambitious reading practices. A review of the relevant literature indicates that research on RK-oriented e-book instruction has risen in the last decade, paralleling the digital revolution that has profoundly transformed the educational scene.

Method

The current study was carried out through an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered to understand the effect of teacher-generated quizzes on RK on developing primary school students' reading performance. Explanatory sequential mixed techniques initially urge researchers to collect quantitative research, analyze the findings, and elaborate on these conclusions through qualitative research (Dawadi et al., 2021). The subsequent qualitative data followed the initial quantitative data results. In the subsequent phase, all data were compared to ensure triangulation, so the researcher tried to pinpoint whether the data complemented each other harmoniously (Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

Participants

The study population comprised all students enrolled at a private elementary school in Erbil, Iraq, for the 2023-2024 academic year. More than 1000 registered students received education in different grades when the study was conducted. Since its commencement, the school has implemented English Medium Instruction in all stages to raise learners' linguistic competencies in an inviting environment, maximizing their exposure to the target language. It is important to note that specific courses are offered in Kurdish and Arabic, enabling students to establish foundational knowledge in their native languages. Consequently, students can pass the threshold to become global individuals who have sharpened their twenty-first-century skills. Upon completing the entrance examinations for fundamental competencies, students may enroll. In the future phases, they conduct an RBA (Reception Baseline Assessment) to ascertain whether the instructional method produces superior outcomes for newly enrolled students. Based on the outcomes of admission and reception baseline assessments, children are directed to raise their learning rates through either whole-class or one-on-one sessions if the need arises after the compromise between parents and responsible teachers. *The Oxford Family Friends* series is selected to elevate students' English proficiency in a well-established manner. *The "Family and Friends"* series was launched in 2009 and has been extensively utilized in educational institutions to instruct young learners in English globally. The books emphasize establishing robust language foundations via vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, and writing exercises supplemented by instructional materials. Consequently, it is a convenient series for the professional instruction of English, utilizing games, additional materials, internet resources, and year-end assessments. Forty-four third-grade students were selected using the convenience sampling approach because of its benefits, including ease, flexibility, and cost-effectiveness, compared to alternative sampling techniques (Rahman, 2023). Twenty-one male and twenty-three female students were allocated into two groups. They received 21 hours of English instruction weekly, in addition to other subjects, including science, mathematics, music, and social values.

Research Instruments

Multiple instruments were employed to assess RK's effectiveness in improving learners' reading ability. The researcher utilized a prominent test to evaluate student levels and assign them to classes. Students' overall proficiency in English, including macro and micro-skills, was assessed

using the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). It should be noted that OPT was administered to other students for testing purposes, and the results showed a Cronbach Alpha Index of.97, indicating that it completely fulfilled the reliability requirements. Before beginning treatment, students were asked to finish the placement and pilot tests.

In addition to placement examinations, students completed two pre- and post-test reading assessments. The reading questions, sourced from Oxford's accessible digital resources, were edited by ELT specialists, considering students' proficiency levels as defined by CEFR standards. After the items were developed, other students piloted them. They were reliable enough, .86, to meet the standard.

The subsequent instrument was a five-item questionnaire formatted on a five-point Likert scale. To evaluate the impact of teacher-created quizzes, the reading scale developed by Schuller et al. (2017) was altered to align with research questions. The questionnaire's validity and reliability were confirmed via pilot research, demonstrating a high Cronbach Alpha Index of .93 and face validity. Students' authentic perspectives on the impact of teacher-created RK were solicited and subjected to statistical analysis. Scientific protocols were rigorously applied and tested during the formulation of the interview items. The researcher solely devised the interview questions. A thorough evaluation process was carried out and finalized by seven English experts with over 12 years of direct experience in education. ELT specialists articulated their reservations and recommendations for formulating unequivocal questions for the interview. The final form was saved and directed to participants upon completion of the initial examination period. Furthermore, interview questions were tested on additional individuals to assess relevance and consistency. Applying these methodologies enabled the researcher to address prospective concerns, so the quality of items was guaranteed precisely. Following the acquisition of requisite approvals from the university's research center, school management, and families to carry out the study in compliance with ethics, the study commenced, scheduled for completion within 9 months from October to May, utilizing the tools mentioned earlier. Moreover, students filled out consent forms that aligned with research ethics. The scientific committee periodically scrutinized the study and offered recommendations for enhancement. It is crucial to note that following the selection of participants, a comprehensive workshop was conducted to elucidate all study phases, facilitating their understanding of two distinct instructional methods and arranging their time accordingly.

The Cycle of Lessons in Each Group

Both groups had some common points, including receiving 22 hours of English instruction and using e-books via RK as supplemental educational resources. The instructional approach for covering literature on RK varied starkly among the groups. Specifically, students in the control group read the books, recorded their voices, and completed standard quizzes. The original quiz questions on the platform encompass factual, central concept, inference, author's tone, conclusion, and exception inquiries. Completing one book daily was the teacher's target to achieve educational benefits. Conversely, students in the experimental group engaged in reading the books, recording their voices, and completing quizzes created by the teacher. The teachers devised various questions, including true-false, matching, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions. Default quizzes required inference at multiple stages, while teacher-made quizzes did not necessitate such inference; instead, questions were simplified to assess students' comprehension and raise their alertness in finding precise information through skimming or scanning the text. A significant distinction between the groups was that control group students completed quizzes online. On the

contrary, experimental group students completed the tests and recorded their answers in their notebooks for regular evaluation by the teacher. In the concluding session, the instructor posed several questions regarding the book to emphasize certain aspects and stimulate active learning within the class. The phases of the lessons are represented in Table One.

Table 1. *The Cycle of Lessons in Both Groups*

Classification	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
Control	Workshop	2Rs, Quiz	Discussion
Experimental	Workshop	2R's Quiz	Discussion

Data Analysis

SPSS 29 was utilized to analyze reading assessments and questionnaire responses using descriptive statistical methods. An independent t-test was employed to compare the means of students in the control and experimental groups to measure the effects of teacher-created quizzes. In addition, descriptive statistics unleashed means, medians, and standard deviations. To triangulate data, the interview transcripts were coded, categorized, and analyzed by content analysis. In the concluding phase, all data were compared and contrasted to determine whether there was a conflict.

Findings

Quantitative Analysis

Reading tests and the questionnaires were directed to the participants to get quantitative data, the details of which are given below:

Precise Analysis of Reading Tests

Reading tests were formed from the supplementary sources of the Family Friends Series. They were tailored for third-grade children and were evaluated and selected in collaboration with other ELT specialists to ensure their relevance, consistency, and familiarity to measure students' levels appropriately. The reading examinations were analyzed statistically. The outcomes are depicted in Tables Two and Three.

Table 2. *Pre-test Results for Groups*

Group	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Experimental	22	51.25	11.750	44	.200	.846
Control	22	51.75	11.083			

Table Two demonstrates that no significant difference was prevalent in the pre-test scores among the groups, with a p-value of .846, higher than the .05 significance value. The mean scores were determined to be 51.25 and 51.75, respectively.

Table 3. *Post-test Results for Groups*

Group	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Experimental	22	71.23	17.280	44	3.350	.002
Control	22	55.68	13.985			

Table Three shows a sharp difference in post-test scores, with a p-value of.002, less than

.05. Mean scores again showed a significant difference, with the control group averaging 55.68 and the experimental group 71.23. More specifically, the experimental group students saw a rise of about 20 points in their average, while the control group saw an increase of no more than 5 points. According to these findings, students in the experimental group showed far more improvement in their performance than those in the control group, whose curriculum was supplemented with RK tests created by the teacher. Figure One below further illustrates the striking variances among students:

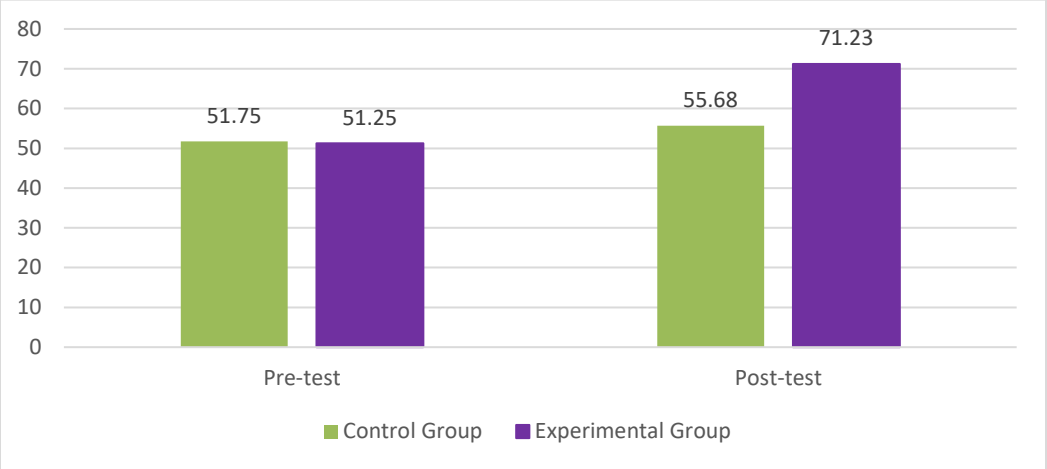


Figure 1. Reading Grades for Both Groups

According to Figure One, no substantial difference was prevalent between the mean scores of control group students (pre-test=51.75, post-test=55.68), whereas it was stark in the experimental group (pre-test=51.25, post-test=71.23).

Paired samples t-test unleashed significant points to compare the average scores of each group within itself, the results of which are shown in Table Four.

Table 4. *Paired Samples T-test Results for Control Group Students*

Paired Samples *t*-test								
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
Pre-test Post-test	Mean	*SD*	*SE*	Lower	Upper	*t*	*df*	*p*
Control Group	-3.866	16.618	3.538	-11.228	3.510	-1.089	23	.290

Having analyzed data in Table Four, it was noticed that there were no marked differences between the pre-test and post-test for control group students, considering a p-value of .290, which is less than a 0.05 significance value. These figures were in harmony with the independent samples t-test, which did not show a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test for control group students.

Table 5. *Paired Samples T-test Results for Experimental Group Students*

Paired Samples *t*-test								
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
Pre-test Post-test	Mean	*SD*	*SE*	Lower	Upper	*t*	*df*	*p*
Experimental Group	-20.451	19.207	4.097	-28.972	-11.942	-4.998	23	.000

On the other hand, paired samples t-test figures in Table Five unearthed that experimental group students yielded better results in the treatment by increasing their reading scores substantially with a .000 p-value. These figures are consistent with independent samples t-test results, which forged a positive correlation between taking teacher-generated quizzes and improving reading performance.

Considering reading exam scores, it can be concluded that teacher-generated quizzes are more promising than taking original quizzes on the platform.

The Analysis of the Questionnaires

The questionnaires were integrated into the study to get students' sincere opinions and analyse them statistically, so more quantitative data could be gathered for more reliable interpretations. Table Six describes them in detail.

Table 6. *Students' Opinions on Modified Quiz Questions of Raz-Kids*

No	Item	*Min*	*Max*	Mean	*SD*	Variance
1	Modified quiz questions increased my motivation to read more.	2	5	4.79	.530	.281
2	I understood quiz questions without having much difficulty.	2	5	4.89	.428	.184
3	Modified quiz questions expanded my vocabulary knowledge.	3	5	4.83	.505	.251
4	I improved my spelling through teacher-made questions.	3	5	4.71	.552	.305
5	My capitalization and punctuation alertness increased during the study.	2	5	4.62	.850	.721
6	Modified quiz questions contributed to my spoken English positively.	3	5	4.84	.470	.221

The questionnaire items examined some reflections of teacher-generated quizzes on the reading performance of primary school students, as presented in Table Six. For instance, item 1, designed to establish a potential connection between providing written responses to quizzes and

enhancing motivation to read more books on the platform, demonstrated a significant enhancement in students' motivation to read more willingly, reflected by a mean score of 4.79. It hints that making minor changes to original questions can generate more satisfactory responses from readers. Item 2 was composed to measure the possible relationship between comprehension rate and taking teacher-generated quizzes. The mean score was the highest among all items, 4.89, indicating a definitive correlation between teacher-created exams and enhanced comprehension rates in reading books. Moreover, item 3 indicated that enhancing vocabulary is feasible when teacher-created quizzes are implemented, as seen by the notable mean score of 4.83. Altering quiz questions may facilitate the absorption of essential English vocabulary. Subsequently, the detailed analysis of item 4 indicated that spelling mistakes can be reduced sharply by incorporating teacher-generated quizzes into the platform, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.71. It might be stated that voluntary writing encourages students to be more thorough, as the teacher periodically checks and grades them. The findings in item 5 indicated that students observed a significant decrease in punctuation and capitalization errors, achieving a mean score of 4.62. This chart demonstrates that guided writing activities pave the way for reducing grave mistakes about punctuation and capitalization mistakes. The mean score of item 6, 4.84, revealed that speaking performance can be boosted significantly when modified quiz questions are discussed periodically in classes. It affirms that students appreciate articulating their thoughts on the books during discussion sessions to facilitate the exchange of ideas with teachers and peers. Based on the questionnaire, it can be inferred that teacher-created quizzes can increase the educational advantages of the platform, as they are tailored to students' levels, prior knowledge, and individual requirements.

Qualitative Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were utilized to uncover students' sincere thoughts on modified quiz questions. It is worth mentioning that interview questions were directed to the students in three languages, which were English, Arabic, and Kurdish, so that they could express their ideas without having any linguistic barriers. Accordingly, the given questions were formulated:

Pre-test

- What is your sincere idea about modified quiz questions on Raz-Kids?

Post-test

- What are some pluses and minuses of modified quiz questions on Raz-Kids?

Interview Analysis

Participants' opinions were divided into categories to emphasize the pros and cons of modified quiz questions. Table Seven shows the pros, whereas Table Eight depicts the cons of modified quiz questions.

Table 7. *Pluses of Teacher-Generated Quiz Questions*

No	Theme	Frequency	%
1	Not challenging	19	86
2	Not boring	20	90
3	Not irrelevant	18	81
4	Not limited	22	100
5	Not monotonous	21	95

Upon comprehensive analysis of students' opinions from the interview, various themes emerged and are shown in Table Seven. For example, they claimed that questions that were not

beyond their understanding (f=19, 86%) attracted their attention as they were assessed based on their capabilities without forcing them so much. Balancing the difficulty level of comprehension questions yields multiple advantages, including improved motivation to complete activities voluntarily and correctly. Secondly, varied types of questions were valued by the vast majority of students (f=20, 90%). It might be posited that composing unique and engaging questions for students is fundamental, as they will likely invest their energy in finding the truth meticulously. Consequently, posing relevant questions immediately engaged students' attention (f=18, 81%). It can be inferred that formulating relevant, engaging, and understandable questions is more effective than addressing higher-order thinking skills-based inquiries. Subsequently, increasing or decreasing the number of questions for specific books was appreciated by all students (f=22, 100%). They underlined that scanning all pages for the answers increased their alertness. The final topic warranting particular focus was the creativity-based inquiries (f=21, 95%), which engaged students in providing innovative responses, as answers to open-ended questions differ based on individual creativity. These findings hint that respondents valued teacher-generated quizzes highly.

Table 8. *Minuses of Teacher-Generated Quiz Questions*

No	Theme	Frequency	%
1	Repetition	2	9
2	Not online	3	12.50
3	Requires much time	1	4.50

Table Eight shows some minuses of teacher-generated quizzes. To illustrate, a few students reiterated that doing tasks repetitively (f=2, 9 %), using a notebook incessantly (f=3, 12.50 %), and allocating much time (f=1, 4.50) as some drawbacks of the instruction adopted in the study. However, such feedback plays a vital role in the improvement.

Apart from content analysis, essential remarks of some students are emphasized to reflect their genuine points of view:

Responding to default questions on the platform was difficult because I could not comprehend some ideas or infer meaning from the context. I received assistance from my siblings and parents, who aided me in discovering the answers. Nonetheless, quizzes created by the teacher were accessible enough to answer alone, as they were within my capabilities. I grabbed my tablet, sat, read, and responded to questions instantly. Furthermore, we compared our responses with those of our classmates in the class. (St 4)

I was not interested in responding to default questions on RK, as they were beyond my level. Thus, my mistakes were higher than correct ones. On the other hand, teacher-created quizzes were relevant and engaging. I found the answers without getting the assistance of anyone else. Moreover, writing answers in a notebook helped me fix my spelling, grammar, and capitalization mistakes. Furthermore, my handwriting improved as I wrote slowly so that I could read easily in class when my teacher asked. (St 7)

This research was great since it triggered my imagination in numerous instances. For example, I composed several lines to elaborate on my ideas about my favorite animal. I also used my imagination when I pretended to be the book's author with some additional pages. Next, I embarked on numerous explorations encompassing astronomy and notable innovations. (St 11)

Completing teacher-created exams at home and articulating our thoughts on the book in class fostered our writing and speaking performance. We noticed that we became bookworms to read more books and answered questions accordingly. Also, expressing our ideas about the book and answering specific questions helped us to become critical readers, reading more carefully and learning more details.(St14)

Answering modified quiz questions on RK was an excellent experience, with a few areas requiring re-evaluation. For instance, writing routinely became challenging due to our obligations and the necessity to play outside with friends. Subsequently, we devoted considerable time to discussing themes about the books, which could be limited to twice a week instead of daily. Ultimately, we prefer responding to questions via our tablets online, as it was tiring for me to write in a notebook. All in all, the modified questions were superb, except for some minor problems. (St 17)

Discussion

This mixed methods research study investigated the effects of teacher-generated quizzes of a renowned e-reading app, RK, on developing students' reading performance and positively influencing their attitudes towards e-book apps. In this context, reading assessments unearthed that teacher-created quizzes raised students' performance in reading classes, resulting in superior reading scores compared to their counterparts whose reading activities were supplemented by the original RK quizzes. It hints that teacher-created quizzes effectively improve learners' reading skills through well-structured questions in diverse formats. Significant improvements in reading can be attributed to training that allows the researcher to adapt questions based on students' proficiency levels and with follow-up discussion sessions (Kara & Kucuk, 2023; Schuller et al., 2017).

Apart from reading exams, questionnaires uncovered essential points to be examined thoroughly. Students reiterated that tailoring questions to align with their background knowledge boosted their motivation, improved comprehension rates, broadened vocabulary, restored speaking self-confidence, and diminished spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors. This aligns with the research conducted by Kim (2021), which demonstrated that minor modifications to quiz questions on e-book platforms can increase outcomes, resulting in boosted motivation, improved reading scores, and a significant increase in speaking performance, as each activity facilitates guided student learning. Gultom (2016) pointed out that balancing the difficulty level of quizzes to assess students' comprehension can increase e-book adoption.

The interviews unearthed positive and negative views on teacher-created quizzes. The findings indicated that unchallenging, pertinent, engaging, thorough, and creativity-oriented exam questions captivated students' attention, driving them to read with more tremendous enthusiasm, consistent with Gareis and Grant's (2015) research. They asserted that altering some quiz questions could significantly boost students' motivation to read more books on electronic platforms. Additionally, Bates et al. (2017) acknowledged that some modifications on e-book platforms can positively address learners' demands, facilitating a progressive transformation from negative to positive cycles. Nevertheless, content analysis revealed several drawbacks with teacher-created quizzes, which were exhausting, paper-based, and tiring. This finding aligns with Kucuk's (2023) study, which indicated that technology-enhanced quizzes may possess certain downsides; however, implementing preventive measures can significantly mitigate their adverse effects. Upon triangulating all data, it can be concluded that teacher-created quizzes affect the reading

environment positively by fostering an increase in avid readers eager to expand their visions through appealing reading resources.

Substantial gains in reading scores can also be ascribed to implementing technology-integrated education at the institution, where the steps of communicative language teaching resonate throughout the academic year. The school chosen to conduct the study is renowned for providing advanced technology in its classrooms, allowing students to improve their learning markedly. Advanced smartboards, e-textbooks, e-assessment means, gamified practice sessions, and video-enriched classrooms are integrated into the lessons to maintain continuous student engagement. Additionally, project-based, inquiry, and content-based methodologies are not underestimated; they are standard practices. Undeniably, students do not encounter any difficulties implementing RK-based learning once they are acquainted with electronic tools in the classroom. Bates et al. (2017) attest that technology-integrated classrooms go hand in hand with a communicative language teaching methodology, thereby employing various resources such as e-books, videos, games, and presentations to maximize the advantages of technology in education.

Conclusion

This study explored the impact of teacher-created quizzes on RK in improving students' reading performance in Erbil, Iraq, via a mixed methods research methodology. Findings revealed that teacher-created quizzes have an unending potential to increase reading performance. Besides, teacher-created tests offer further advantages by enhancing spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and capitalization proficiency. Moreover, responding to modified quizzes in a written and spoken format has restored their self-confidence. Furthermore, engaging with books, audio versions, and recording activities has transformed their perceptions of using e-book platforms. Moreover, it has been observed that learners' creativity has been stimulated, enhancing their creative thinking abilities.

The study's findings have several educational implications. Schools should employ a team to assess the difficulty of items in quizzes on e-book applications, finding common ground to ask questions according to their proficiency levels. Furthermore, seminars should be conducted to determine the conduct of the reading program and monitor their progress periodically. Consequently, students' dissatisfaction with monotonous, time-intensive reading assignments can be significantly alleviated. Subsequently, instructor-created quizzes should be designed in a hybrid format to mitigate the reliance on paper-based reading assessments. Moreover, school administrators must update parents on the reading activity records of each student with a well-established plan. Consequently, parents can encourage their children to cultivate positive reading habits through various awards.

The present study has some limitations, prompting recommendations for future research. The study's scope was limited to third-grade students at a private primary school in Erbil, Iraq, which can be expanded to other stages for further studies. Moreover, additional institutions may be welcomed to assess the impact of teacher-created quizzes on a large scale. Subsequently, just the RK was incorporated into the study, which might be expanded to include other prominent e-

book applications, such as Epic, My On, and Bee Star. This study exclusively examined e-books, which can be enlarged with paper-based books to compare for further studies.

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Mapping AI's Integration into Linguistics- A Bibliometric and Thematic Analysis of ChatGPT's Influence

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Abstract

This study is a systematic and bibliometric analysis of research on artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, and large language models, focusing on the top fifty publications from high-impact linguistics journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus. This study aims to identify and analyze the historical significance of ChatGPT's release and its broader influence on linguistic research as a field. Through scientific mapping we examine research publications from before and after the launch of ChatGPT, analyzing how it presents in choice of topics and methodologies. The study presents a thematic review of articles published up to March 2024, categorizing them into major themes such as editorials, survey studies, translation research, and assessment methodologies. Through the use of Bibliometrix software, the research analyzes the geographical networks of articles, authorship collaborations, citations, and recurring keywords. The findings reveal the growing influence of artificial intelligence, particularly ChatGPT, on various subfields of linguistics, and demonstrate how AI technologies are being integrated into areas such as translation, language assessment, and educational practices. By mapping the trajectory of AI's integration into linguistics, the study offers insights into future research directions, emphasizing the need to continuously assess AI's impact on educational and linguistic practices.

Keywords: applied linguistics, bibliometric analysis, ethical considerations, Generative AI, language assessment, language teaching, large language models, linguistics, systematic literature review, translation

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Introduction

The use of AI-powered technologies has been well established among linguistics researchers and practitioners; these technologies include but are not limited to, chatbots (R. Zhang et al., 2023), speech recognition technology (Jeon et al., 2023), Automated Essay Scoring systems (AES) (Ramesh et al., 2022), and Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) (Mousavinasab et al., 2018). Moreover, research on the impact of Large Language Models (LLMs), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and ChatGPT has exploded in recent years, especially following the release of ChatGPT in 2022; as a result, systematic reviews and meta-analyses on these topics have also increased. However, the large volume of research and reviews tends to lack focus on quality. There is a pressing need for a more targeted systematic review to critically examine how LLMs, AI, and ChatGPT are integrated within leading research publications. That is why we conducted a systematic and bibliometric analysis of research limited to the top fifty linguistics journals according to Web of Science and Scopus. Limiting the review to these top journals ensures a focus on high-quality, peer-reviewed research, providing a reliable and rigorous overview of the most influential and impactful studies on ChatGPT, AI, and LLMs in the field of linguistics, maximizing the relevance and credibility of the findings while keeping the review manageable and concise.

The significance of this research lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive, high-quality analysis of the most influential studies on ChatGPT, AI, and LLMs within the field of linguistics. By focusing on the top fifty journals according to Web of Science and Scopus, this bibliometric review ensures that the findings are both relevant and credible. It will help identify key trends, collaboration networks, and research gaps, guiding future research efforts and informing policy decisions.

This analysis addresses three primary research questions:

(1) What are the publication trends in the top fifty linguistics journals on ChatGPT, AI, and LLMs?

(2) What are the geographic distribution, citation impact and collaboration patterns of research on ChatGPT, AI, and LLMs in the top fifty linguistics journals?

(3) What are the key topics and themes explored in ChatGPT, AI, and LLMs research within the top fifty linguistics journals?

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT and Large Language Models.

The rapid advancements in generative AI over the past year have been marked by significant milestones and widespread adoption, particularly following the release of OpenAI's ChatGPT in November 2022. ChatGPT quickly garnered immense popularity, achieving over one million users within five days and 100 million within two months (Dale, 2024). This swift adoption has drawn extensive media attention and raised public awareness about generative AI's potential impacts on various industries and global AI strategies. Major tech companies like OpenAI, Microsoft, and Google have been at the forefront of these developments, continuously innovating and expanding the capabilities of AI technologies. Smaller companies and international players, particularly from China, have also made notable contributions, further accelerating the field's growth (X. Zhang et al., 2023).

Amidst these advancements, significant challenges and ethical concerns have emerged. Issues such as misinformation, biases in AI outputs, and the societal implications of increasingly powerful AI systems have come to the forefront. The rapid pace of development has sparked

discussions about the need for responsible AI governance and regulation to address these risks. Despite these challenges, the progress in generative AI continues to drive forward, promising transformative changes across numerous sectors while highlighting the critical importance of managing its development responsibly (Jungherr and Schroeder, 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023).

These advancements in generative AI, exemplified by OpenAI's ChatGPT, have significant implications for linguistics research. These models engage deeply with core elements of language, such as syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, offering linguists powerful tools to analyze and understand linguistic structures and meanings. In applied linguistics, AI-powered language models enhance the study of language acquisition, language use in social contexts, and the development of teaching materials. For TESOL, these technologies provide innovative tools for language instruction, such as automated feedback on writing and speaking, personalized language learning experiences, and interactive language practice through AI-driven conversation agents. The multilingual capabilities of AI models enable comparative studies across different languages and dialects, enriching our understanding of translation, language learning processes and pedagogical strategies. This integration of AI into linguistics not only advances theoretical insights but also supports practical applications in language teaching and learning.

The consensus on the promises of AI has led to an explosion in research examining every aspect of AI, including its potential and repercussions. Even within the limits of one field such as linguistics, the number of articles published daily about AI is staggering. While there are reviews that look into this with either a focus on a narrow branch of linguistics such as academic writing (Aljuaid, 2024) and speech recognition (Jeon et al., 2023) or a more comprehensive review of ChatGPT's impact on educational research (Leong et al., 2023), to our knowledge, there has not been any that solely examine the top fifty ranked linguistics journals.

Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a powerful method for examining literature characteristics, identifying development trends, and highlighting current research focal points. This approach evaluates various dimensions of literature, such as quantity, quality, citations, authors, institutions, and keywords, to offer insights into a field's growth and trends (Ellegaard, & Wallin, 2015; Lei, & Dilin, 2019; Mohsen, 2021). In this study, we employed bibliometric analysis, visualization technology, and data mining to provide a comprehensive overview of research trends related to ChatGPT, AI, and large LLMs in the top fifty linguistics journals.

Although it has been criticized for its coverage limitations (Martín-Martín et al, 2021), the Web of Science database is widely recognized as a premier index for research output across various fields. Scopus as well is a well-known and highly cited database.

Our analysis offers linguistics researchers a detailed view of trends, key institutions, and significant topics, promoting knowledge sharing, collaboration, and further advancements to guide future research and innovation.

Method

To ensure a focused review, we developed a rigorous selection method for journal and article inclusion. First, we identified and refined a list of top journals in linguistics from Web of Science and Scopus, eliminating multidisciplinary journals with an AI focus. Next, we conducted a systematic literature search and applied strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, ultimately narrowing down 122 initial articles to 104 relevant papers.

Selection Criteria for Journals

The initial phase involved identifying the top fifty journals within the "Linguistics" category as indexed by the Web of Science Social Sciences Citation Index. This compilation was further refined through a comparative analysis with the top fifty linguistics journals listed in Scopus. We cross-referenced the two lists which resulted in the addition of 18 journals listed in Scopus and not in the top 50 on Web of Science. Of these 18 additional journals, a subsequent exclusion criterion was applied, wherein three journals predominantly focusing on multidisciplinary subjects with a specialization in artificial intelligence were omitted. These journals are Artificial Intelligence published by Springer, Artificial Intelligence published by Science Direct and Communication Research published by Sage. The rationale behind this exclusion was to mitigate the inclusion of a voluminous array of papers irrelevant to the core topic of linguistics.

Review Timeframe

The designated period for the literature search extended from February 28th to March 8th, 2024. Utilizing the advanced search functionality of the Web of Science, the search terms employed encompassed "ChatGPT," "Artificial intelligenc*," "large language model*," or "LLM*" specifically within the abstracts. Exceptions to the Web of Science database coverage were noted for "Communication Monographs" and "Journal of Communication," which, while appearing within the top fifty Scopus listings, were not indexed by Web of Science. These journals were individually searched using their respective database interfaces, employing identical search parameters.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Articles

The screening of 122 journal abstracts retrieved from Web of Science and the journals' homepages was executed using Rayyan software. A total of nine articles were excluded from the review due to duplication. Six articles were excluded due to their reference to "LLM" as an acronym unrelated to "large language models," such as "language learning motivation" or "Long-Lasting Memory." The remaining three exclusions were predicated on their irrelevance to the study's focus on linguistics, including one on behavioral science, another on cognitive science, and a case study where artificial intelligence was merely mentioned as a specialization in the participant's profile. This process culminated in the selection of 104 papers. See Figure 1.

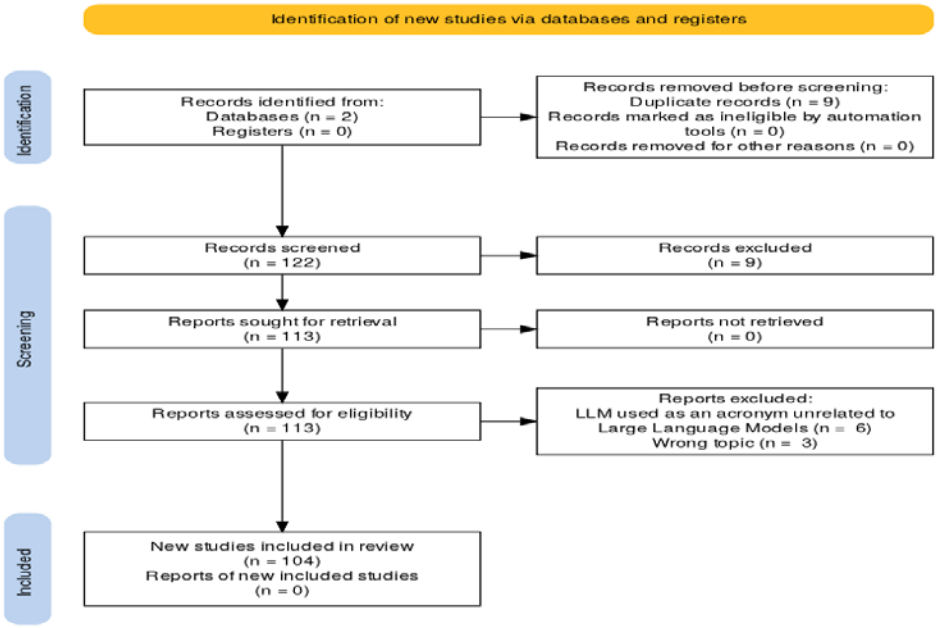


Figure 1 Selection process of the articles using the PRISMA flow diagram method

Research Instruments

In this study, we employed a variety of research instruments to ensure a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the literature. Rayyan was used for the initial screening of titles and abstracts. This tool facilitated the creation of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) diagram, which outlines the flow of information through the different phases of the systematic review. Rayyan's collaborative interface allowed for efficient and accurate screening by multiple reviewers. PRISMA is a standardized tool that helps researchers improve the reporting of systematic reviews and meta-analyses by providing a clear structure for reporting the selection process (Page et al., 2021).

Excel was utilized for collaborative analysis, summarization, and grouping of articles according to identified themes. The flexibility and functionality of Excel enabled us to organize and manage large volumes of data effectively, ensuring that all relevant information was systematically categorized and easily accessible for further analysis.

Bibliometrics was employed for the bibliometric analysis, which included the creation of tables and visualizations. Bibliometrics is an R package designed for comprehensive science mapping analysis. It provides tools for quantitative research in bibliometrics and scientometrics, offering a suite of functions for importing bibliographic data, performing bibliometric analysis, and visualizing results (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This comprehensive tool allowed for an in-depth examination of publication trends, citation impact, and collaboration patterns, providing a detailed overview of the research landscape. Bibliometrix's advanced features enabled us to generate insightful visual representations of the data, enhancing the clarity and impact of our findings.

Research Procedures

The 104 articles were coded to address the research questions using both inductive and deductive coding methods. Inductive coding was applied to the overarching questions concerning the publication trends and the key topics and themes explored in ChatGPT, AI, and LLMs research. During the initial screening stage, with Rayyan's blinding feature activated, both authors independently created labels and categorized each article selected for inclusion. Following this, a second screening was conducted with Rayyan's blinding feature turned off, allowing the authors to iteratively revise their categorizations until they reached 100% consensus.

These articles were then transferred to an Excel sheet, where the authors collaborated to further subcategorize them using deductive coding. This process employed "In Vivo" coding (Saldana, 2015) to ensure that the coding reflected the language used by the articles' authors. Each article within the categories was read to extract the methodologies and analyze how AI, ChatGPT, and/or LLMs were utilized or discussed. This rigorous coding and categorization process ensured a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the literature, providing valuable insights into the research trends and thematic focuses within the field.

Results

Bibliometrix Analysis

The comprehensive analysis resulted in the inclusion of articles published across 33 journals. The distribution of these articles, detailed in Table One in Appendix A, highlights the diverse range of journals contributing to the discourse on artificial intelligence and language models in linguistics.

The data covers the period from 1996 to 2024, encompassing a wide range of sources, including 33 journals, and totaling 104 documents. See Table 2. The annual growth rate of publications is 11.49%, with an average document age of 2.67 years. Each document garners an average of 16.47 citations, translating to 4.164 citations per year. The total number of references cited across these documents is 5645, reflecting the extensive bibliographic foundation of the research.

Table 2. *Main metrics of publications from 1996 to 2024*

Main Information About Data	
Timespan	1996 - 2024
Sources	33
Documents	104
Annual Growth Rate %	11.49
Document Average Age	2.67
Average Citations per Document	16.47
Average Citations per Year per Document	4.164
References	5645

The data set includes contributions from 288 unique authors, who collectively appear 318 times across the documents. See Table Three. Among these authors, 24 have single-authored documents, indicating a balance between individual and collaborative research efforts. The research's collaborative nature is evident, with 30 single-authored documents and a document-to-author ratio of 0.361. On average, each document has 3.06 co-authors, with 24.04% of the collaborations being international, highlighting the global reach and collaborative efforts within this research field.

Table 3. *Overview of author participation and collaboration*

Authors		Authors Collaboration	
Authors	288	Single-authored Docs	30
Author Appearances	318	Documents per Author	0.361
Authors of Single-Authored Docs	24	Co-Authors per Doc	3.06
		International Co-Authorships %	24.04

The annual scientific production shows significant variability, with notable peaks in 2023 and 2024, during which 48 and 21 articles were published, respectively. See Table Four. This trend highlights a growing interest and increasing research activity in recent years, with an overall annual percentage growth rate of 11.49%.

Table 4. *Overview of annual scientific production*

Annual Scientific Production	
Year	Articles
1996	1
1999	1

Annual Scientific Production	
2001	1
2006	1
2008	1
2012	1
2014	1
2017	3
2018	4
2019	1
2020	2
2021	4
2022	14
2023	48
2024	21
Annual Percentage Growth Rate	11.49

The most prolific author is Godwin-Jones R, with 4 articles and an equivalent fractionalized count. See Table Five. Other leading contributors include Aryadoust V, Church KW, and Dale R, each with 3 articles. This indicates a concentrated contribution from a few key researchers in the field.

Table 5. *Overview of most productive authors*

Authors	Articles	Authors	Articles Fractionalized
GODWIN-JONES R	4	GODWIN-JONES R	4.0
ARYADOUST V	3	DALE R	3.0
CHURCH KW	3	ARYADOUST V	2.5
DALE R	3	CHURCH KW	2.0
MARTINS AFT	3	BAÑOS R	1.0
BERTSCH A	2	BARROT JS	1.0
DE SOUZA JGC	2	CHEN YC	1.0
FARINHAS A	2	CHURCH K	1.0
FERNANDES P	2	CUMMINS J	1.0
HANCOCK JT	2	GHAFOURI M	1.0

The most cited manuscript is by Lombrozo T (2006) in Cognition, with 173 citations and an annual citation rate of 9.11. See Table Six. Other highly cited works include Elish MC (2018) in Communication Monographs and Kessler G (2018) in Foreign Language Annal, each reflecting high impact within their respective journals.

Table 6. *Overview of top manuscripts per citations*

Top Manuscripts per Citations

Paper	DOI	TC	TC per Year	NTC
LOMBROZO T, 2006, COGNITION	10.1016/j.cognition.2004.12.009	173	9.11	1.000
ELISH MC, 2018, COMMUN MONOGR	10.1080/03637751.2017.1375130	148	21.14	1.993
KESSLER G, 2018, FOREIGN LANG ANN	10.1111/flan.12318	141	20.14	1.899
MCCORNACK SA, 2014, J LANG SOC PSYCHOL	10.1177/0261927X14534656	117	10.64	1.000
STEIN JP, 2017, COGNITION	10.1016/j.cognition.2016.12.010	110	13.75	1.964
KOHNKE L, 2023, RELC J	10.1177/00336882231162868	101	50.50	13.891
SCHEPENS J, 2012, BILING-LANG COGN	10.1017/S1366728910000623	92	7.08	1.000
STEVENSON M, 2001, COMPUT LINGUIST	10.1162/089120101317066104	76	3.17	1.000
EVANS R, 1996, COMPUT LINGUIST	NA	60	2.07	1.000
MACINTYRE PD, 2017, MOD LANG J	10.1111/modl.12417	52	6.50	0.929

The USA also tops the citation count with 800 citations, followed by China and the United Kingdom. The average article citations reveal that articles from Germany and the Netherlands are highly impactful, with average citations of 38.00 and 92.00, respectively.

Table 7. *Overview of corresponding author's countries*

Corresponding Author's Countries

Country	Articles	Freq	Scp	Mcp	Mcp_Ratio
USA	41	0.3981	29	12	0.293
China	24	0.2330	19	5	0.208
United Kingdom	7	0.0680	6	1	0.143
Canada	6	0.0583	5	1	0.167
Australia	3	0.0291	2	1	0.333
Germany	3	0.0291	2	1	0.333
Korea	3	0.0291	3	0	0.000
Iran	2	0.0194	2	0	0.000
Japan	2	0.0194	2	0	0.000
Portugal	2	0.0194	1	1	0.500

The USA leads with 41 articles, followed by China with 24 and the United Kingdom with 7. The international collaboration metric, MCP_Ratio, highlights Portugal's significant collaboration index of 0.500, indicating a strong international collaborative effort.

Table 8. *Overview of total citations per country*

Total Citations Per Country		
Country	Total Citations	Average Article Citations
USA	800	19.512
China	315	13.125
United Kingdom	174	24.857
Germany	114	38.000
Netherlands	92	92.000
Canada	71	11.833
Philippines	44	44.000
Korea	40	13.333
Saudi Arabia	24	24.000
Japan	10	5.000

Table 9. *Overview of most relevant keywords*

Most Relevant Keywords			
Author Keywords (DE)	Articles	Keywords-Plus (Id)	Articles
Artificial Intelligence	19	English	9
ChatGPT	11	Learners	8
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	6	Students	8
Chatbots	5	Accuracy	5
AI	4	Language	5
Motivation	4	Classroom	3
Machine Learning	3	Features	3
Technology Acceptance Model	3	Model	3
Argumentative Writing	2	Motivation	3
Audiovisual Translation	2	Perception	3

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of AI in linguistics research identifies five key themes: editorials, translation, software, assessment, and surveys.

Editorials

Among the 104 papers, 23 editorials discuss the rise of generative AI tools like ChatGPT, highlighting their potential to enhance language learning but also emphasizing concerns over over-reliance on technology and ethical issues. A recurrent topic is the role of AI in offering personalized feedback and learning opportunities, though many argue that human mediation remains essential to ensure the effective use of AI tools in education. Ethical issues, including data privacy, academic integrity, and cultural bias in AI algorithms, are prevalent throughout the editorials.

Assessment

The theme of assessment is covered in five articles, including two empirical studies, one systematic review, one review article, and one commentary. These articles explore the role of AI in language assessment, focusing on tools like Automated Essay Scoring (AES) and Automated Speech Recognition (ASR). While they find AI promising for formative assessments, there are challenges regarding validity, fairness, and reliability arise, particularly in high-stakes testing contexts.

Translation

Nine articles focus on AI's impact on machine translation, assessing the accuracy, functionality, and cultural relevance of AI-driven translations. While AI has improved translation efficiency, human intervention is still critical in post-editing, especially for maintaining cultural context and addressing idiomatic expressions.

Software

Fifteen articles examine AI-driven language learning tools, such as chatbots and extended reality applications. These tools are presented positively for their ability to support learners in writing, speaking, and engagement. However, challenges like reliance on retrieval-based responses and the need for human intervention to correct AI-generated feedback are also noted.

Surveys

Table 10 summarizes the studies we categorized as using questionnaires and surveys. An et al. (2023) explored AI use in EFL via UTAUT2, showing that performance expectancy and cultural interest predict behavioral intentions. Liu et al. (2024) and Liu and Ma (2024) applied TAM to assess GPT chatbot usage among Chinese learners, highlighting ease of use and usefulness as major predictors of AI adoption. Stein & Ohler (2017) examined perceptions of virtual agents' eeriness, while Shin and Lee (2023) evaluated ChatGPT-generated test items, finding them comparable to human-generated ones in naturalness. Lastly, Dang and Liu (2022) found that a growth mindset fosters positive attitudes toward AI technologies.

Table 10. *Summary of research studies employing questionnaires and Surveys*

Study	Objective	Survey Method	Participants	Key Findings
An et al. (2023)	To assess EFL students' perceptions of AI systems and factors influencing their usage.	UTAUT2 and L2 Motivational Self System questionnaire	524 junior and senior high students	Performance expectancy and cultural interest predicted behavioral intentions; learning experience differed by age.
Liu et al. (2024)	To examine Chinese EFL learners' acceptance of GPT chatbots for informal digital learning.	Adapted Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	867 learners; 20 post-survey interviews	Perceived ease of use and usefulness predicted intention and actual use of GPT for informal learning.
Liu & Ma (2024)	To assess Chinese EFL learners' attitudes towards ChatGPT for informal language learning.	Modified TAM questionnaire	405 learners, aged 18-24	Perceived usefulness influenced attitude; attitude predicted behavioral intention and actual use of ChatGPT.
Stein & Ohler (2017)	To explore mind attribution and the acceptance of virtual characters in a VR setting.	Custom-designed questionnaire	92 German university students	Autonomous virtual agents were perceived as eerie; human avatars were less eerie but not more attractive.
Shin & Lee (2023)	To evaluate ChatGPT's ability to generate reading	Likert-scale and open-ended response items	50 English teachers from South Korea	ChatGPT-generated passages rated similarly to human ones, but distractors were less compelling.

	comprehension items comparable to experts.			
Dang & Liu (2022)	To investigate the impact of a growth mindset on attitudes toward intelligent technology.	Questionnaires across five sub-studies	University students	Growth mindset participants showed higher trust and perceived usefulness of intelligent technologies.

Discussion

In this discussion, we revisit the central research questions that guided this study on ChatGPT, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and large language models (LLMs) within linguistics. Through an analysis of publication trends, geographic distribution, citation impact, collaboration patterns, and distinct thematic areas, this discussion reveals a field experiencing rapid expansion and diversification. While AI's integration into linguistics offers promising advances, it also presents challenges related to pedagogy, ethics, and cultural sensitivity. This discussion will contextualize these findings within the broader research landscape and consider their implications for future study.

Publication Trends

The trends in publication activity indicate that research on ChatGPT, AI, and LLMs is primarily concentrated in journals focused on computational linguistics and technology-assisted learning, such as Natural Language Engineering, Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics, and Computer Assisted Language Learning. These journals are pivotal in advancing both theoretical and applied aspects of AI in linguistics. However, the interdisciplinary reach of AI is evidenced by contributions from journals covering areas such as cognition, social psychology, and language assessment, reflecting the expanding influence of AI beyond traditional linguistic boundaries. This suggests that AI's impact is reshaping both core linguistic theory and its application in fields like psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and educational linguistics.

The recent nature of AI research in linguistics is reflected in the average document age of 2.67 years and an annual growth rate of 11.49%. This growth is driven by the accessibility and applicability of AI technologies like ChatGPT, which have spurred an influx of innovative research. The substantial average citation rate of 16.47 per document reflects the centrality of AI to current linguistic debates and its widespread influence across subfields. Moreover, the 104 documents analyzed collectively cite over 5,645 references, underscoring the richness of the bibliographic landscape supporting AI research. These trends reveal that AI and LLMs are becoming indispensable components of modern linguistic scholarship, fostering new directions in both computational and applied linguistics.

Overall, and unsurprisingly, the trends reveal a dynamic and evolving area of research that is increasingly attracting attention across multiple linguistic domains.

Geographic Distribution, Citation Impact, and Collaboration Patterns

The geographic distribution, citation impact, and collaboration patterns of research on ChatGPT, AI, and LLMs in the top fifty linguistics journals reveal several trends. Research contributions span 33 journals, with the majority of corresponding authors based in the USA, which leads to 41 articles. China follows with 24 articles, and the United Kingdom ranks third with 7 articles. This geographic distribution underscores the significant role of the USA in

advancing research in AI and LLMs within linguistics, followed by contributions from Asia and Europe.

In terms of citation impact, the USA also leads, accumulating 800 total citations, with an average of 19.51 citations per article. China follows with 315 citations, while articles from Germany and the Netherlands exhibit a particularly high average citation impact, at 38.00 and 92.00 citations per article, respectively. These figures indicate that while the USA and China produce the largest volume of research, European countries like Germany and the Netherlands contribute highly impactful work, despite fewer publications.

Collaboration patterns show a mix of individual and collaborative research efforts. With a document-to-author ratio of 0.361 and an average of 3.06 co-authors per paper, collaboration is evident in the field. Furthermore, 24.04% of the collaborations are international, reflecting the global nature of AI and LLM research. Portugal stands out with a significant international collaboration ratio (MCP Ratio) of 0.500, indicating strong cross-border partnerships, while the USA and China also engage in notable international collaborations, albeit to a lesser extent. Collaboration, both national and international, is a key feature of this research area, with a sizable portion of studies being co-authored by researchers from different countries.

Key Themes

Regarding the third research question on the key topics and themes. Five themes emerged; editorials, translation, software, surveys and assessment.

Editorials

Of the 104 papers reviewed, 23 are editorials, with 17 of them published in 2023 and 2024. This trend reflects a surge in opinions coinciding with the rise of ChatGPT and other generative AI tools. These editorials typically focus on five key points related to AI in language learning: the capabilities AI now offers, the challenges and contradictions it introduces, the evolving role of teachers, and critical ethical considerations.

Many editorials explore how AI-based tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly, and machine translation can enhance productivity and facilitate education. For instance, Hockly (2023) highlights that AI-driven tools, particularly chatbots, provide students with conversational partners that offer immediate feedback, enhancing both speaking and writing skills.

Another common theme is that AI offers affordances that would otherwise be difficult or expensive to provide, such as personalized learning and feedback. However, there are concerns about the potential over-reliance on technology, which could lead to the neglect of essential skills such as writing, critical thinking, and creativity. Many editorials emphasize the teacher's role as a mediator who ensures that AI tools effectively complement traditional teaching methods. Barrot (2023) acknowledges that while these tools challenge traditional writing pedagogy, they also offer opportunities to reassess methods and practices. He argues that L2 writing instructors should leverage ChatGPT's capabilities while emphasizing creativity and human expression, ensuring students see writing as a means of intellectual and personal growth. By acknowledging AI's limitations, teachers can inspire students to think creatively and foster a deeper appreciation for the writing process (Barrot, 2023).

Church and Hestness (2019) emphasize the importance of addressing the gap between academic performance and real-world applicability, pointing out the differences between training and test data. They advocate for evaluations that consider generalization and real-world use cases,

suggesting that metrics such as reliability and validity from psychology be incorporated. This concern leads to a broader discussion of ethics.

Ethical issues are raised in most editorials, with calls for clear guidelines to ensure the responsible use of AI in education. The primary concerns include data privacy, academic integrity, and more pervasive societal issues like racism embedded in accent modification technology (Payne et al., 2024). Kohnke et al. (2023) further raise concerns about bias in source databases and algorithms, noting that most AI tools are trained on English-language corpora, which may lead to bias toward English-speaking cultures and written rather than spoken modalities. Learners from other cultures might struggle with the lack of cultural and modal neutrality. Also, Godwin-Jones (2021) draws attention to how minority and underrepresented groups may be neglected in data collection, leading to disparities in the resources developed using AI-based tools.

Church and Yue (2023) highlight the issue of "hallucinations," where AI generates incorrect or misleading information. They suggest that these issues can be mitigated by incorporating fact-checking mechanisms or revisiting rationalist approaches from the 1970s, which focus on logical, rule-based methods. Xi (2023) expresses concern over the "black box" effect in AI and machine learning, where the inner workings of models in language assessment are obscured, making it difficult for stakeholders to understand the assessment metrics and methodologies. Conversely, Xi also warns that over-transparency could result in teaching being narrowly aligned with AI-driven metrics, which could foster a "teaching to the test" phenomenon.

Elish and Boyd (2017) offer a broader societal perspective on AI, cautioning against how inputs and algorithms shape outputs. They advocate a methodological shift in AI research, like how ethnography transitioned from a colonial practice to a reflexive, self-aware approach. Jungherr and Schroeder (2023) also extend the ethical debate beyond education, warning about the influence of data-driven AI in shaping public discourse by prioritizing or suppressing information based on opaque criteria. Concerns about AI's rapid advancement exacerbating issues around reliability, ethical use, and job displacement are prevalent, with regulatory bodies and academic institutions grappling with how to manage AI technology (Dale, 2024).

Church (2018) contrasts the ethical concerns between different regions, noting that while the West focuses on privacy and job security, China views AI as a means for economic revitalization and social improvement. Technologies such as facial recognition are already widely used in China, where public opinion is supportive.

In addition to varying ethical concerns, the editorials also differ in their focus on specific AI technologies. While some explore natural language generation broadly (Dale, 2023), others focus specifically on ChatGPT (Kohnke et al., 2023), and some examine a range of technologies including mobile, virtual, and augmented reality in language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2023), accent modification technology (Payne et al., 2024), or technology-mediated interaction for speaking and listening assessment (Youn, 2023). The geographic and contextual backgrounds of these editorials also vary. For example, Praphan and Praphan (2023) focus on AI in the context of Thailand, while Warschauer et al. (2023) address its use in the classroom more generally.

Pedagogically, the editorials present differing views on AI integration. Some advocate for using AI as a supplementary tool, while others push for more holistic integration. Barrot (2023) suggests students should first produce their original writing, and then use AI as a supplement for refining essays. In contrast, Godwin-Jones (2022) and Su et al. (2023) argue for the deeper integration of AI in classrooms to benefit both students and teachers. Cummins (2024) asserts that

AI, unlike television or computers, will ultimately be more successfully integrated into and enhance language education.

The editorials also debate which learner levels benefit most from AI tools. Hockly (2023) notes that chatbots can be especially useful for lower-proficiency students, providing a controlled environment for learning. Conversely, Godwin-Jones (2022) suggests that these students may not fully benefit because they lack the knowledge to effectively process AI-generated feedback. Su et al. (2023) propose that teachers should train higher-proficiency students to use AI for outlining and proofreading but push them beyond AI's capabilities to create more analytically rich work. Meanwhile, Lozano and Mejías-Climent (2023) advocate a fully integrated approach in translator training so that machine translation is an integral part of the process and learners are trained for pre and post-editing and quality control.

Translation

Nine articles examine the impact of AI and LLMs on Machine Translation (MT), focusing on translation quality. A key theme across these studies is the evaluation of translation accuracy, functionality, and cultural appropriateness, often through specific models or criteria. While these articles highlight the significant advancements of AI-driven translation technologies, they also emphasize the persistent need for human intervention in post-editing and maintaining cultural relevance.

A recurring issue is the difficulty MT systems face in accurately translating culturally loaded terms, idiomatic expressions, and context-specific nuances, which are often misinterpreted or lost by AI. For instance, some studies focus on specific applications like automatic dubbing for films—e.g., the case study on Mulan (Yuan & Jin, 2023)—and educational videos dubbed into Spanish using Google's Aloud (Baños, 2023). Others take a broader approach, discussing AI in translation and language learning environments (Goodwin-Jones, 2022).

Methodologies differ across articles. Some propose new models for assessing translation quality, such as the FAS model, where 'S' stands for synchrony, replacing 'R' for readability in the FAR Model used for subtitles (Yuan & Jin, 2023; Pedersen, 2017). Others rely on existing models, employing both quantitative error analysis (Belinkov et al., 2020) and qualitative evaluations (de los Reyes Lozano & Mejías-Climent, 2023).

Geographical and cultural focuses vary as well. A few articles examine translation practices in specific cultural contexts, such as in China (Yuan & Jin, 2023; Cao et al., 2024), while others adopt a more global perspective, adding nuance to how MT systems perform across different linguistic environments.

Some studies incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing from fields like linguistics (de los Reyes Lozano & Mejías-Climent, 2023), cognitive science (Lee, 2023), and technology studies (Guerreiro et al., 2023). Collectively, these articles offer a comprehensive view of the state of AI in translation, particularly in audiovisual contexts where synchronization, idiomatic precision, and cultural relevance are critical.

Despite notable advancements, the articles underscore the challenges AI systems still face in addressing the subtleties of human language embedded in culture and context. A key conclusion is the ongoing necessity of human involvement, especially in post-editing roles. While AI can streamline the translation process, human expertise remains essential for refining output to meet high-quality standards, suggesting a future where AI and human collaboration is central to translation practices.

5.2.3 Software

Across fifteen articles analyzing AI-driven language software, the first mention of AI appears in a 1996 article about DATR, a language designed to represent complex word patterns via inheritance networks, minimizing redundancy (Evans & Gazdar, 1996). Since then, AI tools have been increasingly discussed, particularly for language learning and writing. Zhao (2023) highlights Wordtune, a digital writing assistant that supports EFL learners during drafting by offering alternative ways to express ideas in varied tones and lengths, aiding fluency. Similarly, Argumate uses chatbot-assisted approaches for argumentative writing (Guo et al., 2022). While limited by its retrieval-based system, Argumate effectively scaffolds students' argumentative skills, with future plans for data-driven enhancements.

Other studies explore more immersive tools. The Cognitive Immersive Language Learning Environment (CILLE) combines extended reality with AI, demonstrating significant language learning improvements in a Chinese context with ten participants (Guo et al., 2023). Additionally, task-based chatbots like Ellie and Call Annie focus on conversational English. Ellie showed high engagement and success rates with 314 Korean EFL students (Yang, 2022), while Call Annie, a generative AI video chatbot, provides immersive video call practice, enhancing speaking skills (Wan & Moorhouse, 2024).

Speeko, an AI-based app, was found to significantly improve L2 speaking proficiency and willingness to communicate in a mixed-methods study with 66 participants (Shafiee Rad, 2024). ChatGPT was also utilized in a controlled experiment to build rapport and grit in IELTS classes, demonstrating that AI-driven instructions could enhance emotional engagement and perseverance (Ghafouri, 2023).

Additional tools include the TPRAI Motion Sensing System, which uses gestures to enhance French vocabulary retention via Total Physical Response (Huang & Wang, 2023). Meanwhile, bibliometric analysis of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) research reveals a focus on independent learning, with limited studies on K-12 learners (Karakaya & Bozkurt, 2022). Wang et al. addressed this gap by studying 327 primary students using an AI coach for EFL, finding AI particularly effective among those who favored its avatar (Wang et al., 2023).

Godwin-Jones (2023) advocates for the use of augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR) to boost motivation and autonomy in language learning. He calls for creative, open-ended uses of VR that align with modern acquisition theories, and suggests mixed reality could provide dynamic, personalized learning in the future.

Large Language Models (LLMs) have also been applied to news summarization, with results comparable to human-generated summaries, though stylistic differences persist (T. Zhang, 2024). In OffensEval, LLMs struggled to detect offensive language in non-English social media posts, underperforming compared to human teams (Zampieri et al., 2023). Fernandes et al. (2023) discuss the quality issues of AI-generated content due to large, internet-sourced datasets, and propose a taxonomy of feedback methods, including reinforcement learning from human feedback (RLHF), while highlighting cost and ethical concerns.

AI-driven language software shows great promise in enhancing language learning and writing, particularly through tools that support drafting, immersion, and engagement. However, the consistent need for human intervention, especially in ensuring accuracy and cultural relevance, highlights the limitations of current AI systems. As these technologies evolve, the most effective applications will likely be those that combine AI efficiency with human oversight to ensure quality and meaningful learning outcomes.

Assessment

Across the five articles that explore AI's role in language learning, a central theme emerges AI tools, such as Automated Essay Scoring (AES), Automated Written Feedback (AWF), and Automated Speech Recognition (ASR), offer valuable formative assessment opportunities but face challenges when applied to summative assessments, particularly in high-stakes testing.

A key concern across the literature is the validity of AI-driven assessment systems. For instance, Graves (2023) highlights the potential of AI tools to assist with specifications grading, yet notes that traditional assessments may struggle to capture higher-order writing skills (Graves, 2023). Similarly, a study on Automated Essay Scoring (AES) demonstrates that while AES can reliably score basic writing traits like grammar, it falls short when evaluating more complex traits such as coherence and argumentation (Hannah et al., 2023). Shi and Aryadoust (2024) reinforce this concern in their systematic review, finding that AWF systems often focus on form-focused feedback, neglecting the nuanced, content-based feedback critical to robust language assessment. The emphasis on form at the expense of meaning brings into question the extent to which these systems truly measure the intended constructs of writing proficiency.

The empirical study on Automated Speech Recognition (ASR) further explores the issue of AI accuracy, particularly in oral assessments using ASR systems. The findings reveal that AI performs well with structured tasks, like oral reading, but struggles with spontaneous speech tasks, especially for non-native speakers (Hannah et al., 2022). This inconsistency highlights the limitations of AI systems in providing reliable and fair assessments across diverse linguistic backgrounds and task types. Similarly, the debate over generative AI raises concerns about the fairness of allowing AI tools in high-stakes assessments, where they could distort the measurement of a test taker's genuine abilities (Voss et al, 2023).

Despite these challenges, AI holds significant promise in formative assessment, where real-time feedback can support student learning and improvement. Shi and Aryadoust (2024) emphasize the benefits of AWF in formative contexts, where AI feedback allows students to revise and improve their writing over time. However, as AI systems become more integrated into language assessment, their role in summative assessment remains contentious, especially as issues of fairness, validity, and reliability continue to emerge.

Thus, while AI is transforming language assessment, its role remains most effective in formative contexts. The limitations of AI systems, particularly in evaluating complex writing skills and handling spontaneous speech, suggest that traditional human-led assessments are still essential for high-stakes testing. As AI tools evolve, addressing these validity concerns will be crucial to ensuring their appropriate integration into both formative and summative assessments.

Surveys

It is somewhat surprising that more survey studies have not been published in prominent journals within the field, given the rapid rise of AI-driven technologies in language learning. However, the available survey-based research provides critical insights into how learners and educators perceive and interact with these technologies. For example, An et al. (2023) utilized the UTAUT2 and L2 Motivational Self System questionnaire with 524 junior and senior high school students, finding that performance expectancy and cultural interest significantly influenced behavioral intentions, while learning experiences varied by age. Similarly, Liu et al. (2024) applied an adapted Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to examine 867 Chinese EFL learners'

acceptance of GPT chatbots for informal learning, revealing that perceived ease of use and usefulness were major predictors of both intention and actual usage.

Liu and Ma (2024) expanded this line of inquiry by employing a modified TAM questionnaire with 405 Chinese EFL learners aged 18-24 to assess attitudes toward ChatGPT for informal language learning. Their findings reinforced the influence of perceived usefulness on attitude, which in turn predicted behavioral intention and actual usage. Stein and Ohler (2017) utilized a custom-designed questionnaire to explore mind attribution and the acceptance of virtual characters in a VR setting among 92 German university students. Their study found that autonomous virtual agents were often perceived as eerie, although human avatars were less so, albeit not more attractive.

Shin and Lee (2023) conducted a Likert-scale and open-ended survey among 50 English teachers from South Korea to evaluate ChatGPT's ability to generate reading comprehension items comparable to expert-created ones. While ChatGPT's passages were rated similarly to those by humans, distractors were found less compelling. Finally, Dang and Liu (2022) surveyed university students across five studies to investigate the impact of a growth mindset on attitudes toward intelligent technology. Their results indicated that participants with a growth mindset showed higher trust and perceived usefulness of intelligent technologies.

These studies demonstrate the importance of surveys in understanding the acceptance, attitudes, and usage of AI technologies in language learning contexts, while also underscoring the need for further research as these technologies evolve and integrate more deeply into educational settings.

Conclusion

This study examines the high-impact research landscape on ChatGPT, artificial intelligence (AI), and large language models (LLMs) in linguistics. Our analysis reveals several important trends, including the concentration of research in computational linguistics and technology-assisted learning, with prominent contributions from key journals such as Natural Language Engineering and Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics. The rapid growth in publication volume, particularly in the past few years, reflects the increasing scholarly interest in AI and LLMs, driven by their expanding influence in both practical applications and theoretical explorations.

Geographically, the research is dominated by contributions from the USA and China, yet European countries such as Germany and the Netherlands produce fewer but highly impactful works. The global nature of this research is underscored by a significant level of international collaboration, with 24.04% of studies co-authored by researchers from different countries, particularly in regions with advanced technological infrastructures.

The thematic analysis reveals a broad spectrum of AI applications in linguistics, ranging from language learning and assessment to machine translation and writing support. Of note are the ethical concerns that permeate discussions around AI, including data privacy, bias, and the potential for over-reliance on technology. These concerns highlight the need for ongoing scrutiny as AI becomes further integrated into educational and linguistic contexts.

While this study provides a robust overview of current trends, limitations remain. The data primarily reflects research published in English, which may obscure contributions from non-English-speaking regions or journals. Additionally, as AI technologies rapidly evolve, future research must track how these advancements continue to shape linguistic research and pedagogy.

Further exploration is needed into AI's long-term impact on areas such as creativity in language use, the role of human oversight in automated systems, and the balance between technological efficiency and educational quality.

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Appendix A

Table 1. ***Distribution of articles across journals***

Journal Title	Articles	Number Of Volumes
Natural Language Engineering	12	8
Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics	10	3
Computer Assisted Language Learning	9	8
RELC Journal	7	5
Language Learning & Technology	6	5
Cognition	5	5
Computational Linguistics	5	5
Assessing Writing	5	3
Language Assessment Quarterly	4	2
Journal of Language and Social Psychology	4	4
Linguistica Antverpiensia New Series-Themes in Translation Studies	3	1
System	3	3
Applied Linguistics	3	3
Language Testing	2	1
Communication Monographs	2	2
Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching	2	2
Communication Theory	2	2
TESOL Quarterly	2	2

Journal of Speech Language and Hearing Research	2	2
ReCALL	2	2
Journal of Second Language Writing	2	2
Bilingualism-Language and Cognition	1	1
Language Culture and Curriculum	1	1
International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders	1	1
Language Teaching Research	1	1
International Journal of Multilingualism	1	1
Journal of Experimental Psychology-Learning Memory and Cognition	1	1
Speech Communication	1	1
Applied Linguistics Review	1	1
Language Cognition and Neuroscience	1	1
Modern Language Journal	1	1
Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development	1	1
Foreign Language Annals	1	1
Total	104	

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A Study of the Impact of Online Feedback on Moroccan EFL University Students' Listening Proficiency

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Abstract
Although technology has been widely integrated into language teaching, research on its impact on EFL students' listening proficiency and subskills still needs to be explored. This study aims to address this gap, stressing the role of online feedback in language acquisition. The significance of this study is manifested in the potential application of online feedback in the EFL arena and other related learning settings worldwide. This quasi-experimental study investigates how online feedback influences the listening subskills of engineering students at the National School of Applied Sciences (ENSA) in Berchid, Morocco. The study addressed the following question: To what extent does online feedback affect students' overall listening proficiency? Through convenience sampling, 60 second-year students were singled out: 30 were assigned to the experimental group and 30 to the control group. Using the pretest-posttest design, the current study aimed to determine whether students improved their listening proficiency and subskills using the ProProfs platform, which gave detailed and interactive feedback. Independent samples t-tests showed significant improvements for the experimental group in listening for gist, specific information, and filtering information, although not in inferring implicit information. The findings of the current study indicated that technology-enhanced feedback could be a successful way of improving EFL students' listening proficiency and subskills, and hence, it called for further integration into tertiary language education.
Keywords: Moroccan EFL university students, higher education, listening subskills, online feedback, ProProfs platform
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Introduction

The impact of ICT on educational practice has brought about profound changes, especially in the EFL context (Christensen & Knezek, 2001; Chun et al., 2016; Sowmya & Hoblidar, 2024). By integrating digital tools into language instruction, the highly innovative methodological tools of teaching second/foreign languages make a considerable difference in the acquisition process (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Golonka et al., 2014; Zenci, 2022). Since English is a lingua franca, effective language learning strategies are essential in contexts where English is taught as a second or foreign language, such as Morocco. One area that can help and has excellent potential is using ICT to provide digital feedback mechanisms, which help improve EFL students' listening proficiency and subskills. Targeted use of digital feedback will overcome EFL students' challenges (Ellis, 2007; Iwashita, 2001). Studies on second language acquisition have revealed that feedback is essential for facilitating language acquisition (Mackey, 2006). Teacher feedback supports Second Language (L2) development (Swain, 2005). Similarly, a bulk of experimental studies have demonstrated a correlation between interactionally occurring feedback and L2 development, highlighting the critical role of ICT in delivering such feedback (Leeman, 2003; McDonough, 2005; Philp, 2003; Silver, 2000).

In terms of language skills, listening is essential. Buck (2001) considers it an integral part of language learning, the basis of communication and language ability. According to Rost (2013), listening gives students all the input required for language acquisition. Morley (2001) emphasized that teaching listening is crucial because it acts as a vehicle through which grammatical structures are imparted and new vocabulary is built within communicative discourse contexts. Furthermore, with English operating as a global language of communication among non-native speakers, there has been increasing pressure on effective listening instruction. Modern learners expect quick, interactive online feedback systems because traditional feedback methods do not meet learners' expectations (Reed, 2018). These digital systems offer a dynamic and personalized approach to assessing and improving students' listening proficiency and subskills (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). To this end, the present study examines the impact of teachers' online feedback on Moroccan EFL students' listening proficiency and subskills to enhance learning outcomes and improve language teaching and assessment strategies in the EFL context.

Prior research has concentrated majorly on the impact of online feedback on listening proficiency without exploring separate subskills. Studies by Matthews and O'Toole (2015), Sandí-Delgado and Mesén-Hidalgo (2020), Mulyadi et al. (2021), Tran and Ma (2021), Carter et al. (2022), Abdelhafiz (2023) Tai and Chen (2024) and Baghit et al. (2024) have highlighted the importance of online feedback in general or on listening proficiency development but have not explicitly addressed the impact of online feedback on EFL listening subskills. By addressing this research gap, the present study seeks to understand how online feedback can enhance listening proficiency and its subskills. Thus far, the significance of this study lies in exploring the role online feedback can play in developing listening proficiency and subskills among EFL students in Morocco. The findings of this study are expected to benefit teachers and practitioners in developing more effective EFL teaching and assessment strategies that foster language proficiency and communication skills within the globalized context. Specifically, this study's primary objectives are: first, to evaluate the impact of technology-enhanced feedback on EFL students' overall listening proficiency; and second, to measure the effects of web-based feedback on specific subskills namely identifying the gist, listening for specific information, inferring implicit information, and filtering correct information (Jang, 2005; Nunan, 2004; Pérez-Segura et al., 2020;

Wilson, 2008). Based on these objectives, the current study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent does teachers' online feedback impact EFL students' listening proficiency?
2. How does online feedback affect EFL students' listening subskills, including listening for the gist and specific information, inferring implicit information, and filtering correct information?

To thoroughly examine the potential merits of online feedback, the present study developed a central hypothesis along with related sub-hypotheses. These hypotheses will direct the research and offer a systematic approach to evaluating the findings.

Central Hypothesis: The treatment group demonstrates a significant improvement in listening proficiency compared to the control group.

Subhypotheses **:**

- $H1_a$: The treatment group performs significantly better listening for the gist than the control group.
- $H1_b$: The treatment group exhibits significantly higher performance in listening for specific information compared to the control group.
- $H1_c$: The treatment group demonstrates a significant improvement in inferring implicit information compared to the control group.
- $H1_d$: The treatment group demonstrates a significant improvement in filtering information compared to the control group.

Each subhypothesis ($H1_a$, $H1_b$, $H1_c$, $H1_d$) addresses a specific aspect of the central hypothesis, testing whether the treatment group improves in different listening subskills.

Literature Review

Understanding and Evaluating Listening Subskills in the EFL/ESL Context

An understanding of the distinction between skills and subskills must take into consideration that skill is a broad ability with several components that have to be in place for the accomplishment of a given task, whereas subskills are discrete abilities collectively forming the overall skill (Deressa et al., 2024; Ismayilli Karakoc, 2019; Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2012). For listening proficiency, subskills refer to identifying the main idea, noting specific details, inferring implied meanings, and recognizing accurate information (Harmer, 2015; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). The terminology of subskills and skills for listening proficiency indicates specific abilities and overall ability to understand spoken language, respectively (Council of Europe, 2018). The current study uses "subskills" and "proficiency" to operationalize specific language abilities' relationship to overall language mastery. Both analysis results in the present study, thus giving a perspective on the interplay of these elements in developing a more comprehensive framework for assessing and improving language competence. This operationalizes each subskill and its integration in offering an approach that helps understand language proficiency. In this sense, Goh and Aryadoust (2015) stated:

> The teaching and testing of listening have been guided […] by the notion of subskills, or a set of listening abilities ... needed for achieving successful comprehension and utilization of the information from listening […]. An underlying assumption of this approach is that by distinguishing the listening components and operationalizing them in a language curriculum or a language test, English learners [...] build up a repertoire of skills that enable effective

> comprehension while test-takers' ability levels can be accurately reflected by their test results. (p. 109)

The divisibility of listening proficiency into subskills can significantly facilitate listening assessment and teaching practices (Baghaei Moghaddam et al., 2024; Hansen & Jensen, 1994). Evidence supporting the divisibility of listening subskills validates taxonomies in testing and pedagogy, leading to more accurate diagnostic assessments. Such assessments, which provide subscores for specific subskills and overall scores, help identify test takers' strengths and weaknesses more precisely (Sawaki et al., 2013). This approach benefits learners by offering targeted subskill-based instruction, supporting more effective L2 listening instruction (Lynch, 2010).

Given that listening is a skill that imposes a high cognitive load, it requires focused attention to sounds, prosodic characteristics, and the dimension of real-time processing, where input control is reduced. This includes unplanned speech elements. Additionally, listening often employs a colloquial register. Beyond words, non-verbal cues also convey meaning (Brown, 2011). Wilson's (2003) research highlighted a distinct challenge in listening: Unlike reading, where individuals can revisit unclear content, listeners must process information in real time. Another constraint on inference-making is the cognitive burden of the need to retain and process incoming information. In addition, Ridgway (2000) argued that listening comprehension and inferencing are conscious cognitive operations, which are only possible to co-occur while seriously overloading the listener's cognitive load. This underscores the significance of strengthening foundational linguistic skills, particularly vocabulary knowledge and auditory decoding, as they account for more than 80% of identified comprehension challenges. In the same vein, Guo (2015) stated that :

> We assume that there is a threshold below which inference-making becomes inoperative or ineffective; this is what we observed in our second study. When visual cues are not available, the listener is more dependent on what he can grasp from the audio document to infer meaning. When there are greater language difficulties, he is unable to identify the sound forms and cannot, therefore, infer meaning or only makes rather random inferences. (p.330)

Adequate listening comprehension requires linguistic knowledge and background information, encompassing vocabulary, sentence structures, idea arrangement, and language functions. Making sense of the input involves cognitive processes such as comprehending, analyzing, and synthesizing (Emiroğlu & Pinar, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

The Communicative Language Competence (CLC) model offers a robust framework for evaluating foreign language proficiency in terms of subskills (Council of Europe, 2001). This model, reinforced through the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), emphasizes everyday language use and technological innovation in language teaching and assessment. The CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001; 2018) provides standardized reference instruments for detailed evaluation across levels from A1 (Beginner) through C2 (Proficient), with listening subskills being a key component. A learner at the A1-A2 levels can identify common words and short phrases or simple instructions or messages when delivered slowly and clearly. At the B1-B2 levels, this turns into understanding standard speech on familiar topics and processing detailed information at normal speed. At higher levels (C1-C2), the learners are to grasp the gist

of longer chunks of spoken language, even when not structured or part of more challenging authentic listening tasks, such as implied meanings (Jang, 2005; Nunan, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Equally, listening to course materials with authentic sources like podcasts, radio news, and dialogues helps learners on all CEFR levels to practice listening. In this regard, using technology in L2 listening teaching and learning processes is vital to allow interactivity, individuality, and immediacy, boosting listening strategies and motivation (Council of Europe, 2018; Erguig, 2009). Digital resources are significant in effective language learning (Council of Europe, 2020). There is a considerable theory-based introduction of ICT in this framework, which can contribute to developing listening proficiency in a more detailed and inclusive way.

Evolution of online Feedback in EFL listening proficiency

An advanced exploration into integrating technology for language learning was described by Matthews and O'Toole (2015). They worked on the development stages of a software application aimed at improving L2 word recognition through speech among 33 ESL students. The three-stage online educational process comprised listening, transcribing, and receiving feedback. This study further underlined timely and informative feedback as crucial in allowing learners to correct their mistakes immediately (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). On the other hand, one of the limitations of this study is the absence of a control group. It indicated that more rigorous methodologies were needed to attribute the improvements to the intervention by the software. In line with integrating technology-mediated feedback into language learning, a systematic review was done by Sandí-Delgado and Mesén-Hidalgo (2020) based on 14 studies of digital feedback in ESL classrooms in higher education. Their findings demonstrated that computer-mediated feedback and screencasts significantly improved the EFL learners' analytical, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills related to interlanguage development. The study found that detailed feedback facilitated deep learning, while postponed feedback was effective for error correction. Nevertheless, the approach taken in conducting the methodology is based merely on a systematic literature review alone, with an overemphasis on one kind of feedback. This could lead to not all effective feedback practices being represented wholly.

Similarly, Mulyadi et al. (2021) explored the effects of incorporating technology with Task-Based Language Teaching (hereafter TBLT) on the listening and speaking proficiencies of 97 nursing students. The study used a quasi-experimental design and found significant improvements in listening among the experimental group because of authentic and technological-based feedback materials. Results on speaking proficiency were mixed; the performance improved in role plays but not in online presentations. The study's limitations were that the success of technology-enhanced TBLT was partly dependent on the motivation of the learners and the ability to use technology effectively, to some degree. Variability in these factors among students could lead to inconsistent outcomes.

In another investigation of assessment methods, Tran and Ma (2021) examined the effects of formative assessment in a blended EFL listening course with 60 first-year English major students at Hue University of Foreign Languages. The students gave a positive perception of online formative assessment activities, noting enhancements in engagement and proficiency in listening. However, technical difficulties and anxiety related to social communication strategies were significant impediments. Another limitation was that the study relied only on self-reported data, which limited its generalizability. There is a further need for a quantitative method to give an all-around view of students' achievements.

One of the works in this area was conducted by Carter et al. (2022) from the University of Technology, Sydney, on using Electronic Audio Feedback (Hereafter EAF) in Legal Education. With 130 participants, the study found that EAF ensured better quality of feedback, clarity, detail, and engagement than traditional written comments, creating a personal connection between student and teacher. While some considered written comments more accessible, problems with access to audio feedback in public settings also limited its implementation. However, among its limitations is that the study highly relied on self-reported data from interviews with students and staff. This can be bound by different biases that influence the accuracy and reliability of the reported experiences and perceptions while influencing the evaluation of the effectiveness of the EAF.

Similarly, Abdelhafiz (2023) conducted a study to examine the effect of adaptive feedback on the listening and reading skills of 26 first-year university students attending an English for Specific Purposes course. Results showed significant enhancements in listening and reading comprehension, vocabulary, specifically in reading, and restatements and extended conversations in listening. However, this study was limited by the small sample size and the absence of a control group. More definitive proof of the benefits of adaptive feedback could be obtained with a larger sample and a control group.

The most recent work cited was by Tai and Chen (2024), who investigated the effectiveness of intelligent personal assistants (IPAs) in improving English listening proficiency via Google Assistant among ninth-grade EFL learners. This study found a significant improvement in the listening mean score of the experimental group using Google Nest Hub, which was associated with the interactivity and multimodal features of the IPA. One of the study's limitations is that the pretest and posttest listening tests used were the same items, only differently ordered. This approach may result in test-retest effects, with participants' performance on the influenced posttest because of their familiarity with the content from the pretest.

In a recent Moroccan study, Baghit et al. (2024) investigated online feedback's potential benefits and challenges. Their study described the perceptions of Moroccan EFL university students toward online feedback. The results supported gains in language learning progress through online feedback. The study pointed out that online feedback saved time and was highly flexible. It also identified technical problems, lack of digital literacy, and academic dishonesty. Further, e-feedback was perceived as essential in the development of language learning. However, this study had some limitations since it was based solely on the questionnaire results. Hence, the depth of students' perceptions could have been quite limited. They focused on general language learning gains and did not distinguish between individual language skills or subskills.

Research collectively underlines the importance of online feedback in influencing EFL students' listening proficiency. The reviewed studies provided evidence of enhancement in students' listening proficiency through different forms of online feedback. Immediate, detailed, and adaptive feedback plays a vital role in enhancing the teaching and assessment of languages by offering timely correction and personal guidance, according to the findings of the studies mentioned above. Nonetheless, the small sample size and the absence of a control group and self-reported data make results difficult to generalize. Hence, a more rigorous research methodology is needed. This review has delineated the transformative potential that online feedback has for improving EFL learners' listening proficiency. However, the present study identifies a research gap in exploring specific listening subskills. Therefore, more detailed research would clarify how

online feedback influences the EFL students' overall listening proficiency and, specifically, listening subskills.

Method

The present research sought to investigate the effect of technology-enhanced feedback on EFL engineering students' listening proficiency and subskills at the ENSA, Berchid, Morocco. To this end, a quasi-experimental research design was employed to serve the purpose of the study. The experimental and control groups underwent pretests and posttests to assess their overall listening proficiency and subskills before and after the intervention. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 27.0, employing descriptive and inferential statistics, including independent and paired samples t-tests. The experimental group received online listening materials during the six-week intervention, including activities and tasks delivered via the ProProfs platform. Over six weeks, the online tasks focused on developing overall listening proficiency and the subskills outlined by the CEFR (2018).

Participants

The population of this study was 60 second-year engineering students at ENSA, Berchid, Morocco, during the 2023/2024 academic years, with 30 students in each group. The gender distribution among participants approached equality but with a slight predominance of males. In this respect, 55% of the study group were males, and 45% were females. Due to constraints within the educational environment at ENSA, randomizing the sampling process was impractical. Therefore, a convenience sampling method was applied to select participants (Woodrow, 2014).

Research Instruments

Quantitative data were collected using pretests and posttests, each comprising 20 items. Every five questions were designed to measure one specific subskill: listening for the gist, specific information, inferring, and filtering information, as outlined by the CEFR (2001; 2018). The recordings used for these tests were excerpted from the British Council website, and the researchers specifically designed the questions to target these subskills (see Figure One).



Figure. 1 A Snapshot of a sample listening task

Pretest scores were checked for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha, which returned the reliability coefficient for the pretest data as 0.840. Both experimental and control groups took pretests so that the participants' initial listening levels could be ascertained. After that, each participant took a posttest to measure any change from the results of the pretests. Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistics for the pretests indicated high internal consistency in both groups. Table One shows that a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.840 was obtained for the control group, and similarly, the experimental group had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.834, both of which indicated good reliability. The closeness in their Alpha values between the two groups means that the 20-item test consistently measured the latent constructs across different groups. Such high reliability shows that the pretest was reliable for appraising participants in both groups, thus justifying validity in future comparisons.

Table 1. *Reliability statistics of the pretest of the participants' groups*

Reliability Statistics		
Participants's Groups	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Control Group	0.840	20
Experimental group	0.834	20

Note. N: Number

Research Procedures

The research was undertaken at The National School of Applied Sciences (ENSA) Berchid, Morocco, over 6 weeks (see Table Two). In the beginning, during the pretest intervention in week 1, the researchers administered the pretests to measure the baseline listening proficiency of the participants, who were then randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. The intervention phase, going on from weeks 2 to 4, has the experimental group using ProProfs platform tools for immediate and detailed online feedback aimed in a personalized manner at improving listening proficiency and subskills, whereas the control group continued with a standard curriculum without technological support (see Figures Two and Three). During week 6, posttests were given to both groups in the post-intervention phase to evaluate any changes in listening proficiency and subskills. The data obtained were analyzed with IBM SPSS 27.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data. Independent sample t-tests were employed to compare groups, and paired sample t-tests were used to see changes within each group.

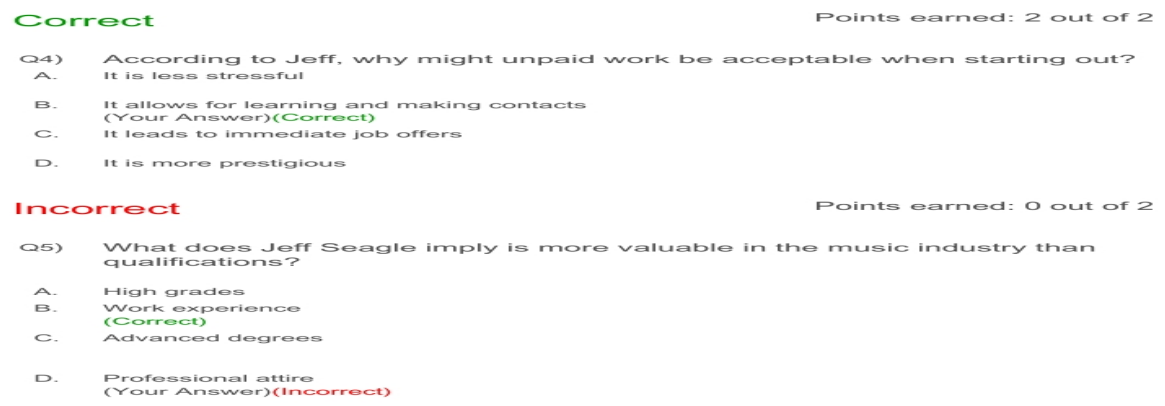


Figure. 2 A Snapshot of immediate feedback and automatic scoring

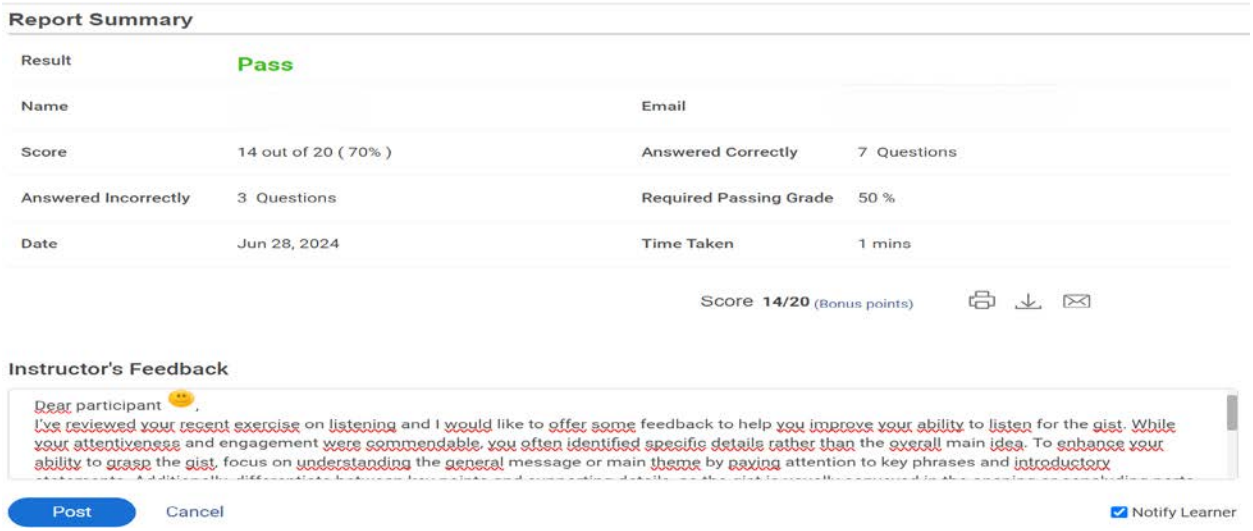


Figure. 3 A Snapshot of detailed online feedback

Table 2. *Timetable for the experimentation phases*

Phase	Duration	Activities
Pre-Intervention	Week 1	- Pretests' administration - Participants' assignment to groups - Training of experimental group on ProProfs
Intervention	Weeks 2-3-4 &5	-The experimental group uses ProProfs for listening proficiency and subskills' development. - The experimental group received immediate feedback: Automatic scores along with verified feedback. - Students were given elaborate written feedback twice a week. - The feedback was designed to train students to develop their listening subskills. -The control group follows the regular curriculum
Post-Intervention	Week 6	- Posttests' administration

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The pretest results indicate that the control group (CG) obtained a mean score of 13.27, while the experimental group (ExG) achieved a mean score of 12.17. Both groups exhibited comparable standard deviations of 4.533 and 4.411, respectively. Following the intervention, the experimental group's mean score rose to 16.23 during the posttest, whereas the control group's mean score slightly declined to 13.16. These findings suggest that the experimental group displayed improvement in post-intervention, contrasting with the control group's lack of notable change (see Table Three).

Table. 3 *Descriptive statistics of the control and experimental groups on the pretest and posttest results*

	Descriptive statistics			
	Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max score
Pretest	CG	13.27	4.533	20
	ExC	12.17	4.411	
Posttest	CG	13.16	4.347	20
	ExG	16.23	2.160	

Homogeneity of the Groups

An independent samples t-test on pretest scores revealed no significant differences between the two groups. Levene's Test indicated equal variances, with F = 0.015 and Sig. = 0.902. The t-test results (t(58) = 0.953, p = 0.345 > 0.05) showed no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups at the initial testing stage. The mean difference was 1.100, with a standard error of 1.155. The 95% confidence interval ranged from -1.211 to 3.411, including zero. Thus, both groups demonstrated equivalent listening proficiency performance at the outset. This result suggests no significant variance differences between the control and experimental groups, indicating group homogeneity. Therefore, differences in posttest scores likely result from experimental manipulation rather than inconsistencies in pretest measurements (see Table Four).

Table 4. *Between-subjects comparison of the pretest scores*

	N	M	SD	t	df
CG	30	13.27	4.533	.953	58
ExG	30	12.17	4.411		

Note. ExG=Experimental group; CG=Control group ; ***N***=Sample Size ; M=Mean ; SD=Standard Deviation

The Effect of Online Feedback on EFL Students' Listening Proficiency

The paired-samples t-test analysis reveals a significant increase in mean scores from the pretest (M = 12.17, SD = 4.411) to the posttest (M = 16.23, SD = 2.160), indicating a statistically significant improvement (t(29) = -4.220, p=0.000 < 0.05). The standard deviations reflected variability in scores, with the posttest demonstrating slightly less variation. This analysis revealed improved scores from the pretest to the posttest, underscoring the efficacy of the online feedback intervention (see Table Five).

Table 5. *A within-subjects scrutiny of the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group*

	M	SD	t	df
The pretest overall scores	12.17	4.411	- 4.220	29
The posttest overall scores	16.23	2.160		

Note. M=Mean ; **SD**=Standard Deviation

Table Six presents the paired samples t-test results for the control group's pretest and posttest scores. There was no statistically significant variation between the pretest scores (M = 13.27, SD = 4.533) and the posttest scores (M = 13.16, SD = 4.347) regarding the overall listening proficiency (t (29) = 0.100, p=0.921 > 0.05). These results indicated no significant improvement in mean scores between the pretest and posttest of the control group.

Table 6. *Within-subjects scrutiny of pretest and posttest scores of the control group*

	M	SD	t	df
The pretest overall scores	13.27	4.533	.100	29
The posttest overall scores	13.16	4.347		

Note. M=Mean ; SD=Standard Deviation

Table Seven shows that the control group had a posttest mean of 13.16 (SD = 4.347), whereas the experimental group turned out to be higher at an average of 16.23 (SD = 2.160). An independent samples t-test proved that there was a significant difference. The results show that the experimental group outscored the control by 3.07 points (t = -3.460, df = 42.5, p = 0.001<0.05). An effect size of d = 0.89 is considered large and bears evidence of a marked difference in listening proficiency between the groups. These results confirm the intervention's efficacy, with the treatment group performing significantly better than the control on the posttest. These results supported the central hypothesis that the experimental group would show a significant improvement in listening proficiency compared to the control group. This suggests that online feedback effectively enhances EFL students' listening proficiency.

Table 7. *A Between-subjects comparison of posttest scores of the listening proficiency*

	N	M	SD	t	df
CG	30	13.16	4.347	-3.460	42.5
ExG	30	16.23	2.160		

Note. ExG=Experimental group**;** CG=Control group ; **N**=Sample Size ; M=Mean ; SD=Standard Deviation

The Effect of Online Feedback on EFL Students' Listening Subskills

Concerning EFL listening subskills, analysis of the posttest scores indicated that the experimental group manifested a marked improvement in listening to the gist, specific information, and filtering correct information. Independent samples t-tests indicated that the experimental group had a significantly higher mean score in listening for the gist as compared to the control group (M = 4.06, SD = 0.82, and M = 2.93, SD = 1.41) at a statistically significant level of difference (t(46.81) = -3.79, p = 0.000 <0.05). This finding supports the hypothesis that online feedback increases performance in listening for the gist. Likewise, on the listening for specific information, the experimental group outperformed the control group, evidenced by higher scores (M=4.06, SD=0.82) as compared to the control group (M=3.30, SD=1.48) and significantly different (t(45.35)=-2.46, p=0.018<0.05). Therefore, online feedback helped students better identify and recollect specific details.

Additionally, the experimental group also outscored the control group in filtering correct information (M = 4.03, SD = 1.03) (t(58) = -2.53, p = 0.014 < 0.05) compared with the control

group (M = 3.20, SD = 1.47). This reveals that online feedback helped discern relevant information from irrelevant or incorrect details. Still, there was no significant difference between the groups in inferring implicit information. The experimental group had an average score of 4.00 compared with the control group's 3.86 (t(50.53) = -0.46, p = 0.644 > 0.05). The findings support the hypothesis that online feedback enhances EFL students' listening subskills. However, the lack of significant improvement in inferring implicit information suggests that additional strategies may be needed to address more complex inferential listening tasks (see Table Eight).

Table 8. *A Between-subjects comparison of the listening subskills in the posttest*

Posttest Items	GROUPS	N	M	SD	t	df	*p*
Posttest Listening for the gist	CG	30	2.93	1.412	-3.792	46.813	.000
	ExG	30	4.06	.827			
Posttest Listening for specific information	CG	30	3.30	1.489	-2.465	45.359	.018
	ExG	30	4.06	.827			
Posttest Inferring implicit information	CG	30	3.86	1.306	-.465	50.535	.644
	ExG	30	4.00	.870			
Posttest Filtering correct information	CG	30	3.20	1.471	-2.538	58	.014
	Ex G	30	4.03	1.033			

Note. ExG=Experimental group; CG=Control group ; N=Sample Size ; M=Mean ; SD=Standard Deviation

Discussion

In response to the first research question, the main findings revealed a significant improvement in the overall listening proficiency of the experimental group, who received online feedback, compared with the control group, who did not. The experimental group showed significant mean score increases from the pretest to the posttest. In contrast, the control group showed no significant improvement, supporting the hypothesis that online feedback effectively enhances EFL students' listening proficiency. Such findings are consistent with the work of Matthews and O'Toole (2015), Sandí-Delgado and Mesén-Hidalgo (2020), Mulyadi et al. (2021), Tran and Ma (2021), Carter et al. (2022), Abdelhafiz (2023), and Tai and Chen (2024) who had underscored how timely, corrective, and personalized online feedback can bring about positive effects on listening proficiency from different dimensions. Though all these studies were primarily oriented to listening proficiency, none delved into the listening subskills with the detail our study attempted to do. Our findings align with those in the studies mentioned above, which state that online feedback improves EFL listening proficiency. For example, Matthews and O'Toole (2015) and Sandí-Delgado and Mesén-Hidalgo (2020) both underscored the importance of detailed online feedback in improving listening proficiency, which parallels our observation that detailed online feedback boosts overall listening proficiency. However, our study extends this understanding by

identifying which subskills are most affected by online feedback. Contrary to Baghit et al. (2024), whose findings gave a general overview of the role of online feedback in language learning, the present study offered specific details regarding the listening skill and its componential subskills.

Regarding the second research question, a closer look into listening sub-skills brought more insights, with the experimental group outperforming the control group in gist and specific information and filtering correct information. Online feedback enhances one's understanding of the main idea, ability to recall specific details, and ability to notice relevant information. However, there was no significant difference between the groups in inferring implicit information, stressing the need for additional or different instructional strategies for this subskill. Unlike earlier studies that had measured general listening ability or other macro-skills, the present study underscored significant improvements in listening for the gist, specific information, and filtering correct information with no significant improvement in inferring implicit information. We could interpret the lack of substantial enhancement in making inferences from online feedback on listening subskills to the inherent intricacies of inferencing in listening tasks. It depends on the listener's capacity to conclude from explicit and implicit information using contextual hints and prior knowledge. Our findings align with Guo's (2015) and Ridgway's (2000) viewpoints that inference-making becomes unreliable without visual cues and encountering significant language complexity. Consequently, the lack of improvement in online feedback on inferencing may not stem from deficiencies in the feedback itself but from the necessity of enhancing the foundational linguistic skills, particularly vocabulary knowledge and auditory decoding, before addressing advanced listening subskills like inference-making.

In summary, our study replicates most of the past research on the benefits of online feedback. Importantly, we broke down these improvements into specific listening subskills and, in so doing, contributed new insights toward the literature. This focus on subskills helps to understand how online feedback impacts the many aspects of listening and thus reveals targeted areas for instructional improvement that previous research has yet to explore in depth. This revealed effectiveness in developing certain listening subskills through online feedback, bringing to light areas that may need additional instructional strategies.

Research Implications

The possible implications of the findings from this study on the effectiveness of online feedback on EFL students' listening proficiency and subskills are multi-fold: Both overall listening proficiency and specific subskills improved significantly in the experimental group. Such results can be taken as a basis for justifying the incorporation of online feedback mechanisms functioning as formative assessments into EFL teaching and assessment as a favorable strategy to invigorate learning on the whole and listening proficiency specifically (Baghit et al., 2024; Nicol et al., 2014). These findings have clear implications for EFL teachers and curriculum designers—with respect to mining ways to integrate online feedback into their pedagogical practices to foster their students ' listening proficiency and subskills. Therefore, EFL teachers should think about the mechanisms targeting specific subskills since they have significantly proven to increase listening proficiency. Notably, students prefer feedback that directly improves their listening proficiency and subskills (Hyland, K & Hyland, F, 2006). Another practical implication of our study is that the ProProfs platform can be used as an efficient medium for providing online feedback, making the feedback cycle process easy so that learners can continuously improve their listening proficiency and subskills.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the impact of online feedback on EFL university students' listening proficiency. Specifically, the study examined the impact of online feedback within a Moroccan EFL university setting. The findings showed that online feedback significantly improved students' listening proficiency, particularly in subskills such as listening for the gist, listening for specific information, and information filtering. However, no significant improvement was found in listening for implicit information. In the present study, online feedback was critical in improving listening proficiency and most subskills because it provided automatic, corrective, and personalized input on individual learners' needs. Immediate and automatic feedback permitted the participants to realize and correct their mistakes during the listening tasks in real time, thus improving comprehension instantly.

Online feedback addressed specific errors, which enabled the learners to see patterns in their mistakes and refine essential subskills, including identifying the gist and supporting details of the spoken input. Furthermore, the online corrective feedback focused on targeted areas requiring further understanding. It was delivered twice weekly, allowing students ample opportunities to reflect on their performance and adjust within a supportive framework. This regular bi-weekly engagement allowed involvement with the process that could be measured in terms of listening proficiency and subskills development. Future studies could investigate the long-term impact of online feedback on these specific subskills, with particular emphasis on inferring implicit information.

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Exploring EFL Teachers' Views on Task-Based Learning and English for Specific Purposes in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract
This study investigates how instructors perceive Task-Based Instruction (TBI) implementation in their English for Medical Purposes (EMP) classes. There are two minor objectives: 1) to examine the degree to which EMP instructors utilize TBI in their teaching, and 2) to highlight the perceived advantages and disadvantages of TBI from the perspective of EMP instructors. To achieve these objectives, the study attempts to answer the following question: What are the EMP instructors' views on implementing TBI? The study was carried out with 50 EMP instructors who teach medical students. It employed qualitative and quantitative methods, utilizing a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated that 83% of EMP instructors had a positive attitude towards incorporating task-based instruction in their teaching practices, and 74% demonstrated a high understanding of TBI concepts. According to the instructors, TBI is advantageous and motivating for EMP students as it enhances their communication skills and promotes student interaction. The findings are followed by some implications for Teachers of English for Medical Purposes and curriculum designers to develop and implement TBI strategies for EMP students. Finally, the research concludes with some recommendations for further study.

Keywords: Communicative language teaching, English as a foreign language, English as a foreign language teacher, English for medical purposes, instructors' perceptions, medical students, task-based instruction
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Introduction

The rise of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the early 1980s emphasized enhancing learners' communicative abilities. Task-Based Instruction (TBI) emerged as a significant method focusing on process-oriented syllabi to boost actual language use for communication. TBI engages learners in communicative tasks using authentic language and focuses on the functional use of language for meaningful purposes, simulating real-world tasks through interactive classroom activities. This study, grounded in Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and CLT, draws from theories related to Second Language Acquisition (SLA), sociocultural theory, and cognitive psychology. Richards & Rodgers (2001) describe TBI as using tasks as core planning and instructional units, while Willis (1996) highlights its adaptability for practicing various skills. Literature indicates that tasks are more motivating, engaging, and learner-centered than traditional exercises, promoting language learning.

TBI has become a dominant approach in language instruction, evidenced by numerous publications and its application in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Studies (e.g., Iranmehr & Davari, 2011; Sarani & Sahebi, 2012) recognize TBI as effective in ESP, emphasizing negotiation and task performance to solve problems. Kavaliauskienė (2005) notes that TBI fosters favorable learning conditions and autonomous learning for ESP students. Ushioda (2010) and Stoller (2006) argue that TBI benefits ESP learners through authentic language use, discourse-level focus, authentic tasks, learner-centeredness, and purposeful language use. ESP targets learners' reasons for learning the language (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Krahnke (1987) considered TBI suitable for ESP learners due to their need for language use for defined purposes. However, the impact of TBI on ESP learners, particularly in medical fields in Saudi Arabia (English for Medical Purposes - EMP), remains underexplored. Few studies have examined whether ESP teachers use TBI or their perceptions of this method.

The current study addresses the problem of Saudi medical students' poor English communication skills, likely due to the focus on grammatical accuracy over communicative ability. It proposes that TBI can improve EMP students' communication skills, which is necessary for their professional environment, and seeks to explore this potential solution. Thus, it addresses the gap in research on TBI's implementation in ESP, specifically in Saudi EMP classrooms. It investigates teachers' perceptions of TBI, their views on its use, and its benefits and drawbacks.

This study is significant as it introduces EMP teachers to a motivating language teaching approach, potentially boosting students' English proficiency and communication skills. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of TBI for EMP students and explores its impact on their learning process. The main aim of this study is to investigate how instructors perceive the implementation of Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in their English for Medical Purposes (EMP) classes. Another aim is to examine the degree to which EMP instructors utilize TBI in their teaching. An additional aim is to highlight the perceived advantages and disadvantages of TBI from the perspective of EMP instructors. The study attempts to answer the following key research questions:

1. What are ESP instructors' perceptions of TBI?
2. What are the EMP instructors' views on implementing TBI?
3. To what extent do EMP instructors report using TBI in their EMP classes?
4. For ESP instructors, what are the benefits and drawbacks of employing TBI in their teaching practice?

Literature Review

Definition of Task

Understanding the concept of a "task" is fundamental to comprehending Task-Based Instruction (TBI). Various scholars have provided different definitions of tasks, reflecting diverse perspectives and aims. Ellis (2003) reviewed these definitions, noting that some, like Long (1985), take a broad view, defining a task as any piece of work undertaken for oneself or others. Breen (1987) described tasks as a range of work plans.

From a classroom interaction perspective, Prabhu (1987) defined a task as an activity requiring learners to achieve an outcome from given information, thus allowing teachers to guide and control the process. Swales (1990) saw tasks as goal-directed activities for acquiring skills necessary for specific situations. Lee (2000) characterized tasks as classroom activities requiring participant interaction, focusing on meaning exchange. Wen (2024) describes tasks as "an activity with communicative purposes which focus on the meaning of language and can help learners understand, learn and use language." (p. 28)

Willis & Willis (2001) defined tasks more narrowly as classroom undertakings where the target language is used for communicative purposes to achieve an outcome. Samuda & Bygate (2008) have described a task as a "holistic activity which engages language use to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both" (p. 69).

Overall, tasks in TBI are seen as activities emphasizing meaning and real-life language use. Skehan (1996) argued that tasks should focus on meaning and resemble real-life language use. Ellis (2000) added that tasks should involve communicative language use with a specific goal. Nunan (2004) has defined a task as:

> A piece of classroom work involves learners in comprehending, producing, or interacting with the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge to express meaning, with the intention to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form (p. 4).

Moreover, Bhandari (2020) defines a task as a "language activity aimed at developing students' communicative skills focusing more on meaning than on form" (p.178).

In summary, tasks are essential for promoting second or foreign language learning. Researchers have defined and characterized tasks, proposing principles for designing practical tasks that enhance language acquisition.

The appearance of TBI

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) movement inspired the creation of various methodologies aiming to enhance learners' communicative abilities, though these methodologies differed in their approaches. CLT posits that meaningful communication promotes language acquisition (Nunan, 1989). However, Willis (2004) notes CLT's shortcomings in addressing grammatical and sociolinguistic competence due to its heavy reliance on meaning-focused methods, such as the natural approach, which downplays grammar.

In response, theorists suggested using tasks to balance meaning and form, enhancing social interaction in the classroom (Ellis, 2005; Long, 1996; Willis, 1996). This led to Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), or Task-Based Instruction (TBI). Proponents of TBI, including Prabhu (1989) and Skehan (2003), believed it effectively develops communicative competence through meaningful tasks.

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Kumaravadivelu (2006) observed a shift from CLT to TBI, noting the increasing prevalence of "task" in scholarly literature. Norris (2009) affirmed that "task" consolidated various instructional ideas into a unified approach. Samuda & Bygate (2008) credited Johnson (1979) with highlighting the importance of integrating language processing into teaching materials. Johnson argued that methodologies should be based on linguistic and psycholinguistic insights, with fluency developed through task-oriented teaching emphasizing actual meaning and task performance.

The critical difference between CLT and TBI is that TBI prioritizes task achievement, while CLT uses tasks to display language, regardless of task completion. Willis (2004) noted that some educators adopted TBI to reflect real-life language use. Norris (2009) highlighted early task-based approaches to bring authentic communication and learner-centered processes into the classroom.

Practitioners first explored task-based teaching in specific or academic programs, such as ESP and EAP, where English is needed for professional or educational purposes (Samuda & Bygate, 2008). Task-based instruction is defined by Seyyedi (2012) as a "new approach … which calls for language teaching to be organized around different tasks" (p. 243). Ogilvie & Dunn (2010) described TBI as philosophically and methodologically innovative. Philosophically, TBLT views language learning as an organic process fostered through meaningful use. Methodologically, it encourages students to act as language users, with language structures emerging from task completion difficulties. This approach attracted many ELT and ESP researchers due to its comprehensive focus on language acquisition and performance, promoting learner confidence and enthusiasm.

Principles of TBI

Task-Based Instruction (TBI) encourages language learners to communicate effectively in the target language. According to Willis (2004), TBI is based on three main principles. Firstly, language learning is a complex and organic process rather than a linear one, as learners progress through developmental stages marked by errors (Skehan, 1996). Secondly, language is best acquired when learners focus on meaning rather than form, with extensive exposure to comprehensible input (Brumfit, 1984; Prabhu, 1984). This aligns with Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" (1985). Thirdly, authentic situations should be provided for natural language acquisition, supporting Swain's "Output Hypothesis" (1985). Willis (2004) emphasized that interaction during output facilitates second language acquisition. TBI offers rich exposure to language through listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Willis, 1996). Nunan (2004) summarized that TBI integrates cognitive processing, emotional factors, and social interaction, enabling learners to acquire language naturally by engaging in meaningful communication and learning language forms.

TBI implementation

Task-Based Instruction (TBI) has gained recognition as a promising and authentic teaching method, allowing various implementation strategies. Willis (2004) emphasized that "TBI is not monolithic; it does not constitute one single methodology. It is a multifaceted approach, which can be creatively applied with different syllabus types and for different purposes" (p. 3). Ellis (2009) similarly noted, "There is no single way of doing TBI" (p. 224). This diversity in TBI practices accommodates learners' language levels, needs, interests, social context, and available resources (Willis, 2004, p. 36).

The framework of TBI generally involves three principal phases: pre-task, task, and post-task. Prabhu, the pioneer of the task-based approach, introduced this model in 1987, later refined by Willis (1996). She designed a framework that has significantly influenced this field and was advocated by many researchers and educators. Shehadeh (2005) praised Willis's model for being "quite practical and straightforward" (p. 26). Willis's tripartite structure—pre-task, during-task (task cycle), and post-task (language focus)—is widely cited and forms the basis for several English language textbooks. This framework has also received strong support from scholars like Skehan (1996, 1998, 2003) and Ellis (2000, 2003), making it the most referenced model for TBI in literature.

Numerous studies have examined the implementation of Task-Based Instruction (TBI) and the challenges faced by teachers worldwide. In the Arab context, while there are studies on instructors' and students' perceptions of TBI, there is a lack of research specific to Saudi Arabia. Arbaoui (2023) explored how task-based instructions improve learning outcomes for business students in ESP classrooms in Morocco. Using questionnaires, the study collected data from 21 teachers and 234 students at the National School of Business and Management in Beni Mellal. The findings showed positive attitudes towards TBLT, with teachers and students indicating that TBLT enhances teaching practices and learning outcomes by engaging students through tasks. Moreover, Febrianti et al. (2024) seek to assess the efficacy of the Task-Based Language Teaching method in enhancing students' language abilities in three distinct fields of study. This study adopts a quantitative approach with a pre-and post-test experimental design. The findings reveal that the TBLT method effectively enhances students' language skills within different fields of study: foreign language education, physical education, and elementary school teacher education.

In Turkey, Mehmood & Sabuncuoglu (2021) studied the perceptions of 102 English language teachers regarding TBLT. While teachers appreciated TBLT's fluency-first, communicative, and interactive nature, some hesitated to implement it due to challenges in organizing and managing large classes. Velásquez-Hoyos (2023) assessed English teachers' perceptions of TBI in their classrooms in a qualitative study involving 12 teachers. The findings indicated that while TBI was beneficial for professional development and student engagement, it was time-consuming and required culturally sensitive materials. Similarly, Hattani (2020) investigated teachers' attitudes towards TBI in ESP classrooms and its role in skill acquisition and learning achievement at the National School of Commerce and Management of Fes, Morocco. The study used mixed methods to involve 65 first-year students and 14 ESP professors. The results revealed positive perceptions of TBLT due to its ability to engage learners in tasks related to academic and professional requirements, promote autonomy and motivation, develop communication skills, and enhance creative and critical thinking.

Concerning critiques of TBI, which highlight several challenges, McDonough & Chaikitmongkol (2007) identified students' reluctance to communicate in English, the need for additional time, and the need for instructional materials. They noted that while teachers and students had positive views on TBI, initial reactions were adverse due to the absence of explicit grammar instruction. Cui (2012) reported similar challenges among Chinese EFL teachers, including classroom management, examination performance, and difficulties adjusting to TBLT after traditional methods. Teachers expressed concerns about the potential neglect of writing skills and basic grammar knowledge. Douglas & Kim (2015) highlighted assessment challenges in TBI within a Canadian context, noting mismatches with student expectations, lack of classroom time, and the need for careful planning and skillful implementation. They pointed out that students'

cultural backgrounds could pose challenges, as some preferred instructor-centered teaching over learner-centered tasks. Xhaferi & Xhaferi (2013) examined university teachers' attitudes towards TBI at Southeast European University in Macedonia. They found challenges related to classroom time, instructor preparation, and the suitability of textbook materials. Despite a high understanding of TBI principles, teachers were hesitant to adopt TBI due to the extensive preparation time required. While TBI shows promise in enhancing language teaching and learning, its implementation faces various challenges, including classroom management, preparation time, instructional materials, and assessment complexities.

TBLT model proposed by Willis (1996)

Willis (1996) proposed a three-phase TBLT model involving the pre-task, task, and post-task phases (see *Figure 1*.).

PRE-TASK Introduction to topic and task instructions
TASK CYCLE Task Planning Report
LANGUAGE FOCUS Analysis Practice

Figure 1. Framework of TBLT (Willis, 1996, p. 38)

Description of the three Phases of Willis's Model:

Pre-task Phase:

The pre-task stage sets the stage for the main task by introducing the topic, activating prior knowledge, and providing instructions. It acts as a beginning to "warm up, including introducing the tasks, stimulating students' active participation, and providing authentic language materials." (Li, 2023, p. 192). According to Willis (1996), pre-task activities should offer adequate input and motivate learners through engaging activities. Options for this phase include rehearsing a similar task or using video/audio examples (p. 38). Ellis (2003) suggests that pre-task planning increases engagement (p. 247), and Foster & Skehan (1996) found it enhances the quantity and quality of language produced by reducing cognitive load (p. 310).

Task Phase:

In this phase, learners use their language skills to complete the task, focusing on meaning. It includes three components: task, planning, and report (Willis, 1996). Learners work individually or in groups, using familiar and new language forms. Teachers support by providing functional language, ensuring target language use, analyzing deficiencies, and correcting errors (Willis, 1996, p. 38). During the planning stage, learners prepare reports for the class, enhancing their focus on form (Skehan, 1998, p. 198; Shehadeh, 2005, p. 27). Reports can be oral or written; students may present or exchange them with peers.

Post-task Phase:

The post-task or "language focus" phase involves direct grammar instruction and language analysis (Willis, 1996, p. 27). Students review and discuss specific language features from the task, and teachers provide practice on new words, phrases, and patterns. This stage aims for more accurate and complex language use. Teachers may compare task results with native speakers (Willis, 2004, p. 39) and address grammar items that were challenging during the task (Plews & Zhao, 2010, p. 42).

The three phases of TBI—pre-task, task, and post-task—allow for creative activities and adaptation to teachers' contexts and learners' needs. Willis (2004) emphasized that knowing a range of options provides flexibility and enhances teaching effectiveness (p. 39).

The difference between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Medical Purposes (EMP)

English has attained a paramount global status, becoming integral to international society, culture, and economy (Gatehouse, 2001). Hutchison & Waters (1987) observed that as English evolved into a global language, the need for English language teaching to integrate with other fields increased, leading to the rise of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Alqurashi, 2016). Since the 1960s, ESP has gained significant attention in language education, becoming a vital movement within English Language Teaching (ELT) (Lili, 2015). ESP focuses on meeting learners' current and future academic or occupational needs, emphasizing the language, skills, discourses, and genres required for these purposes (Anthony, 2018). This approach differs from general English because it targets specific vocabulary and subject knowledge for future workplace use (Marsakawati, 2016). One branch of ESP is English for Medical Purposes (EMP), as identified in the "Tree of ELT" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Conversely, English for Medical Purposes (EMP) has emerged from English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to address medical learners' academic and professional needs. EMP focuses on specialized vocabulary and language skills medical practitioners need to communicate effectively in English on specific medical topics (Antic, 2007). EMP has developed its research base, content, and pedagogy. It emphasizes authentic readings relevant to the medical field and activities, highlighting rhetorical and discourse features to scaffold students' existing language and content knowledge (Porcaro, 2013). Both medical teaching staff and students agree on the necessity of General English and EMP proficiency for scientific and professional advancement. Needs analysis reveals that medical students require training in specialized language, including vocabulary, grammatical structures, phrases, and communication styles specific to the medical profession. EMP aims to immerse students in the authentic language of their field (Antic, 2007).

To meet EMP learning objectives, task-based learning is recommended as a teaching strategy, as it directly addresses students' needs and effectively helps achieve learning goals (Marsakawati, 2016). However, integrating task-based instruction into medical English courses is challenging for many EMP instructors, who often rely on traditional methods such as presentation, practice, and production, which are only sometimes effective. This research investigates EMP instructors' perceptions of task-based instruction, exploring its implementation, benefits, and implications for medical students.

Methodology

Research design

This research employs a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. According to Creswell (2009), mixed methods research involves collecting, analyzing, and combining qualitative and quantitative data to understand the issue being studied thoroughly. Using multiple data collection methods can enhance the quality of the information gathered (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, this study utilizes quantitative data through questionnaires and qualitative data via semi-structured interviews. These tools were chosen to gather the data required to address the study's research questions.

Specifically, this study follows a descriptive research method, employing surveys with two data collection instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. This approach explores instructors' perceptions of implementing TBI in English for Medical Purposes (EMP) classes. The descriptive method provides a detailed and comprehensive account of instructors' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to TBI in their EMP courses without manipulating any variables.

Participants

The study involved 50 instructors teaching English for Medical Purposes (EMP), including native and non-native speakers. These participants were drawn from three universities in Riyadh: Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences, and King Saud University. Most participants were from King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences, as all the instructors there specialized in teaching English exclusively to medical students and possess extensive experience in this field.

Instrumentation

The research instruments employed in this study are questionnaires and interviews. A five-point Likert Scale questionnaire is essential for exploring people's thoughts, experiences, attitudes, and future intentions (Bulmer, 2004). The questionnaire (see Appendix A) assessed participants' perceptions of Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in this study. It consisted of two sections. The first section gathered background information such as gender, qualifications, the college where they teach English, and years of experience. The second section comprised 25 items aimed at understanding instructors' views on tasks and TBI, including an open-ended question for additional comments on using task-based instruction. The scale ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. This questionnaire was created after an extensive literature review on task-based instruction, including instructors' perspectives on implementing TBI and its impact on EMP students. The researcher also drew upon related questionnaires from previous studies to design the instrument.

As Kvale (2003) highlighted, interviews are particularly effective in eliciting narrative data, allowing researchers to delve deeply into individuals' perspectives. Additionally, Dörnyei (2007) pointed out that interviews are a natural and socially accepted way to explore people's experiences and opinions. In this study, the interview method (Appendix B) was primarily employed to gain profound insights into instructors' views on implementing Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in classrooms and to uncover reasons and ideas that could not be captured through questionnaires. Furthermore, the interviews validated and ensured the reliability of the data collected via the questionnaire. Four English for Medical Purposes (EMP) instructors were interviewed, with

teaching experience ranging from ten to eighteen years. They shared their experiences and opinions on using TBI in the classroom. The researchers scheduled the interviews with the instructors, obtained their consent, recorded them, and lasted approximately ten to fifteen minutes each.

Validity and Reliability

Three EFL university professors evaluated the initial draft of the questionnaire for content, construct, and face validity. Their feedback on the instrument's suitability, clarity, and relevance led to several modifications. A pilot study with 10 EMP teachers was conducted to test reliability, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated using SPSS. This resulted in a reliability score of 76%, which is acceptable for scientific research. This confirmed the questionnaire's appropriateness for the study sample.

Data Collection

The data for this study were gathered from the compositions of 50 English for Medical Purposes (EMP) instructors. The researcher employed two methods for distributing the questionnaire: a paper-based version and an online version. Despite the availability of both formats, most responses were obtained through the self-administered paper questionnaires. The primary goal of collecting this data was to facilitate thorough data analysis.

Data analysis

To examine the gathered data, the researcher utilized descriptive statistical methods. These methods encompassed measures of central tendency, including the mean and mode, and measures of dispersion, such as standard deviation, range, and percentages. The analysis used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, Version 21. Additionally, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha formula.

Results

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews provides a more in-depth and thorough explanation of implementing Task-Based Instruction (TBI) from EMP instructors' views. Interviews with four EMP instructors from universities in Saudi Arabia revealed positive attitudes toward Task-Based Instruction (TBI). These interviews aimed to explore the extent of TBI usage in classes, and the responses of the participants were as follows:

Teacher 1 reported that TBI fosters intrinsic motivation and enhances communication skills, especially among adult students. However, she noted that TBI requires more time than traditional methods, which can be a limitation given the set curriculum.

Teacher 2 highlighted TBI's engaging and fun nature, emphasizing its effectiveness in retaining language through practice. She mentioned that TBI caters to individual learning differences but should be level-appropriate. She observed that TBI works better in TESL settings than TEFL settings due to students reverting to their native language at lower levels.

Teacher 3 found TBI effective for promoting critical thinking and active learning, particularly with intermediate and advanced learners. She stressed that TBI is essential for EMP students to relate language learning to real-life medical contexts. However, she noted that teachers must maintain control during TBI sessions to ensure productive learning.

Teacher 4 praised TBI's effectiveness in various fields, including literature and medical education. She believed that TBI encourages student communication and collaboration, creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere. She did not identify any significant drawbacks to TBI.

Overall, the interviews suggest that while TBI is beneficial and effective, it has some challenges, such as time management and maintaining classroom control. Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that all the instructors have a favorable view of implementing Task-Based Instruction (TBI). They agreed that TBI is practical, enjoyable, and motivating for students and teachers, improving communication skills and encouraging language practice. Although there was general agreement on the benefits of TBI, some differences emerged regarding its appropriateness for different student levels. Specifically, two instructors mentioned that something other than TBI might be suitable for beginners.

Quantitative Findings

It shows 83% of the participants are female, while 17% are male. On the other hand, the distribution of teaching experience among participants showed that 31% have 4-6 years of teaching experience, 23% have 11-15 years, 19% have 7-10 years, 15% have 1-3 years, 8% have more than 21 years, and 4% have 16-20 years of teaching experience. Moreover, the distribution of ELT qualifications among the participants showed that 60% held a master's degree (MA), 17% had a bachelor's degree (BA), 13% possessed a Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA), 6% had a Higher Diploma, 2% held a Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA), and 2% had a PhD (see figures in appendixes).

Teachers' Views Towards TBI Implementation

Descriptive statistics were used to find the mean value and standard deviation to investigate how instructors perceive the implementation of Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in their English for Medical Purposes (EMP) classes. The results are presented in the following table.

Table 1. *Teachers' Practical Understandings of TBI*

Items		SD	D	U	A	SA	Means	Standard deviations	Ranking
1. I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction.	F	14	23	5	6	2	2.18	1.10	6
	%	28.0	46.0	10.0	12.0	4.0			
2. I understand what TBI is and what a pedagogical task means.	F	3	4	5	25	13	3.82	1.10	5
	%	6.0	8.0	10.0	50.0	26.0			
3. TBI is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching CLT.	F	1	2	14	21	12	3.82	0.92	4
	%	2.0	4.0	28.0	42.0	24.0			
4. TBI is based on the student-centered instructional approach.	F	1	3	8	26	12	3.90	0.92	3
	%	2.0	6.0	16.0	50.0	24.0			
5. TBI includes three stages: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.	F	1	3	1	28	17	4.14	0.89	2
	%	2.0	6.0	2.0	54.0	34.0			
6. I am interested in implementing TBI in the classroom.	F	1	3	3	21	22	4.20	0.96	1
	%	2.0	6.0	6.0	40.0	44.0			
Overall Means							3.68		

Table 1 illustrates that most participants understand Task-Based Instruction (TBI) and pedagogical tasks, as evidenced by the mean score of 3.82 for the statement "I understand what TBI is and what a pedagogical task means." Participants showed a strong interest in applying TBI

in their classrooms, with the statement "I am interested in implementing TBI in the classroom" achieving the highest mean score of 4.20 out of 5.00. This indicates a significant interest among teachers in using TBI. The statement "TBI includes three stages: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task" ranked second, with a mean score of 4.14 out of 5.00, suggesting that participants are well-informed about the TBI process. Conversely, participants disagreed with the statement "I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction," which had the lowest mean score of 2.18 out of 5.00, indicating that teachers generally understand TBI well. The findings indicate that EFL teachers have a satisfactory understanding of Task-Based Instruction (TBI), as reflected in items 1 to 6. Specifically, 88.0% of teachers recognized the three stages of TBI: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task, as shown in statement 5. Responses to items 2 through 4 suggest ESP teachers know about TBI. Most teachers agreed that TBI is a student-centered approach aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles. Table 1 shows that ESP teachers generally agreed with statements 1 through 6, with an overall mean score of 3.68 on the Likert scale, indicating a general agreement.

Teachers' Perspectives on the Benefits of Implementing TBI

To examine the degree to which EMP instructors utilize TBI in their teaching, Table 2. summarizes the statistical results concerning the benefits of TBI.

Table 2. *Teachers' Views on the Benefits of TBI in the Classes*

Items		SD	D	U	A	SA	Means	Standard Deviation	Ranking
7. TBI is purposeful and emphasizes communication and meaning for EMP students	F	1	3	4	25	16	4.06	0.92	7
	%	2.0	6.0	8.0	50.0	32.0			
8. TBI is relevant to EMP learners' needs and interests	F	1	2	6	22	18	4.11	0.92	5
	%	2.0	4.0	12.0	44.0	36.0			
9. TBI improves learners' interaction skills	F	1	2	3	21	22	4.24	0.9	1
	%	2.0	4.0	6.0	42.0	44.0			
10. It promotes higher-order thinking skills	F	1	2	4	23	19	4.16	0.9	3
	%	2.0	4.0	8.0	46.0	38.0			
11. In TBI, new lexical items are introduced within a meaningful context	F	1	2	7	25	15	4.02	0.89	9
	%	2.0	4.0	14.0	50.0	30.0			
12. TBI encourages learners' intrinsic motivation	F	1	3	3	24	18	4.12	0.93	4
	%	2.0	6.0	6.0	48.0	36.0			
13. TBI creates a collaborative learning environment	F	1	3	3	21	22	4.2	0.95	2
	%	2.0	6.0	6.0	42.0	44.0			
14. TBI provides better context for the activation of learning processes	F	1	2	5	28	14	4.04	0.86	8
	%	2.0	4.0	10.0	56.0	28.0			
15. TBI makes language learners to be users of language rather than only learners of language	F	2	2	7	18	21	4.08	1.05	6
	%	4.0	4.0	14.0	36.0	42.0			
Overall Means							**4.11**		

The data in Table 2 indicates that participants strongly agreed with statements 7-15, reflecting positive attitudes toward Task-Based Instruction (TBI). Teachers acknowledged the benefits of implementing TBI in the EMP classroom, particularly noting that it enhances learners' interaction skills, as evidenced by statement 9, which had the highest mean score of 4.24. Additionally, most teachers felt that TBI is relevant to EMP learners' needs and interests, with statement 8 scoring a mean of 4.11. Teachers agreed that TBI is purposeful and emphasizes communication and meaning, as shown in statement 7, with a mean score of 4.06. Most teachers also believed in the usefulness of TBI in promoting higher-order thinking skills, intrinsic motivation, collaborative learning environments, and better activation of learning processes. High mean scores (ranging from 4.04 to 4.20) support these insights for statements 10, 12, 13, and 14. Furthermore, teachers recognized that TBI helps language learners become active users rather than just learners of language, as reflected in statement 15, which had a mean score of 4.08. Overall, the statistical results from Table 2 demonstrate a positive attitude toward implementing TBI for EMP students, with ESP teachers showing high agreement on statements 7-15. The overall mean score of teachers' responses was 4.11, indicating general agreement on the Likert scale.

Teachers' Opinions on the Drawbacks of TBI

Table three summarizes EMP instructors' views on the drawbacks of using TBI in their classrooms.

Table 3. *Teachers' Views on the Drawbacks of Using TBI in the Classroom*

Items		SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	*Standard Deviation*	*Ranking*
16. It is hard to implement TBI in EMP classrooms	F	4	20	18	5	3	2.66	0.98	8
	%	8.0	40.0	36.0	10.0	6.0			
17. Form-focus work is easier to manage	F	1	9	22	14	4	3.22	0.91	1
	%	2.0	18.0	44.0	28.0	8.0			
18. Teachers' role is unobvious in TBI	F	6	21	9	8	4	2.65	1.16	9
	%	12.0	42.0	18.0	16.0	8.0			
19. It conflicts with learners' perception of the teacher's role as the provider of the target language	F	4	17	17	9	3	2.8	1.03	4
	%	8.0	34.0	34.0	18.0	6.0			
20. TBI is complex to be used with low-ability students	F	6	18	8	14	3	2.8	1.17	5
	%	12.0	36.0	16.0	28.0	6.0			
21. Grammar in TBI has an indefinite role	F	-	13	24	10	2	3.02	0.8	2
	%	-	26.0	48.0	20.0	4.0			
22. It is complex since it has various options that are hard to follow, like form-focused approaches such as PPP	F	2	15	28	4	1	2.74	0.75	6
	%	4.0	30.0	56.0	8.0	2.0			
23. Materials in textbooks are inappropriate for using TBI	F	6	17	14	12	1	2.7	1.04	7
	%	12.0	34.0	28.0	24.0	2.0			
24. It conflicts with learners' perception that language learning should be based on a text-book	F	4	20	6	14	5	2.92	1.2	3
	%	8.0	40.0	12.0	28.0	10.0			
	F	8	22	14	5	1	2.38	0.95	10

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25. I have difficulty in assessing learner's task-based progress	%	16.0	44.0	28.0	10.0	2.0			
Overall Means							2.79		

Table 3 shows that participants somewhat find traditional form-focused instruction easier than Task-Based Instruction (TBI). This is reflected in statement 17, "Form-focus work is easier to manage," which ranked highest among the last items with a mean score of 3.22. Similarly, statement 22 indicates that teachers somewhat prefer form-focused approaches because they find TBI complex and challenging to follow due to its various options. Regarding the perceived drawbacks of TBI content, teachers are uncertain about the role of grammar in TBI, as shown by statement 21, "Grammar in TBI has an indefinite role," which ranked second with a mean score of 3.02. Additionally, Table 3 highlights teachers' views on the challenges of using TBI related to students' perceptions. Teachers somewhat disagree that TBI is inconsistent with learners' perceptions that language learning should be textbook-based and that the teacher is the primary provider of the target language, as indicated by statements 24 and 19, which ranked third and fourth with mean scores of 2.90 and 2.80, respectively. Moreover, most teachers disagreed that TBI is problematic for use with low-level students in EMP classes. They also strongly disagreed with finding difficulty in using TBI due to materials or in assessing students' progress. The lowest mean scores in statements 16, 20, 23, and 25, which scored 2.66, 2.80, 2.70, and 2.38, respectively, support these conclusions. Overall, the statistical results from Table 3 indicate that teachers need to be more certain about the problems associated with Task-Based Instruction (TBI). The overall mean score of 2.79 falls into the third category of the Likert scale, reflecting a neutral stance.

Discussion

The study's findings reveal that teachers generally have a positive attitude toward using TBI. They believe TBI positively influences ESP students by emphasizing tasks focusing on meaning, communication, and interaction, transforming learners into active language users. These results align with previous studies by Arbaoui (2023) and Hattani (2020), which also reported positive attitudes toward TBI due to its learner-centered approach. Moreover, this study proves that all instructors reported using TBI in their classes. They found TBI to be highly effective and beneficial for EMP students, enhancing engagement, motivation, and collaborative skills. Teachers noted that TBI encourages active participation, focusing on meaning rather than grammar, making learning more enjoyable and purposeful. These findings are consistent with Velásquez-Hoyos (2023), highlighting TBI's role in increasing classroom engagement.

The study also demonstrates that instructors identified several benefits of TBI, including improved interaction skills, higher-order thinking, intrinsic motivation, and a collaborative learning environment. However, a significant drawback was TBI's unsuitability for beginners, as they lacked the necessary linguistic foundation. This aligns with Mehmood & Sabuncuoglu (2021), which also found TBI more effective for intermediate and advanced learners. Despite the positive perceptions of TBI, some instructors still prefer traditional, lecture-oriented methods due to the time and planning required for TBI. This preference for conventional methods, as easier and quicker to implement, was also noted in previous studies (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Cui, 2012; Xhaferi & Xhaferi, 2013; Douglas & Kim, 2015).

The findings about implementing TBI in the field of EMP highlighted several vital aspects to encourage EFL, especially EMP teachers, to adopt it in their classrooms:

1. ***Learner-Centered Approach***: TBI places learners at the heart of the learning process. Tasks are designed to be engaging and motivating, allowing for learner choice and input, which promotes autonomy and active participation (Nunan, 2004).
2. ***Reflective Practice***: TBI requires teachers to be reflective practitioners, constantly evaluating the effectiveness of their tasks and teaching methods (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).
3. ***Goal-Oriented Tasks***: In TBI, tasks are goal-oriented. Teachers must set clear, explicit objectives for each task, guiding learners' efforts and providing a framework for teaching and assessment (Skehan, 1998).
4. ***Performance-Based Assessment***: TBI emphasizes performance-based assessments focusing on learners' ability to complete tasks effectively. Teachers should establish assessment criteria that reflect real-world language use and provide meaningful feedback (Norris et al., 1998).

In conclusion, the study found that EMP instructors generally perceive TBI positively and favorably in terms of its use in language teaching. However, despite this positivity, EMP teachers often refrain from using TBI due to its time-consuming nature and unsuitability for low-level students. Additionally, they find the form-focused approach to be more straightforward to implement.

Conclusion

To conclude, the study sought to understand EMP teachers' perceptions of TBI by examining their grasp of TBI concepts, their stance on its implementation, and the perceived benefits and drawbacks of using TBI in EMP classrooms. The study revealed that EMP instructors have a positive perception of TBI and are favorable towards its implementation in their classrooms, appreciating its benefits for improving communication skills and enhancing student interaction. Moreover, the instructors demonstrated a good understanding of TBI's basic concepts. However, despite recognizing its importance, many instructors do not consistently use TBI. This is not due to a lack of understanding but rather practical reasons, such as traditional teaching methods' simplicity and time efficiency. The study aims to assist teachers in designing and implementing authentic communicative tasks, which are vital for EMP learners to engage in meaningful language use relevant to their needs and interests. Additionally, it seeks to support teachers in the practical application of TBI strategies. The findings suggest that merely having a positive attitude towards TBI is insufficient; practical obstacles to its implementation need to be addressed.

Research Implications

Based on the findings of this study, several implications can be made to improve the methodology of teaching English for Medical Purposes (EMP) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Therefore, these implications are as follows:

Teachers of English for Medical Purposes: Given the significance of TBI for EFL students, it is recommended that EMP teachers receive training and become familiar with the TBI approach. Teachers should incorporate TBI into their teaching practices, as it improves students' communicative competence and encourages practical use of English, which is essential for their professional environments.

Curriculum Designers: Developers of English courses for medical students should consider integrating TBI as a critical instructional method. Future EMP textbooks should include more task-based activities and scenarios to better support this approach.

Recommendations for further research

Based on the findings and identified limitations of this study, several recommendations for future research are proposed:

1. More research is necessary to evaluate the impact of TBI on the English language proficiency of EMP students.
2. Future studies should explore students' perceptions of TBI, as this study only addressed teachers' perspectives. Including students' views would provide a more comprehensive understanding.
3. Additional research should replicate this study with other ESP or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) groups in different regions of Saudi Arabia.

Limitations of the study

This study focuses on a group of instructors from medical fields who teach preparatory-year students. The research was limited to three major universities in Riyadh: Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences, and King Saud University. It was also limited by the time and instruments used and conducted during one semester.

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Appendices
Appendix A: A Questionnaire

Section I: Background information
1. Gender: □ Male □ Female
2. Years of Teaching Experience:
□ 1-3 □ 4-6 □ 7-10 □ 11-15 □ 16-20 □ 21+
3. Please describe your highest qualification in English language teaching (ELT):
4. Which college do you teach English in?

□ Architecture and Planning □ Law and Political Sciences □ Business Administration
□ Medicine and Applied Medical Sciences. □ Computer and Information Science □ Engineering □ Sciences

Section II: Teachers' Understandings of Task and TBI

A. Please respond to each statement by putting V in a box, according to the following scale: SA (strongly agree), A (agree), U (undecided), D (disagree), SD (strongly disagree).

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I have very little knowledge of task-based instruction.					
2. I understand what TBI is and what a pedagogical task means.					
3. TBI is consistent with the principles of communicative language teaching CLT.					
4. TBI is based on the student-centered instructional approach.					
5. TBI includes three stages: pre-task, task implementation, and post-task.					
6. I am interested in implementing TBI in the classroom					
7. TBI is purposeful and emphasizes communication and meaning for EMP students.					
8. TBI is relevant to EMP learners' needs and interests					
9. TBI improves learners' interaction skills.					
10. It promotes higher-order thinking skills.					
11. In TBI, new lexical items are introduced within a meaningful context.					
12. TBI encourages learners' intrinsic motivation.					
13. TBI creates a collaborative learning environment.					
14. TBI provides a better context for the activation of learning processes.					
15. TBI makes language learners to be users of language rather than only learners of language.					
16. It is hard to implement TBI in EMP classrooms.					
17. Form-focus work is easier to manage.					
18. Teachers' role is unobvious in TBI.					
19. This conflicts with learners' perceptions of the teacher's role as the provider of the target language.					
20. TBI is complex to be used with low-ability students.					
21. Grammar in TBI has an indefinite role.					

22. It is complex because it has various options that are hard to follow, such as form-focused approaches such as PPP.					
23. Materials in textbooks are inappropriate for using TBI.					
24. It conflicts with learners' perception that language learning should be based on a textbook.					
25. I have difficulty assessing learners' task-based progress.					

B. Are there any additional comments you would like to add about using task-based instruction in your English language classes?
……..
….

*PPP: stands for Presentation, Practice, & Production Teaching Method.

Appendix B: Interview

Interviewee's Name: ……..…….
Gender: □ Male □ Female
Nationality (Optional): ……
Please describe your highest academic qualification: …….

For all the participants in the interviews:
1. Which aspect of task-based language teaching seems confusing to you?
2. Do you use task-based language teaching in your classes? Why?
3. how will you manage a task-based language teaching session if you decide to use task-based language teaching?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

For the participants who implemented TBI:
1. Please describe your experience with task-based language teaching.
2. Having experienced TBI, what are your perceptions of it?
3. What benefits did you identify when you tried task-based language teaching in your classroom?
4. What problems did you identify when you tried task-based language teaching in your classroom?
5. Did you notice any response on the part of students?

Appendix C: TBLT model proposed by Willis (1996)

PRE-TASK Introduction to topic and task instructions
TASK CYCLE Task Planning Report
LANGUAGE FOCUS Analysis Practice

Figure 1. Framework of TBLT (Willis, 1996, p. 38)

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First-year Students' Attitude Towards English as a Medium of Instruction: A Study on Tishk International University, Erbil, Iraq

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Abstract

The educational system encounters a massive shift regarding the medium of instruction, as there is an excellent focus on employing the English language in various disciplines in higher education institutions. Hence, it is crucial to investigate the benefits and challenges that stakeholders, including teachers and students, might encounter. Although researchers conducted many studies investigating EMI, no previous study has been employed to investigate the first-year students' attitudes toward its' implementing in private universities in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. This study aimed to investigate first-year students' attitudes towards English as the medium of instruction and the challenges they encountered. The data collection was via a questionnaire and analyzed through SPSS. The research adopted a convenience sampling method. The research included 87 students in the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024 within two months. The questionnaire indicated different parts focusing on various aspects, such as students' attitudes towards the English language, the challenges they encounter during the implementation of EMI, the improved skills, and the benefits. The results displayed the courses' positive impact on students, including improving their skills, content knowledge, and vocabulary. This eventually reflected the optimistic attitude of the first-year students towards these courses. The results have some implications for the Ministry of Higher Education, such as providing intensive language courses for learners to support linguistic ability and high-quality learning.

Keywords: Attitudes, challenges, English as a medium of instruction, first-year, impact

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Introduction

Nowadays, the status of the English language has changed worldwide as it is the language of various sectors, such as tourism, business, medicine, and education (Karam, 2023). Educational institutions have adopted the English language for a variety of reasons. Being an international language is one of the most important reasons for employing the English language in educational institutions. However, institutions worldwide are directing their focus to internationalization. Hence, speaking English fluently is essential to becoming ahead of others in the globalized world (Aldawsari, 2022; Decorte et al., 2024). English language is not merely an academic subject but is also an instructional instrument in other academic disciplines worldwide. The status of English has changed from being a subject of study to a tool for teaching other academic subjects. Technically speaking, this phenomenon is known as English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI hereafter) to cover courses solely in English rather than using other languages (Blommaert, 2012). English as a medium of instruction is the application of the English language to teach academic topics where English is a foreign language (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012; Celik & Yildiz, 2019). It is common knowledge that internationalization procedures have recently crept into higher education establishments. Therefore, the first step in internationalizing universities can be implementing the English language as an educational tool (Borg, 2016).

The current study has multiple significances. Firstly, the primary purpose of using English is to prepare learners for the rapidly globalized world in general and educational and professional life in particular. In this regard, introducing this system is considered a means for expanded globalization (Celik & Kara, 2024). The trend is the same in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which is the context of the current study, as the majority of universities are adopting the English language in teaching. Kurdish is the official language in the region and the medium of instruction from primary to high school, whereas English is a minor focus. However, some authorities implemented English as the medium of instruction in higher education in various global-orientation disciplines, such as accounting, science, engineering, and mathematics (Chen et al., 2020). Secondly, the limited exposure to English during school years may cause some students to suffer from speaking anxiety. Hence, first-year students might face issues understanding and communicating in English. Borg (2016) pointed out that despite implementing EMI courses and using coursebooks written in English, some public institutions still instruct the courses in Kurdish or Arabic. This mismatch occurs due to a variety of challenges that both teachers and students face in the English-medium environment. The primary objective of this study is to get an insight into the first-year students' perceptions and the challenges they face when implementing EMI in their major. Therefore, the current study is focusing on identifying the main challenges faced by the first-year students during the implementation of EMI through the following research questions:

1. What are the first-year students' attitudes towards implementing EMI?
2. What are the main challenges encountered by the students in EMI courses at the tertiary level?

Literature Review

English as a medium of instruction, a new sample of progress in language strategy, represents the target language method, which holds that teaching only in the target language and avoiding switching back to the mother tongue is the optimal course of action. However, this viewpoint is very contentious. It raised several queries. One of the concerns is whether these courses focus on the subject content or the language only, or both simultaneously. Another concern to take into account which is how to provide a high-quality education to learners with linguistic and comprehension difficulties (Albalawi, 2024; Chen et al., 2020). These questions indicate that introducing English presents various challenges and barriers, including language-related issues and the motivation to learn the language. Therefore, many studies have investigated various aspects of EMI, including the reasons and consequences of implementing it and teachers' and students' perceptions.

Reasons behind the Implementation of EMI

Internationalization of universities is one of the factors behind the implementation of EMI, as universities are attempting to attain international status. Internationalizing higher education aims to foster intercultural and international competencies (IIC) and foreign language proficiency. Universities worldwide have used tactics like English-mediated instruction or teaching content subjects in English to accomplish this goal. EMI plays a crucial role in the development of English as a global language of communication, which has enhanced international student mobility in a process called internationalization (Corrales et al., 2016; Kara & Kucuk, 2023). These universities offer international programs and focus on applying English to their offered courses, which will eventually appeal to a more significant number of students from various parts of the world (Costa & Coleman, 2013). Blommaert (2012) has summarized the main motives behind implementing English in universities as three goals: appealing to more international students, elevating the university's prominence, and equipping the students for mobility and the globalized work marketplace.

Challenges Accompanied by the Implementation of EMI

Every story of EMI implementation is undoubtedly unique in that it includes a complex web of organizational, language, cultural, political, and other impacts. However, what's possibly more fascinating is how frequently certain aspects of those stories recur despite the complexity of the stories themselves.

Proficiency in the English language was one of the biggest obstacles in implementing this system, as the English language is different from the instructor's and the learner's first language. Therefore, this issue was heavily researched (Dearden, 2014). Teachers' insufficient linguistic ability requires time and personal effort to maintain English proficiency (reading, watching English-language movies, travelling, etc.). It also demands more work from non-native English teachers in developing lesson plans, creating and implementing evaluation instruments, and

creating classroom materials (Celik & Kara, 2024; Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2018). The limited linguistic proficiency has several repercussions, such as a decline in the breadth and depth of lecturers' clarifications, a decline in the ability to communicate clearly and rephrase, and a notable decrease in the range of terms that those non-native lecturers employ (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012). The situation is the same for the students without appropriate language competency. University students may struggle to develop the English language proficiency necessary for their field (Corrales et al., 2016). Lin and Morrison (2010) also pointed out that changing the medium of instruction at schools from English to Chinese had harmful repercussions on creating undergraduates with low L2 proficiency, and this consequently led to experiencing more language difficulties than their peers when it comes to group projects, content comprehension, reading instruction resources, writing projects, and classroom interactions. In addition to the mentioned challenges, Gröblinger (2017) has also pointed out more issues faced by both lecturers and learners, such as limitations in encouragement and concern in the language, instructors' reluctance to instruct in English, and the absence of subject matter specialists in particular areas who are willing and able to teach in English. Moreover, native teachers refuse to adjust to the demands of learners who are not native speakers of the English language. Furthermore, EMI poses a potential danger to native language and cultural identity. Finally, Dearden (2014) has pointed out issues related to organization, management, facilities, and funding shortages.

In general, the challenges of EMI implementation result from linguistic issues, a lack of motivation to teach and learn in the targeted language, difficulties in understanding native teachers, and insufficient funding and facilities to create an EMI environment.

Students' Perceptions Towards EMI

The extensive implementation of EMI in higher education has highlighted the importance of exploring learners' attitudes towards this system. Hence, a large number of scholars have investigated students' perceptions. By examining students' perceptions regarding a range of factors, such as English for education, English for occupations, English for globalization, conservation of tradition, both national and international identities, academic fulfillment and desire to migrate, Despitasari (2021) has shed light on EMI policy in a private higher education institution in the Indonesian context. This policy at the university receives excellent feedback from the participants in the study. Those participant view English as globally significant for their academic and professional endeavors. They don't perceive English as a danger to the survival of the Indonesian language and culture. They are even considering moving overseas to a different nation for a more stable living and work environment. They find this policy's execution in their institution to be generally satisfactory.

Kırkgöz (2014) has conducted a study investigating students' perceptions. This study indicated two groups. In one group, Turkish was the medium of instruction, which is the mother language of the participants, while for the other group, English was the medium of instruction. The study included a questionnaire, interviews, and an analysis of exam papers. The findings revealed that being instructed in English helped them improve their linguistic skill regarding vocabulary

and translation. Moreover, the students had positive visualizations regarding EMI, which they predicted would allow them to get well-paid jobs. However, they had some challenges regarding understanding the disciplinary topics, and this eventually led to choose memorization merely to pass their exams. The memorization technique has a negative outcome, as the students will quickly forget the memorized information, emphasizing the shallow and incomplete learning of disciplinary knowledge. When it comes to the other group that used the Turkish language, the students showed more satisfaction and complete comprehension of the major-related knowledge of using Turkish by the teachers. On the other hand, those students expressed experiencing issues, such as difficulty comprehending any source in English and their fears regarding job opportunities that require knowledge and competence in the English language. These issues reflect the importance of EMI in higher education institutions.

Moncada Comas (2022) has investigated Catalan university students' attitudes towards EMI. Although instruction in this university was in Catalan or Spanish, the learners' mother tongue, English, was recently adopted as the medium of instruction. In this study, there was a focus on four aspects, including investigating students' attitudes towards the variance in being instructed in English and L1, multilingual behavior adopted in the classrooms by lecturers as well as students, students' attitudes towards their own and their peers' performance and linguistic competence, and the English language teaching and learning events. The results of the log questions regarding learners have shown that students were satisfied with being instructed in English as they consider themselves competent in the language. However, they referred to their peers' English as insufficient, eventually impeding their comprehension and pushing them to use L1. Regarding improving their linguistic ability, students agreed that EMI courses helped them have more exposure to the language, improve their skills, and discover various vocabulary. Finally, students also indicated a tendency towards multilingual strategies when meaning is unclear in English, so there will be a need to switch to L1.

On the other hand, the results of the study conducted by Kim et al. (2017) were opposite to previous studies, as the students showed dissatisfaction with the adoption of EMI and excellent preference for Korean. The lack of exposure to English can be the reason for the preference for KMI. Moreover, the students pointed out that reforming the school policy to make the English language compulsory would eventually make learning English more accessible.

Finally, a study conducted by Aldawsari (2022) at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia investigated both instructors' and learners' attitudes towards EMI. The results showed a positive perception of EMI from both parties. However, the learners showed more preference for code-switching, including the use of L1, which was due to their incompetence in the language. Moreover, those learners reflected their satisfaction with their L1 as well as their own culture.

To sum up, the students' attitudes were varied. Some have seen the implementation of EMI as beneficial for their social and professional lives. On the other hand, others have suffered and

considered learning in English to lead to shallow learning due to their incompetent linguistic abilities.

Method

Research Design

This quantitative study aimed to investigate first-year students' perceptions of EMI at Tishk International University and determine any challenges they face while learning English. Collecting the data was via a questionnaire based on (Zhang & Pladevall-Ballester, 2022) with some modifications to attain statistical data from the participants to achieve the aim of this study eventually. The researcher used SPSS to analyze the data.

Participants

This study was conducted at Tishk International University in Erbil, Iraq, in the 2023-2024 academic year. The participants for this study were selected using a convenient sampling method. A total of 87 first-year undergraduate students took part in the survey. The number of female (N=55) students exceeded their male (N=32) friends. Their ages ranged from 17 to 29. Their nationalities were Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish and Assyrian. The participants' English proficiency level was moderate, so they were required to take a Foundation English course to sharpen their English throughout the year as a non-technical elective course. The participants belonged to different faculties and departments, including interior design, pharmacy, information technology, civil engineering, computer engineering, business administration**,** dentistry, and architecture. The personal details related to the participants are all listed in Table One :

Table 1. *Participants' personal information summary*

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	32	37%
Female	55	63%
Total	87	100.00
Faculty		
Interior Design	19	22%
Pharmacy	24	28%
Information Technology	13	15%
Civil Engineering	7	8%
Business Admin.	1	1%
Dentistry	20	23%
Architecture	3	3%
Total	87	100%

Apart from demographic details, participants' departments are visualized in Figure One.

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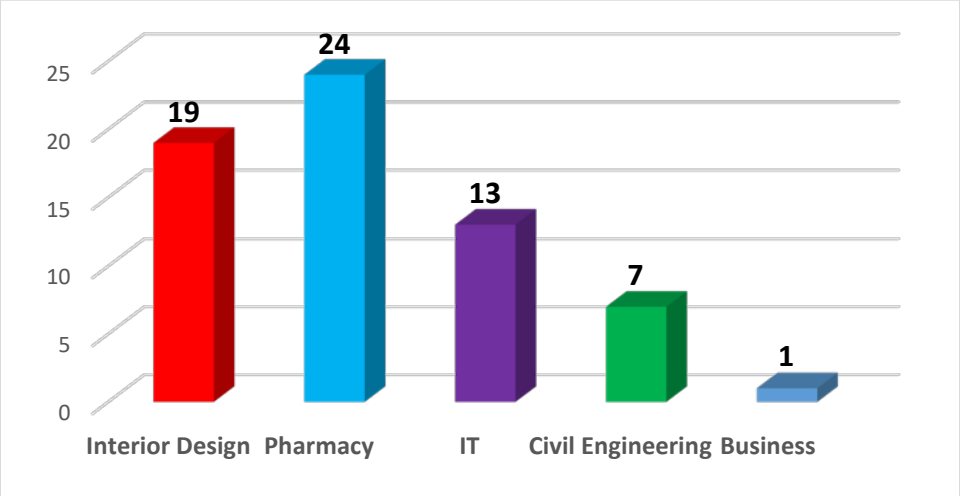


Figure 1. Distribution of students by departments

As Figure One shows, pharmacy (N=24) students led other departments. In other words, pharmacy students were followed by interior design (N=19), IT (N=13), civil engineering (N=7) and business (N=1) with varying figures. Students' inclination to allocate time for speaking practice per week is illustrated in Figure Two.

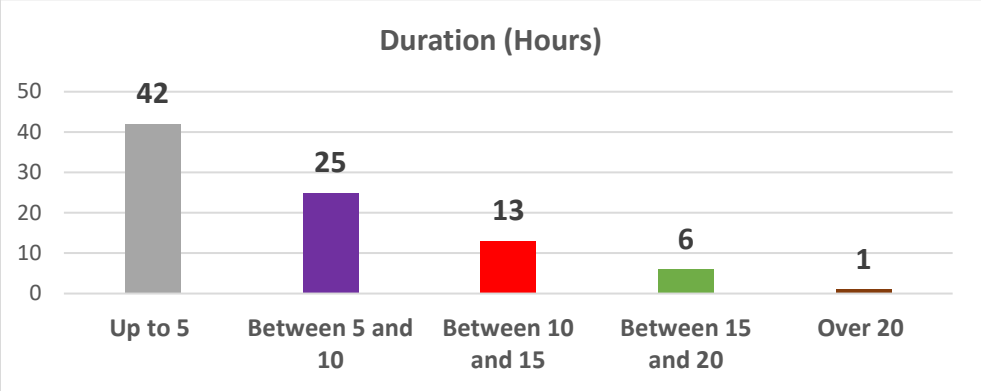


Figure 2. Weekly speaking practice

According to Figure 2, nearly half of the students developed a routine to speak English for up to 5 (N=42) hours per week. This was followed by five to 10 (N=25) and 10 to 15 (N=13) hours. After that, the number of students who studied for 15 hours or more was lower than in other categories.

Findings

The primary purpose of the study was to investigate first-year students' perceptions towards EMI at the university level and any challenges they encounter. Data collection was via a questionnaire adapted from Aldawsari's (2022) scale on EMI. The participants were 87 first-year undergraduate students, 55 females and 32 male students, majoring in different departments at Tishk International University in Erbil. The first part of the questionnaire included demographic

questions about the participants, as well as questions about the language skills they are competent in and the approximate number of hours they spend practising these skills every day. Table Two describes these two variables.

Table 2. *Participant's favourite skill and spending hours*

Skills	Number	Percentage
Speaking	24	28%
Listening	30	35%
Reading	23	26%
Writing	10	11%
Total	87	100%

The second part of the questionnaire included four main domains. These domains focused on student's attitudes toward the English language, challenges in EMI; skills improved through EMI courses, and the benefits of EMI.

The first domain of the questionnaire investigated attitudes towards the English language. Table Three below summarizes the participants' answers for each item.

Table 3. *Attitudes Towards English Language*

ITEMS	Mean	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
		%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
EMI improved my English proficiency.	3.82	12.7%	11	9.2%	8	12.7 %	11	13.7%	12	51.7%	45
I will enrol in the EMI course even if it is not required.	3.82	18.4%	16	7%	6	5.7 %	5	11.5 %	10	57.4%	50
I am interested in learning English.	4.03	9.2 %	8	3.4 %	3	16.1%	14	17.3%	15	54 %	47
The content of the course drew my attention.	3.93	9.2 %	8	12.6 %	11	4.6%	4	23%	20	50.6%	44
The lessons were fun.	4.12	5.7%	5	4.6 %	4	10.3%	9	30%	26	49.4%	43
I have a positive attitude toward EMI.	4.05	9.2%	8	6.9 %	6	5.7%	5	25.3%	22	52.9%	46

The first domain in the questionnaire was associated with the attitudes towards the English language. Students responses were positive regarding statement (1), which was related to the effect of EMI on their language proficiency. The table shows that (51.7%) strongly agreed and (13.7%) of the participants agreed with the statements. Also, (12.7%) of the responses were neutral, indicating the participants' satisfaction with the impact of these courses on their English proficiency. On the other hand, (9.2%) disagreed and (12.7%) strongly disasagreed with the role of this system in the progress of language proficiency.

Statement (2) was related to enrolling in EMI courses even if they were not required. A big percentage (57.4%) strongly agreed and (11.5%) agreed with enrolling in these courses in case they were not obligatory. (5.7%) of the respondents stayed neutral. While (7%) disagreed (18.4%) strongly dissagreed regarding enrollment in these courses if they were optional.

The respondents showed a significant agreement with statement (3), which is related to being interested in learning the English language. The results were highly significant, as (54%) strongy agreed and (17.3)% of the respondents agreed on their interest to learning in English. While (16.1%) of the participants stayed neutral regarding being interested in learning in English. Only (3.4%) disagreed and (9.2%) strongly disagreed with this statement. The results eventually reflects the participants positive attitude towards EMI.

The fourth statement was related to the content of the course and how the learners perceive it. A significant percentage (50.6%) strongly agreed and (23%) agreed that they were interested in the content of the course, which reflects the constructive impact of the EMI. (4.6%) of the respondents stayed neutral. Whearas (12.6%) disageed and (9.2%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

As for the fifth statement, (49.4%) strongly agreed and (30%) agreed that the lessons of EMI were entertaining, indicating a constructive opinion towards the EMI lessons. (10.3%) of the respondents stayed neutral. A small percentage (4.6%) disagreed (5.7%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

Statement (6) resulted in positive attitude to EMI, as (52.9%) strongly agreed and (25.3%) agreed. Also, a small percentage, (5.7%), stayed neutral. Wheras, (6.9) disagreed and (9.2%) strongly disagreed with this statement. The participants significantly showed a high attitude towards the EMI courses.

When measuring the benefits of these courses for the participants, the results were as elaborated in Table Four below:

Table 4. *Benefits of EMI*

ITEMS	Mean	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
		%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
I feel I know more content-related vocabulary by learning the subject through English.	4.01	8%	7	10.3%	9	7%	6	21.9%	19	52.8%	46
I feel I improved my subject knowledge by learning the subject through English.	4.08	8%	7	6.9%	6	4.6%	4	29.9%	26	50.6%	44

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Statement (7) results, which is related to the role of EMI in improving the content-related vocabulary, showed that (52.8%) strongly agreed and (21.9%) agreed with this statement. While (7%) of the respondents stayed neutral. On the other hand, (10.3%) disagreed and (8%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

As for statement (8), the results showed that (50.6%) strongly agreed and (29.9%) agreed that EMI improved the respondents' subject knowledge. While (4.6%) stayed neutral. Whereas, (6.9%) disagreed and (8%) strongly disagreed, stating they have not advanced their knowledge in English, including the vocabulary.

One of the crucial domains to examine was the effect of EMI courses on the four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The results reflected the positive impact of these courses on the development of the four skills in general. However, the results varied for each skill as shown in Table Five:

Table 5. *Improved skills via EMI*

ITEMS	Mean	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
		%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
My speaking skills have improved by learning the subject through English.	3.73	10.3%	9	18.4%	16	4.6%	4	20.7%	18	46%	40
I feel my listening skills have improved by learning the subject through English.	4.12	5.7%	5	9.2%	8	3.4%	3	29.9%	26	51.8%	45
I feel my reading skills have improved by learning the subject through English.	3.91	10.3%	9	8%	7	8%	7	26.6%	23	47.1%	41
I feel my writing skills have improved by learning the subject through English.	3.86	11.4%	10	12.6%	11	2.4%	2	25.2%	22	48.4%	42

Speaking skills results showed that (46%) strongly agreed and (20.7%) agreed that they improved their speaking skills through EMI. While (4.6%) stayed neutral. On the other hand, (18.4%) disagreed, and (10.3%) strongly disagreed with this statement.,

As for listening skills, (51.8%) strongly agreed and (29.9%) agreed about the positive role of EMI on improving the respondents' listening skills. (3.4%) stayed neutral. While (9.2%) disagreed and (5.7%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

Regarding reading skills, (47.1%) strongly agreed and (26.6%) agreed that EMI improved the reading skills. (8%) stayed neutral. Whereas only (8%) disagreed and (10.3%) strongly disagreed with this statement.

The results for writing skills were as the following: (48.4%) strongly agreed and (25.2%) agreed with the impact of EMI on the writing skills improvement. While (2.4%) stayed neutral. On the other hand, (12.6%) disagreed and (11.4%) strongly disagreed with the statement

Given these points, the results displayed a positive attitude towards improving the four skills in general. The highest percentage, however, was in listening skills, which resulted from the extensive exposure to the English language within and outside the classroom.

Another important aspect to inspect was the challenges those learners might encounter during the implementation of EMI. The results displayed that EMI did not constitute any obstacle to understanding the content of the course. Moreover, the respondents had sufficient English to join these courses; hence, they were fine with comprehending and interacting in the classes as shown in Table Six below:

Table 6. *Challenges encountered in EMI*

ITEMS	Mean	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
		%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
I prefer to learn the content through English compared to Kurdish or Arabic	4.12	5.7%	5	11.5%	10	3.5%	3	23%	20	56.3%	49
It was easy to understand specific terminology via EMI	4.06	11.5%	10	5.7%	5	5.7%	5	18.4%	16	58.7%	51
I felt my English was very good for the EMI course.	4.06	4.6%	4	11.5%	10	11.5%	10	17.2%	15	55.2%	48

As for statement (13), (56.3%) strongly agreed, and (23%) agreed and preferred to learn in English compared to Kurdish and Arabic, which are the participants' mother tongues. (3.5%) of the respondents stayed neutral. On the other hand, (11.5%) disagreed, and (5.7%) strongly disagreed, indicating their disagreement towards preferring English over Kurdish and Arabic.

Statement (14) which is related to the ease in understanding specific terminology in English (58.7%) strongly agreed, and (18.4%) agreed with the statement. (5.7%) stayed neutral. On the other hand, (5.7%) disagreed, and (11.5%) strongly disagreed.

Finally, statement (15) was related to the participants' English ability, in which (55.2%) strongly agreed and (17.2%) agreed that their English language was sufficient to join these courses.

While (11.5%) stayed neutral. Whereas (11.5%) disagreed and (4.6%) strongly disagreed, which reflects having insufficient English due to their limited exposure to the English language. In general, the results showed that the participants did not encounter any challenges during the implementation of English as a language of instruction.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate first-year students' perceptions regarding EMI and address the challenges they might encounter while implementing the English language as a tool for teaching and learning. The study indicated five main domains. The first domain was related to the learners' attitude towards EMI. The current study's results reflected these courses' positive impact on improving their linguistic competency. This result ties nicely with the previous study by Huang (2015), which displayed the significance of these courses in improving the learners' language proficiency. Also, the results showed that the respondents enrolled in these courses willingly. Unlike the current study, a study conducted by Yeh (2014) showed that the students enrolled in EMI courses either because they were obliged or for having no other option. The results also demonstrated the students' willingness to learn the English language. A study by Costa and Coleman (2013) also confirmed that the respondents expressed a desire to learn English. Moreover, the findings confirmed the participants' interest in the content of the courses. Similar to previous studies, results by Iwaniec & Wang (2023) showed the students' motivation to learn in EMI courses as it offers the potential for better job opportunities, as well as better interaction in international contexts. Moreover, these English courses offered them enhanced content learning as it improved their content-related vocabulary, eventually encouraging them to be more into these courses. The participants indicated their positive attitude to these courses as they were entertaining. This result was in line with a study by Doiz and Lasagabaster (2018) in which the respondents enjoyed the videos watched during EMI lessons. Finally, the participants confirmed their positive attitude towards these courses in general. Previous studies by (Aldawsari, 2022; Despitasari, 2021) have demonstrated similar results in line with the current study.

The study demonstrated the beneficial role of these courses on developing both content-related vocabulary and disciplinary knowledge of the participants. Similar findings were available in a study conducted by Chen et al. (2020) in which the participants improved regarding their vocabulary related to academia and their discipline. All in all, the results revealed that the participants were satisfied with taking these courses because they significantly improved their knowledge and vocabulary in English.

According to the current results, the participants confirmed their development in the four skills. However, the most remarkable development was in listening skills, which resulted from the English environment inside the university that eventually reflected extensive exposure to the English language. This result was similar to another study by Kim et al. (2017), which also reflected the progress in the listening skills of the respondents during the EMI courses. The findings indicated that the respondents encountered no difficulties while implementing these

courses. The respondents reflected their willingness to learn through English, preferring it over their mother tongue. In line with the current study, one of the groups of a study by Zhang & Pladevall-Ballester (2022) displayed their preference to learn in English over Chinese, as there will be a great need and usage for the English language in their practical life in the future. Moreover, the results reflected that the implementation of English in the classrooms did not impede the comprehension of the content-related terminologies. Unlike the current study, some previous studies, such as (Costa, 2017; Corrales et al., 2016), affirmed that the implementation of English constituted an obstacle to learning specific terminology and the learners confronted significant linguistic issues. Finally, the results showed that the students have sufficient language ability that qualifies them to join these courses which resulted from the admission process followed by the university, as the students must take a proficiency exam to find out about their linguistic ability. Otherwise, the students with low English competency must join specific courses to prepare them to enter their departments. This finding contradicts previous studies (Borg; 2016; Jiang et al., 2019), which have suggested that the learners' language proficiency was insufficient for the EMI courses.

Conclusion

This study investigates first-year students' attitudes towards the EMI courses. Data collection was via a questionnaire. This study involved first-year students at Tishk International University majoring in different departments and faculties. The questionnaire indicated five main domains, including attitudes towards EMI, benefits of EMI, skills that improved throughout these courses, and the challenges that the students faced during the courses. The study's findings displayed the students' positive attitude towards the EMI courses. The findings reflected the constructive and beneficial impact of these courses on various aspects, including the level of language proficiency, vocabulary, content knowledge, and entertainment during these courses. In addition, the findings were also optimistic regarding the four skills. However, the participants' listening skills showed a significant improvement through the implementation of these courses, which is the result of the extensive exposure to the language, as it is the language of communication between the participants and the lecturers. Moreover, the implementation of EMI showed that the learners faced no challenges.

This study suggests several pedagogical implications for those teachers who teach EMI courses. The implications can be to improve their language competency and content knowledge in English to get over their language barrier and to be able to deliver their lectures in depth. Also, this study allows teachers to support their learners with incompetent linguistic ability by providing them with various resources that help them improve their language and comprehend the content in English.

The limitation of the current study is that it mainly focused on the first-year students' attitudes; hence, further studies can investigate students of more advanced levels to get more

accurate results and to find out whether they have faced any challenges during the implementation of EMI courses.

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Scholarly Writing Experiences of Doctoral Students as Nonnative Speakers of English: Encountered Challenges and Needed Support

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Abstract
This study explores the challenges doctoral students encounter and the support they require at an international university where publishing is a prerequisite for graduation. Conducted at an English as a Medium of Instruction university in Northern Cyprus, the research study focuses on non-native English-speaking students and academic staff who use English as an Additional Language. A mixed-methods approach was employed, triangulating data from various research instruments (interviews, questionnaires, and group discussions) and multiple perspectives, including 147 PhD students, six supervisors, and two policymakers. The findings reveal four main challenges faced by PhD students: language-related, genre-related, support-related, and journal-related. The study also reports the types of support PhD students need to enhance students' scholarly publishing literacy. Based on the results, the importance of guiding to improve doctoral students' publication literacy is underscored. The implications suggest further research should investigate how to enhance publication literacy across diverse academic disciplines.
Keywords: Article publication, doctoral students, encountered challenges, needed support, scholarly publishing literacy, nonnative speakers of English

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Introduction

Since the last decade of the 20th century, there have been changes in how people view higher education. Its function has evolved from a tool for educating students to one crucial to the so-called "knowledge economy," with doctoral students serving as the bright future for creating scientific and technological innovators (Nerad, 2010). The research conducted by the postgraduate students has become a pivotal moment in the implementation of innovative workplace enhancements, hence attracting investments into both local and global economies. Embracing neoliberal policies that prioritize performativity, accountability, and competition (Harvey & Ringrose, 2016), more universities have started to offer doctoral programs (mostly English medium ones because of the status of English as the global lingua franca in many fields and venues, including scientific publications) to better prepare the applicants for different sectors. This shift in the function of graduate studies has forced essential changes in their fundamental structure to include more academically productive graduates. Doctoral students in many parts of the world are thus expected to develop high-level capabilities that would enable them to publish their original research in a language, i.e., English, which may not necessarily be their first language, as a condition for their graduation. Consequently, the adage 'no pain, no gain' holds true in mastering necessary academic literacy skills as it accommodates many challenges and obstacles for doctorate students as inexperienced authors who usually lack enough familiarity with the article-writing genre and scholarly publishing literacy.

Scholarly publishing literacy, a term first introduced by Beall (2012), refers to familiarizing oneself with the operations and implications of publication (Zhao, 2014). It includes researchers' awareness of the publication strategies, skills, and techniques, such as detecting the gap, reading relevant studies, designing an appropriate methodology, collecting and analyzing data, eliciting valuable conclusions, composing a reader-friendly article, targeting a suitable journal, and responding to the editors' and reviewers' feedback. Each component of this literacy is equally important in getting published and has been researched extensively (to cite a few, Dehkhodaei, Mansouri & Erfanmanesh, 2021; Hall, 2019; Houlihan, Wiley & Click, 2017; Li & Flowerdew, 2007). Yet, composing a reader-friendly academic article remains the main challenge for doctoral students. Hyland (2016a) defines 'writing for publication' (WFP) as "learning to write for a professional peer audience, the process by which novices are socialized into the academic community" (p. 61). Achieving the capacity to create an article is a unique phase in academic life attainable alone by eminent scholars. To gain an international reputation or receive more citations, publishing an article in a high-impact-factor journal requires both good experience and extensive knowledge of the publication genre (Mur-Dueñas, 2019).

With this in mind, the present study aims to investigate the article publication literacy of non-native doctoral students in a 'publish or no degree' context, focusing on the challenges they face and the support they receive from others. It triangulates the perspectives of doctoral students, supervisors, and university policymakers using interviews, a questionnaire, and a focus group discussion.

Literature Review

Novice authors face discursive and non-discursive challenges while sharpening their article publication literacy. Discursive challenges refer to the ones that are directly related to the article writing, such as linguistic competency (native-nonnative speaker dichotomy), genre knowledge, and revision process. Non-discursive challenges, on the other hand, refer to the aspects

that are not directly involved in the publication process but still have an effect on easing or restricting the publication, such as lack of enculturation in the publication community, time management skills, and lack of support. Previous studies have focused on both discursive-related and non-discursive-related challenges as summarized below.

Since the requirement of publishing an article in a high-profile journal means that the candidates should publish in English (Hyland, 2012), 'language' represents one of the biggest challenges for nonnative English-speaking authors as opposed to native English speakers who are believed to be much more advantageous because they acquire the language from birth. The language challenge for non-native speakers from various perspectives has been discussed in earlier studies. For instance, Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) and Song (2014) concentrated on difficulties with vocabulary and academic register; Cho (2009), Flowerdew (2000) and Song (2014) on difficulties with grammar and syntax; Mur-Duenas (2019) on difficulties with the L1 (first language) effect; AlMarwani (2020) and Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) on difficulties with style and organization; Negretti (2021) on metacognitive awareness in writing for publication; and Wickman (2023) on genre and meta genre in research writing. Nonnative English speakers encounter more difficulties when writing an article in a language that is not their native tongue. They may also be exposed to the prejudice that their language use would be non-standard.

Nevertheless, Hyland (2016b) disagrees with this idea, emphasizing that "a crude native vs nonnative polarization not only draws on an outmoded respect for 'native speaker' competence but serves to demoralize English-as-an-Additional-Language (EAL) writers and marginalize the difficulties experienced by novice L1 English academics" (p. 58). In other words, it is not merely the language usage that makes the article acceptable but, among other things to be mentioned below, the familiarity and experience with the register that is related to the article genre also matter, and it is not acquired by just being a native speaker of English. According to Wood et al. (2001), there are some more challenging issues than language challenges in academic writing. Rejections given to papers are mostly based on reasons related to the weaknesses in content and methodology of the research rather than its language deficits (Coniam, 2012). Hyland (2019) also points out the same view, saying that the issue in writing for publication is the "register rather than the language" (p. 27), and both Native Speakers (NSs) and Nonnative Speakers (NNSs) should know the appropriate genre so that they make their publication process easier.

Apart from these discursive challenges, the non-discursive challenges for doctoral students in getting published were also reported in the related studies. For instance, the supervisor-supervisee relationship (Hirvela & Yi, 2007), lack of enculturation in the publication community (Belcher, 2007; de Oliveira & Lan, 2012; Flowerdew, 2000; Hill & Thabet, 2021; Ma, 2021; Song, 2014), lack of faculty support (Baldwin & Chandler, 2002; Kim & Karau, 2009), time and duties (Mur-Dueñas, 2019), lack of access to sources (Canagarajah, 1996; Lillis & Curry, 2013; Mu & Zhang, 2018) were some of these challenges reported in the studies.

Multiple studies have documented the diverse training required and/or obtained by multilingual doctorate candidates to elevate the academic quality of their articles to satisfy the language standards of journals. For instance, Li et al. (2020), Negretti (2021) and Negretti and McGrath (2018) detailed the provision of institutional support to enhance doctoral students' awareness of rhetorical practice. Studies by Hamilton, Huscroft-D'Angelo and Bharwani (2023), Happell (2011), and Kuper, O'Sullivan and Cleland (2023) outlined how to respond to feedback; and the studies by Lee and Swales (2006), Laso and John (2017), and Li et al. (2020) reported support given to the doctoral students in the use of lexico-grammatical resources. More recently,

Zhang and Curry (2022) reviewed the research (published between 1991 and 2021) on publishing pedagogies provided for multilingual writers to analyse their effectiveness. They concluded that indicators for effectiveness in the use of rhetorical moves, standard English, the quality of text revisions, the ability to evaluate and select target journals, submission rates and publication outcomes altogether reflected the challenging nature of academic literacy practices.

As can be seen from the related literature, learning academic publication skills has been widely discussed in the related literature (Flowerdew, 2000; Hyland, 2016a; Lillis & Curry, 2013; Taylor et al., 2005); yet the studies targeting the challenges that novice authors meet and how these challenges can be responded are still not enough (Aitchison et al., 2010; Maher et al., 2014). Since many of the studies are case studies with a qualitative nature, there is a need for more such studies conducted in different contexts to be able to reveal in-situ dynamics (if any) affecting the publication performance of doctoral students. Another gap in the literature is that the studies mostly tackle publication from one perspective, mainly from the author's perspective (e.g., Habibi et al., 2019; Mansouri Nejad et al., 2020), with the use of mostly one, in some cases two, data collection tools, interviews being the most commonly used tool. Some studies examine the publication journey of authors in general, without differentiating between doctoral students, faculty members, or even practitioners (Drosou et al., 2020). In a rapidly increasing 'publish or no degree' policy in doctoral programs worldwide, exploring the publication challenges of doctoral students in diverse contexts from multiple perspectives seems to address the need to fill in the gap in the research literature.

Although academic publication skills have been widely discussed in the literature, research specifically addressing the challenges novice authors face and how these challenges can be mitigated remains limited. Most existing studies are qualitative case studies, highlighting the need for more research in varied contexts to uncover the specific factors influencing doctoral students' publication performance. Additionally, the majority of studies focus on publication from a single perspective, predominantly that of the author, and rely heavily on one or two data collection tools, with interviews being the most common data collection. Few studies differentiate between the experiences of doctoral students, faculty members, and practitioners, often treating these groups as a homogenous whole. Given the growing prevalence of 'publish or no degree' policies in doctoral programs worldwide, investigating the publication challenges of doctoral students across different contexts and from multiple perspectives is crucial to filling this gap in the literature In an attempt to address this gap in the research literature, the present study aims to investigate the article publication literacy among nonnative doctoral students in a 'publish or no degree context' in terms of the challenges they meet and the support they receive from others, by triangulating the perspectives of doctoral students themselves, supervisors, and university policymakers and employing several numbers of research tools (including interviews, a questionnaire and a focus group discussion).

Method

This study adopts the sequential exploratory mixed-method research (Creswell et al., 2003) due to several values it indicates, such as enhancing the confidence of the results and conclusions (Colyle & Williams, 2000) and deepening the understanding of the studied phenomenon (Hurmerrinta-Peltomaki & Nummela, 2006). The sequential exploratory mixed method in this study, included three stages: qualitative, quantitative, and qualitative research (Figure 1). In the first phase, the qualitative method included interviews with PhD doctoral students to elicit the

given themes with a thorough inspection of meaning, especially in social sciences (Gaudet & Robert, 2018). The results emerging from the interviews were used in the second phase where a questionnaire was designed, piloted, and surveyed. At this stage, the descriptive method was adopted to "describe the current state of affairs at the time of the study" (Salkind, 2012, p. 197) and enables examining the phenomenon with a larger number of participants. In the last phase of the study (Phase 3), the questionnaire results were discussed with a) eight doctoral students (in a focus group discussion), b) six supervisors (in interviews), and c) two policymakers (in interviews). The findings obtained after the analysis of the data are reported below in the order of challenges and support from the perspectives of Doctoral Students (DS), Supervisors (SV) and Policymakers (PM).

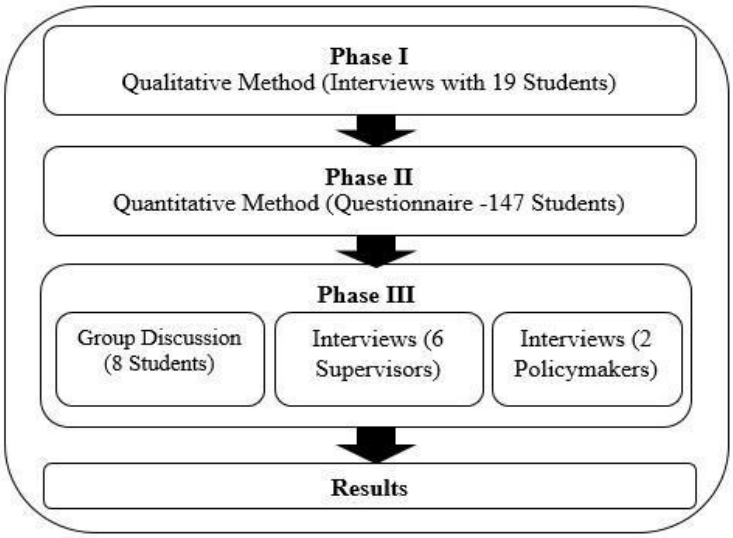


Figure 1. Research method procedures (Creswell et al., 2003)

Participants

The study was conducted in an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) university in Northern Cyprus with non-native English-speaking students and academic staff who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). This reality presents an obstacle for doctoral candidates, or at least for a portion of them, when they are trying to compose their articles in the English language. The University views publication in top-tier journals mainly based in the USA or the UK (more specifically, ISI-indexed English-medium journals) as a graduation requirement in the PhD programs. The data of the study was collected between October 2020 and July 2021.

This study included many different participants in each of the research phases. The data collection process commenced with interviews conducted with 19 doctoral students from various departments (namely, Architecture, Banking and Finance, Business Administration, Chemistry), as illustrated in Figure 1 (Phase 1). All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their information. The interview questions were elicited from the extensive reading of the related literature. They focused on the doctoral students' perceptions of the publication condition, challenges they encountered, strengths and weaknesses, and support

they received. The participants were reached out using the opportunity sampling technique. All of the participants had already completed their courses, passed the qualifying exam and started their dissertation phase.

The items resulting from the interviews, then, were formed into a questionnaire that was designed and piloted with 20 doctoral students from different departments (Phase 2). Then, the questionnaire was distributed to 167 doctoral students university-wide. One hundred forty-seven students (147) replied.

In the last phase of the study (Phase 3), the questionnaire results were discussed with a) eight doctoral students (in a focus group discussion), b) six supervisors (in interviews), and c) two policymakers (in interviews). The findings obtained after the analysis of the data are reported below in the order of challenges and support from the perspectives of Doctoral Students (DS), Supervisors (SV) and Policymakers (PM).

Research Instruments

Since this study included three research phases, each one had a different research instrument. In the first phase (Interviews with PhD students), the data was recorded using the Otter Application, which records and transcribes the interview. Later, the first author listened again to each interview to check the accuracy of the transcription. Then, the transcriptions were analyzed using the thematic method.

In the second phase, the themes elicited from the interviews stage were used to design the questionnaire, which was piloted with 30 participants. To ensure reliability, the participants in the piloting phase were excluded from the real data collection phase. Following adjustments to the content and instructions based on the comments received, the questionnaire was retested using Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS, yielding a value of 0.78. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

In the third stage, the group discussion was held online, and the transcription and recording of the session were done using the Otter Application. The session took around an hour, and the analysis was done manually using the thematic analysis. Parallely, interviews with supervisors and policymakers were conducted using the Otter Application, and the analysis was performed through thematic analysis.

Results

Encountered Challenges

The challenges identified by participants (i.e., doctoral students, supervisors, and policymakers) during interviews, a survey, and a focus group discussion can be categorised into four sources: i) language-related challenges, ii) genre-related challenges, iii) journal-related challenges, and iv) support-related challenges.

Language-related Challenges

All participants, being non-native English speakers, uniformly asserted that they are at a disadvantage when writing in a language other than their first language (L1). DS-3, for instance, commented on this issue as follows:

> …being a non-native speaker is a problematic factor in article writing and publishing… learning a language is different from acquiring it... when it comes to self-confidence our

> weaknesses appear in the use of appropriate registers, hedges, phrases, vocabulary, and structures.

The same was confirmed by the participating supervisors who considered that their supervisees face serious language problems in writing their dissertations and articles despite their better oral communication skills, as expressed by SV-3*:* "In fact, the students [doctoral students] have good speaking skills, but when it comes to writing, they don't have the academic writing skills that reach the level of article writing."

For that supervisor, strong verbal communication does not inherently indicate written proficiency. Rather, the doctoral students are expected to have developed a wide range of academic vocabulary, formal and complex grammatical structures, correct spelling and punctuation, transitional discourse markers, etc., all of which are essential to properly compose a manuscript in which they report their research to the readers of reputable journals.

Genre-related challenges

Similar to the writing obstacles described by doctoral students in the composition of academic papers, learning the academic writing genre appeared to be the primary obstacle faced by students. This genre-related challenge may be classified under three categories: a) defining the focus, b) constructing the content, and c) cohesion.

Initially, identifying the focus or discerning a gap within the related literature to address in their research poses a barrier for doctoral students prior to commencing their investigations. Numerous doctoral students in the present study expressed feelings of helplessness in identifying a research entry point, namely a 'trending issue' with potential for publication in their chosen journal, at the outset of their dissertation writing process. DS-13, for example, said: "It's hard to find the gap… In the finance sector, identifying a gap necessitates an understanding of the true locus of development. So, that is a bit of a constraint for us." Although they had read many academic articles during their MA and PhD studies, DS-13 added, they still need a critical eye to detect a unique gap in the literature to help them choose their dissertation topic which will later – when sent to a journal as an article– be attracting the attention of the editors and has a higher chance to get published.

The second aspect, i.e., constructing the content of the article, was noted by the participants as another genre-related challenge which demands profound knowledge in their research area. Several participants in the study admitted that they have a weakness in forming the essence of the article, which indicates the commonality of the content hardship among doctoral students. DS-16 exemplified this issue as follows:

> In our field [Electric and Electronic Engineering program], you have to find a problem, and when you find the problem, you have to solve it on the computer … So, the biggest part of the problem is getting your results accepted. If your research is acceptable, scientifically, I think all other things [of article writing] are easy."

This underlines the significance of scientific knowledge as the main challenge within his department. To him, the processing of the data necessitates a sufficient level of technical expertise and knowledge in the subject matter of his field to produce the appropriate results.

The last genre-related aspect revealed in the interviews was 'cohesion'. Article publication is not restricted to conducting research and eliciting significant results; it also requires a skill in composing all the data cohesively, using techniques and structures to make the different parts fit together and flow smoothly, making it more reader-friendly. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the functionality and requirements of each component of the article to prevent any potential misrepresentation of the article's cohesion.

SV-5 posited that doctoral students must understand the logic for each component (or 'move') of the article and how to construct it adequately to meet reviewers' expectations and enhance the likelihood of publishing in the desired journals.This was voiced by SV-2, as well:

> They have difficulties in persuading the reader… for example, they often neglect writing the contribution of their study to the field. They have difficulties in writing the literature review critically to show that they have a grasp of related literature… and the niche in the literature so that their research sets out to fill in this gap… they do not understand the importance of basing on a specific theoretical framework for each hypothesis in their study, things like that…

Doctoral students rated the most difficult sections of article writing in the questionnaire as follows: data collection (mean=3.53), designing the research methodology (mean=3.26), writing the discussion (mean=3.23), writing the results (mean=3.02), writing the literature review (mean=3.01), and writing the introduction (mean=3). During the interviews and the group discussion, they voiced 'data collection' in specific. These findings emphasize the content and research conduction over the other aspects of article writing (e.g., introduction or literature review). For policymakers, similarly, enhancing research skills plays a vital role in improving the quality of the article and thus increases its publication chances, which will ultimately benefit the university's record of publications.

Journal-related Challenges

Another major obstacle voiced by doctoral students about their publication efforts is related to meeting the journals' criteria. Those who expressed dissatisfaction with the article publication requirement acknowledged that they did not oppose the condition itself. Rather, it is the journal-related challenges that make the publication process more difficult and time-consuming. Some interviewees pointed out the limited number of ISI-indexed journals in their discipline compared to other disciplines, and the long time needed to receive a response from the journal editors.

The way the reviewers of journals tackle the article also represents a major source of anxiety for doctoral students. During the focus group discussion, numerous doctoral students disclosed that they received comments from journals that explicitly suggested that their articles were not thoroughly reviewed. For instance, DS-7 said: "The reviewers don't read everything. Sometimes they make comments or ask such questions you know they haven't closely read the paper… the paper already has the answers to their questions."

Journal-related challenges were also worded by SV-1 who considered that there is no balance between the pure science and social science journals indexed in Web of Science. This may be a disadvantage not only for social science doctoral students but also for their supervisors and teachers.

SV-1: If I want to publish an article in the field of sociolinguistics, there are only three SSCI journals where I can publish. But if I were in engineering, mathematics, physics, or chemistry, I would have a chance to publish in 800 journals. Can you compare it? 800 journals!

Journal challenges are not merely restricted to the journal numbers, they are rather extended to the author-editor/reviewers' communication. Several students narrated tough stories about waiting for months and years to receive rejections without clear comments that may increase the efficiency of their publication. One student, DS-6, reported once waiting for one year to receive a rejection stating that her article isn't in the scope of the journal. The waiting-for-publication status made her extend her PhD time to 10 years till she graduated. A decision that could have been made in a day, made her lose an entire year of her life.

Support-related Challenges

The need for support is a critical issue in the publication process. Being novice authors with almost no previous experience in publication, doctoral students need to receive sufficient assistance to accomplish the publication mission. Any lack of support expected from their supervisors, instructors, peers and the institution may turn into a challenge in the publication process. Consequently, the absence of support may significantly impact doctoral students' publication opportunities.

This issue emerged in the findings of the questionnaire: 88.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "The university should offer more courses/workshops about writing for publication." Furthermore, 54.8% of them disagreed with: "My PhD courses focused on publication skills". Additionally, 26.5% of the students deemed the supervisor's assistance in article writing to be inadequate.

Similarly, the lack of support on scholarly publishing literacy from the university, supervisors, and course instructors was one of the main headlines in the focus-group discussion with the doctoral students. During the group discussion, the participants clearly stated that the lack of expected support is a major factor that restricts their publication chances. Yet, they initially appeared to avoid giving examples of how they or their peers were affected negatively due to the lack of support. Hearing such comments from each other during the group discussion encouraged the students to talk about it, though rather in general terms. They were assured several times that their identity would be kept confidential and only after that some of them decided to narrate their own stories about it or what they heard from some of their colleagues in their departments. Consequently, the group discussion introduced a contentious issue: the obstacles they faced as a result of inadequate support. This is in contrast to the interviews, in which the participants exclusively concentrated on the support they required, without acknowledging the hardships they may have experienced.

The supervisors' expertise represents a milestone factor that may ease up or harden the challenges encountered during the publication journey. When the supervisor has good experience in publication and its techniques (such as targeting an interesting gap, having good analysis experience, and composing valuable results that may be published in indexed scholarly journals), the supervisee will benefit from it as the supervisor's role as a guide and feedback provider can assist the student in passing the publication tunnel successfully. Nevertheless, this may not apply to some doctoral students, as claimed by DS-13:

> In our department at least, most of the supervisors did not come from PhD programs that call for publication; most of them completed their PhD in their own country. Publication was not required for their graduation so they are unaware of our dire need for publication because they have not encountered our circumstances.

At this point of the group discussion, several other students told sad stories about themselves and their colleagues due to the lack of support from their supervisors. Since the 'publish or no degree' policy is flourishing worldwide, the majority of the current supervisors have not experienced it as they graduated from PhD programs that did not require a publication for graduation. In certain cases, DS-18 said, the supervisors depend on their supervisees' publications for their promotion:

> Some supervisors wait for the students to compose an article and publish it from A to Z, offering the students with scarce feedback, if any. When published, the credit will be for the supervisor to promote the same as the student to graduate. However, the student is the only one who bears the burden of postponing graduation until further notice if the article is rejected.

Although doctoral students can publish as sole authors, it is a general practice in the research context that supervisors demand to co-author the publication. The university by-laws pressure them to improve their academic output to be promoted, and working with their supervisees to publish would expand their number of publications. Nevertheless, the extent of their contribution to the co-authored manuscript may fluctuate between two extremes. While some supervisors themselves write the manuscript for their supervisees, others may give very little (if any) support in writing the manuscript.

Another reported challenge for doctoral students stems from the lack of support in familiarizing them with the publication process. Due to their status as beginner authors with few or no publication experience, doctoral students must enhance their understanding of the publication process. This includes being familiar with the journal indexes required for publication, their criteria, journals, and categories. It also includes genre-related information about the article's composition, including its sections and subsections, moves, and pragmatic tools such as hedges and boosters. For them, there is an urgent need to learn the basics of article writing and other procedures that may enable them to reach their final goal, i.e., publication. The participants reported having a lack of support in filling these gaps. For instance, Anna questioned the possibility of doctoral students publishing an article in the required indexes without having much information about the journals in these indexes in the first place.

For example, DS-12, a PhD student in Mathematics reported not receiving article writing skills, such as paraphrasing techniques. She contends that these 'secrets' or 'methods' of research ought to have been imparted to her not just by the supervisor but also by the professors throughout the course phase. She specifically referenced the plagiarism and paraphrasing case since her research involves formulas and statistics that are duplicated in other articles.

To put it in a nutshell, composing an article requires sufficient support that assists the doctoral students in mitigating their publication, and any shortage in this support will turn out to be a source of challenge that restricts the doctoral students from accomplishing their publication.

Needed Support

Despite the support doctoral students are assumed to receive from their supervisors with whom they co-author, doctoral students are still positioned at the top of the responsibility for publication. Consequently, in this research study, participants were requested to delineate and assess the forms of help they receive and their effectiveness in facilitating their publication. Their narratives in the interviews and group discussions, along with the questionnaire, revealed three sources of support they received with an effect on their publication, namely support from supervisors, instructors, and university, each of which is briefly explained below.

Supervisor Support

Analysis of the data reveals that the mentorship provided by the supervisors represents the main support for doctoral students. Supervisors usually lead their supervisees down the road of research by formulating their research concepts, suggesting sources, and giving feedback about the article. The main issue that emerged in the interview analysis was the 'ownership of the responsibility'. As stated earlier, the interviewees believe that the main responsibility of article publication falls upon their own shoulders when it comes to reading about the topic, conducting research, collecting data, and writing the article. Supervisors, on the other hand, should guide the students throughout the article journey, giving feedback, suggestions, and sources, an opinion voiced by DS-2 is as follows:

> Although the professor is an expert in that discipline, we are the experts in our area of interest. As a result, we are researching the literature, and this professor may have minimal knowledge of the field. This professor is mostly concerned with how we organise our scientific results.

DS-2 asserts that doctoral students must enhance their understanding of their subjects and surpass the expertise of their supervisors. Reaching the level of required expertise begins with accepting to be the expert in the very specific topic worked upon first as a student. The majority of supervisors concur that doctoral students should spearhead the article composition process. Upon acquiring adequate knowledge throughout the course phase, students should proactively undertake the composition of the article and occupy a prominent place within the publication hierarchy.

Despite the acknowledgement of this, participants underscored the significance of the supervisor's involvement in mentoring their work incrementally, fulfilling numerous functions such as guide, feedback provider, resource for materials, and linguistic expert at different phases of the research. Another doctoral student, DS-4, pointed out that the supervisor should be a guide for doctoral students during the article-writing phase. To him, mentoring the students and guiding them through the path they need to follow represents the main pillar of supervision responsibilities. The existence of a common research affinity between the supervisor and the student ensures the receipt of the appropriate support from the supervisor. In other words, doctoral students need to decide on the research area(s) they are interested in and match it with those of the supervisors to guarantee the support required. DS-4 added that if the supervisor has no experience in the research area of the supervisee, he/she will need to read and research more to provide feedback, which might not be possible with their existing academic and administrative duties. This may lead to a decrease in the support and feedback s/he would give to the supervisee. Supervisors, on the other

hand, had two different perspectives on this issue. Some (for example, SV-1 and SV-6) believed that supervisors should be the guides in the initial stages of the research to show the way and then encourage the students to continue by themselves. Others (SV-2, SV-3, SV-4, and SV-5) viewed the doctoral students at the top of the research hierarchy while supervisors are supposed to play the supporter role whenever needed.

The analysis of the questionnaire responses revealed a remarkable correlation between the supervisor's support and the L1s of supervisors and supervisees. Those who share the same first language with their supervisors (n=44) tend to be more positive in their responses about the support they receive from their supervisors compared to their peers who do not share the same L1 with their supervisors (n=103). This finding deserves to be seriously considered by the PhD program administrators to ensure equality in the amount of support to be provided to all PhD students regardless of their L1.

Instructors' Support

Regarding the support they received from the course instructors in the PhD program they attended, participants negatively responded to the following items in the questionnaire: "My PhD courses focus on publication skills"; "My PhD course instructors guided me to improve my publication skills", with a disagreement percentage that reached 55.8% and 43.8%, respectively. The results suggest that the current phase of the courses fails to provide adequate research assistance for PhD candidates. The doctoral students expressed in the interviews, questionnaire, and focus group discussion their need for research funding to begin as early as feasible in their academic phase. They asserted that experience in academic writing should commence early in the course phase, during which they participate in critical analysis of prior research works in their discipline, identify gaps in the relevant literature, and undertake small-scale research projects. The value of this phase lies within its role as a practical phase for acquiring research skills to produce preliminary articles, projects, and assignments, which can sharpen the learnt skills and help in improving the student's performance, as illustrated in DS-14's comment below:

> Before the supervisor, it's the responsibility of the instructors who are providing the courses. We should begin building research knowledge much earlier than the article composition time. We should have prior preparation by our course instructors… we should be exposed to more projects, assignments, and even papers that can be published in local journals. I am not sure if we had this preparation.

The responses on this aspect varied based on the students' programs. While some students in certain departments (such as the English Language Teaching program) confirmed gaining this kind of experience during their doctoral course phase, others stated that they were required to study only the course content without any real focus on (or opportunity for) the research experience. Therefore, the students considered that there should be a common policy in the university to ensure that all doctoral courses across the programs focus on research knowledge in addition to theoretical content knowledge.

On the other hand, the supervisors and policymakers had two opposite views about inducing publication knowledge in the course phase. While some expressed their belief that publication should be part and parcel of the course phase, others considered the role of the instructors during the course phase to give the subject knowledge of a certain area of interest rather than research.

SV-1, for instance, said courses should prepare the PhD candidates for research and publication but expressed his doubt on that: **"**I am not sure how effective the courses we offer in that respect…I mean how to do research… how to write an article."

SV-1 emphasised the necessity of imparting publication skills to doctoral candidates through practical instruction. He said that the research methods course, at least, should have a practical side along with a theoretical one. Other supervisors, however, consider that it is the responsibility of the students to learn research skills. SV-3, for example, believes it is the student's responsibility to familiarize themselves with the research and publication skills, and the course phase is only dedicated to the subject knowledge they need to learn to define their research area in the future. This view was shared with PM-1:

> Of course, publication is very important… something essential in PhD programs…but in the courses, the aim is to expand and deepen their knowledge on the topic. If students produce papers as a consequence of the course, out of a project in the course, it's perfect, but as I say, it's not the aim of the course, I mean having a publication at the end of each course. There are some courses for this purpose, like a research methods course...

PM-1 believes that doctoral students' publication is essential in the PhD programs, and engaging students in some projects that may turn into articles later would also be a valuable addition to their experience, but, he warned, this should not be the main aim of the course as some course instructors in some programs are reported to use it for their own co-authorship purposes with some pressure on students.

The contrast in the perspectives of the participants (students, supervisors and policymakers) about their roles in article publication reflects that there is no one clear policy set by the university about supporting the students in publication during the course phase. Instead, it is an individual or departmental perspective that significantly influences the publication opportunities of doctoral students.

University Support

The university's support, as reported by the doctoral students, includes complimentary open access to journals, laboratories, resources, and financial aid for acquiring certain materials and such items. They indicated a greater necessity for further help through workshops, courses, and training to enhance their publication skills. For this, DS-1 explained this issue in the following way:

> they [workshops] should teach us how we should prepare our data for publication, how we should rely on it. They should demonstrate the distinctions in terminology, language, and content between the thesis and the article. They should tell us the difference between writing an article and a thesis.

Workshops can equip doctoral students with condensed experiences related to academic writing. They can offer them all the information needed for article publication, in terms of methodology, data collection and analysis, hedges and expressions, current trends in the related field, journals and their criteria, and many other skills. The university where this research was conducted offers workshops for article publication now and then; however, the students demanded

that the frequency of such workshops be increased since they are short sessions. According to DS-1, there are some workshops held by the university targeting all doctoral students across all the departments, where only general skills are discussed. In spite of the advantages of these workshops, DS-1 emphasised the necessity for further specialised workshops in each department, conducted by field specialists. This way, the benefits will be higher, and the students can obtain more knowledge and experience to sharpen their research skills.

In detail, the majority of the students considered that the support provided by the university in the form of courses, workshops, etc., is not sufficient. Responding to the first item of this category, "The university should offer more courses/workshops about 'writing for publication", 63.2% of the participating doctoral students agreed with this statement, which indicates that the current courses, workshops, and training sessions offered by the university are still unable to enrich the students' research needs. The participants (88.3%) also asserted that the university-wide academic writing courses taught by the English language instructors should be given by instructors who are specialized in the research field of the students and article publication, or ideally as a team of subject expert and an English language instructor, rather than by English language instructors only. Doctoral students assert that the university's present courses and workshops are generic and do not cater to the specific requirements of each area. In other words, there is a need to have discipline-related writing workshops and training sessions, in which an expert in tourism, for instance, with good publication skills, gives the course. In this way, the students will benefit from the course better.

Commenting on the questionnaire results about the university's support, another participant (DS-10) suggested having an introductory workshop for doctoral students at the beginning of their enrollment to familiarize them with the program requirements and teach the students how to write an article. He believes this can enhance students' understanding of the publication requirement and raise their attention on meeting graduation criteria.

Discussion

The research findings from various participant groups, including PhD students, supervisors, and policymakers at an EMI university, identified four categories of challenges faced by PhD students: language-related, genre-related, journal-related, and support-related challenges. The majority of participants did not perceive language-related issues as a significant issue. The existing English proficiency level of non-native doctorate students was not indicated as a barrier to article composition, and linguistic deficiencies may be rectified through proofreading services. This may be attributable to the university's language competency requirement prior to program enrolment. This aligns with Hyland's (2019) findings, indicating that the English language is not the primary obstacle; instead, it is the register that authors, whether native or non-native, must master. Nonetheless, this does not negate the genuine obstacles faced by certain authors who may struggle to produce a reader-friendly piece due to inadequate linguistic proficiency (Ferguson, Perez-Liantada & Plo, 2011). The authors must enhance their understanding of genre expertise, necessitating rigorous support from their supervisors. A deficiency in offering this help may hinder PhD candidates from publishing their articles.

Mandating publication in prestigious ISI-indexed journals from PhD students, who are still novice authors, constitutes an exceedingly challenging endeavour unless supplemented by adequate support. The present study has identified deficiencies in several support areas, consistent with the findings of previous research, including instructor support during the course phase (Ma,

2021) and the shortage of workshops and training sessions provided by the faculty (Kim & Karau, 2009). To enhance assistance opportunities, several strategies demonstrated to be effective in previous studies may be implemented. For instance, an explicit method for understanding authorial stance (Chang & Schleppegrell, 2016) and a collaborative, practical engagement in the peer feedback process within the research article genre (Humphries Sandstrom, 2021; Tyndall & Powell, 2023; Yallop, Taremaa, & Leijen, 2021) can be cited. Furthermore, seasoned doctorate candidates may be motivated to engage with early-stage PhD students at consistent intervals to facilitate the exchange of their experiences, as demonstrated by Lei and Hu (2019).

This study examined the challenges of article publication among doctoral students and the support they are given at an international university in Northern Cyprus, where publication is a graduation requirement for PhD programs. Future research studies may investigate the publication literacy developments of graduate students in different settings. One may also investigate whether and/or how the 'publish or no degree' requirement in doctoral programs contributes to the publication literacy development of researchers around the world in the long run. There may be some doctoral programs without such requirements and their graduates may still publish more in the long run. In addition, there are many other issues surrounding academic publishing which these graduates may face in the long run, including but not limited to, peer-review practices; issues surrounding tenure and the pressure to publish; the problems associated with open-access publishing and predatory journals and 'pay to publish' practices. Only by quantitatively analyzing the academic publishing patterns of graduates from diverse PhD programs can one comprehend the long-term impact of the publication requirement for graduation.

Future publishing literacy research studies may need to consider some implications derived from the current study's findings. They might take a more specific perspective on doctoral students' publication literacy development in various departments. While it is possible to claim that publication literacy practices are similar in different areas, one may also detect disciplinary differences in developing publication literacy skills. One can only understand the differences and similarities through data collected from various departments and by observing how doctoral students develop these skills in these departments. Future researchers may undertake a longitudinal and observational study to monitor potential changes in the development of publication literacy skills among doctoral students across various disciplines.

Moreover, additional case studies can be conducted to achieve comprehensive longitudinal analyses of publication literacy advancements among graduate students across various contexts. As noted by Sala-Bubaré, Castelló, and Rijlaarsdam (2021), these studies will offer valuable insights into the challenges and support systems encountered by doctoral students in their publication literacy journeys, as well as their regulation of the writing process in authentic settings. Such data could point to how doctoral programs might begin to address their students' needs in publication literacy development and provide some needs-based support in response to challenges their students face in the academic publishing process.

Conclusion

This study examined doctoral students' publication difficulties in many situations and from various angles to bridge the gap in the related literature. The main contribution of the study can be described as triangulating the perspectives of doctoral students, supervisors, and university policymakers regarding the challenges faced by doctoral students and the support they receive from others, using a variety of research tools (namely focus group discussions, questionnaires, and

interviews), as "publish or no degree" rules are becoming more and more prevalent in doctoral programmes worldwide. The reported findings may inform the doctoral students themselves as primary beneficiaries, as well as their academic supervisors, university administrations, and peer reviewers of journals for creating and maintaining opportunities so that doctoral students can better navigate the complexities of scholarly publishing and thus contribute meaningfully to their fields.

The implications suggest that further research should investigate how to enhance publication literacy across diverse academic disciplines. This could be achieved through longitudinal and observational studies, allowing for a better understanding of the differences and similarities in publication literacy practices.

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Corpus-based Readability Assessment of Chinese Cultural Textbooks for Middle School Students from an English Glocalization Perspective

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Abstract

The localized English version of Chinese cultural material has played an essential role in spreading Chinese culture worldwide. However, insufficient attention had been paid to the readability of Chinese cultural reading materials, and far less to the readability of Chinese cultural reading materials for middle school students. The readability of Chinese cultural reading materials was calculated based on a self-created corpus, considering various factors such as vocabulary, sentence structure, and comprehensive indicators to analyze the readability of these materials in English quantitatively. Two questions were addressed: 1) To what degree are the current Chinese stories in English readable to middle school students; 2) What readability of Chinese stories in English is ideal for middle school students? The results indicated significant variations in readability among the five sets. It also recognized the need for further adjustments and development of the textbooks to better align with students' grade levels and curriculum requirements. Moreover, it is crucial to enhance students' engagement with Chinese culture via textbooks. It helped demonstrate the lack of sufficient attention to the readability of Chinese stories in English, and it inspired future Chinese cultural texts designed for middle school students to possess good adaptability in terms of readability.

Keywords: Chinese culture textbook, English glocalization, middle school students, readability

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Introduction

English glocalization facilitates adapting the English language to local or regional contexts, which has become increasingly prominent in today's globalized world. One of the notable aspects of English glocalization is incorporating local vocabulary, idioms, and expressions into English. Localized words, on the one hand, enrich the language with unique linguistic elements from various regions, reflecting the cultural diversity and dynamism of English speakers worldwide. Believing that English learners in China accounted for the largest population learning English as a foreign language, Wei and Su (2012) investigated that there have been approximately 400 million English learners throughout China. On the other hand, with the motivation from the Chinese government, more attention has been directed to Chinese cultural reading materials in English and their readability. The prevalence of English glocalization and government promotion encourage the co-existence of multiple localized forms of English, which set a firm foundation for cross-cultural communication while retaining their unique linguistic identities and expressions.

With the increasing popularity of English glocalization, Chinese culture has attracted the attention and interest of scholars and researchers. From the late 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a growing publication of Chinese storybooks in either Chinese or English. Most Chinese storybooks in English were published between 2019 and 2020, and it is expected that there would be more soon. The currently published storybooks are targeted mainly at English beginners. It demonstrates the significant impact of English glocalization on English education in modern China.

However, it is worth noting that numerous written Chinese cultural materials have not been effectively evaluated for their readability levels (Kotani et al., 2012; Rai & Deng, 2014; Sun & Zhao, 2021). Moreover, the majority of the reading materials are found far too difficult for secondary school students, who are believed to have limited proficiency in English literature, and there has been limited research conducted on how to assess the readability of Chinese stories in English. Sun and Zhao (2021) are among the first scholars to focus on the readability of Chinese stories in English. They examined four series of books and found that while these stories had varying reading levels, they were still unsuitable for readers due to the lack of precise age and readability divisions. Though their findings were enlightening, they, like previous scholars, do not provide guidance on how to assess the readability of these stories or how to present them to middle-high school students.

To obtain an explicit knowledge of the readability of Chinese stories in English, the factors affecting the readability of Chinese stories were examined in terms of the content, layout, readability, and cultural aspects.

This article addressed two research questions:

1) To what degree are the current Chinese stories in English readable to middle school students?
2) What readability of Chinese stories in English is ideal for middle school students?

Seven graded headword lists were made according to the English Curriculum Standards of Compulsory education (2022), Compusory Education the General Senior high School English Curriculum Standards (edited in 2017 and revised in 2020) and College English Curriculum Requirements (2020). Meanwhile, all the target reading materials were transformed into text files for corpus software processing. This can help make clear the actual level of words covered in the reading materials based on the standard curriculum requirement of Chinese middle school

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students, which not only enables a clear and objective view of the readability of the current cultural materials but also help sort out the proper Chinese stories in English.

Literature Review

The wide acceptance of English glocalization reflects the intersection of global and local influences on the English language, resulting in diverse variations and adaptations across different cultures and communities. The increasingly frequent interaction between the Chinese and the world gives rise to the assimilation of global English for daily use in the Chinese context (Rai & Deng, 2014). Rai and Deng explained the notion of global English and the reasons for its importance and provided implications for textbook development.

Related Research on English Glocalization

The global spread of English makes the study of English glocalization a focus. Shi (2013) examined the nature and impact of the social transformations which resulted in the global expansion and glocalization of English in mainland China. Scholars like Cai (2015), Liu and Li (2011), Yang and Yang (2016) pointed out that the current situation of English education in China has attached unilaterally an importance to standardization and seldom emphasises the export of Chinese culture, which has led to the consequence that students, though having learned English for many years, still have great importance in using English in communication, especially expressing their motherland culture. Lü (2016) and Zheng (2019) noted that there were issues in English education in China that hindered its glocalization, namely, an excessive focus on written English and a lack of integration between Chinese cultures and Western cultures. This indicated that English glocalization in China has been in progress and thus became the focus of academic research.

Some researchers approached the research from the perspective of culture. Lei (2018) mentioned that cross-cultural English teaching in China often overlooked students' cultural thinking, resulting in their "aphasia of Chinese culture and a doubt in their native culture" (p. 54). Then, she suggested that attention should be given to the localization of English, also known as "Chinese English" (p. 55), and the cultivation of students' intercultural communication abilities.

Yaqouob et al. (2023) examined publications on glocalization in the Scopus database from 1993 to 2023 from the perspective of bibliometrics analysis and suggested that global and local collaboration networks promoted glocalization in the scientific field. Meanwhile, numerous Chinese scholars directed their attention toward investigating the effects of English glocalization on English education in China. However, certain shortcomings still existed. Firstly, there was a notable emphasis placed on college and high school students when discussing the development of cross-cultural competence, with limited consideration given to students in compulsory education. Secondly, the proposed suggestions of ten encounter obstacles during implementation, remaining predominantly at a theoretical level. The process of altering cultural concepts and revising textbooks requires a significant amount of time. Our cultural perspectives have been established through long-term learning and experience, making it challenging to effect rapid change. It represents a considerable challenge for both teachers and students. Lastly, although some scholars have delved into how to convey Chinese narratives in English and have developed numerous cultural reading collections, there remains a scarcity of such collections specifically tailored explicitly for junior high school students due to issues related to unclear grading and other factors.

Related Research on Readability

Chinese culture reading materials in English are translated texts, which were reported to have translation universals like lexically less diverse, syntactically more complex and generally less readable.

The Readability of a written material refers to the difficulty of understanding. Richards et al. (2000) defined readability as the ease of written materials that can be read or understood. It was believed to depend on several factors, such as the average length of sentences, the number of new words contained, and the grammatical complexity of the language used in a text. However, the purpose of reading has been overlooked. DuBay (2004) placed factors within the reader and the interactive process between the reader and the writer in defining readability, i.e., "the ease of reading created by choice of content, style, design, and organization that fit the prior knowledge, reading skill, interest, and motivation of the audience" (p. 6).

Research on the relationship between readability and Flesch Reading scores has been a significant area of inquiry, shedding light on how different linguistic features contribute to text comprehension and accessibility. The early researchers worked on the effective Flesch Reading Ease formula. For example, Flesch's Reading Ease Formula (1948) primarily considered factors like sentence length and syllable count to gauge the readability of English texts, which laid the groundwork for further research in the field. In 1975, Kincaid et al. (1975) revised the formula and introduced the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level formula, which incorporated another factor like word difficulty besides sentence length and syllable count. It offered a more precise assessment of text complexity. Since the early 1980s, scholars like Klare expanded the application of Flesch readability scores in educational settings, underscoring the significance of considering linguistic features when designing materials for language learners. Entering the era of 2000, researchers such as Collins-Thompson and Callan (2004) explored the integration of Flesch readability scores as featured in automated text classification and information retrieval systems. Their findings motivated the improvement of readability assessment employing natural language processing algorithms. More recent research like Crossley et al. (2017) incorporated various linguistic features like syntactic complexity and lexical diversity in calculating Flesch Reading Ease scores, revealing insights into how readability related to the linguistic properties of texts. Currently, the combination of Flesch Reading Ease scores and Kincaid grade level was often adopted to measure readability as seen in the research of Fischer et al. (2021), Pizure-Barnekow, et al. (2010), Raja and Fitzpatrick (2023), Woodmansey (2010), and so on.

The continuous revision of the Flesh Reading Ease formula helped provide valuable insights for linguists, and educators and promoted the comprehensive understanding of language complexity in written communication.

Readability formulae have been widely used to measure the readability of a test and are considered a helpful method in EFL teaching and test development, which helps collect reading materials and test materials that match language learners' proficiency (Kotani et al., 2012). Early Formulas of readability measurement are grounded on vocabulary for predicting readability and Thorndike's Teacher's Word Book for measures of vocabulary difficulty (Lively & Pressey, 1923; Vogel & Washburne, 1928; Dolch 1928; Patty & Painter 1931; Johnson, 2015). They also use relatively crude criteria of reading difficulty. The formulas of 1934-1938 take more and different factors into calculation, such as word and sentence length. From 1938 to 1953, the efficiency and simplicity of formulas are the priority of measurement (Dale & Chall, 1948; cf. Janan & Wray, 2014).

Various readability measurements were applicable to indicate the ease or difficulty of targeted texts, and the Flesch reading Ease Score generated a considerably broader distribution, thus, the better (Ozasa et al., 2007; Petesen & Ostendorf, 2009; P. Reck & R. Reck, 2012). The research of Boles et al. (2016) also proved that the Flesch-Kincaid grade level was reliable in evaluating readability. However, the scores were not sufficient to predict readability. Other indicators were needed, such as vocabulary width and vocabulary depth (Richards et al., 2000). What's more, Chinese-localized words in English are also included in the discussion. Shi and Jin (2024) conducted quasi-experimental research on college students' reading ability development with or without Lexile-base reading intervention and found that students completing inside-class reading activities achieved more development in conceptualization, cognition and emotion of metaphors on reading. It indicated that reading in class, especially the textbooks which provide reading material, plays a big part in students' reading ability growth. However, at present, barely any research has directed attention to the reliability of Chinese Culture in English textbooks.

Methods

AntWordProfiler and Range ECV are two popular and effective tools for corpus analysis. AntWordProfiler is used to help analyze the vocabulary width and depth of the five sets in terms of type-token ratio (or TTR), token percentage and word list. TTR is a critical and objective device to measure vocabulary acquisition of English native speakers and English as a second language speakers. The higher the TTR is, the more vocabulary a passage or discourse contains. However, it has been believed that the ratio is liable to be affected by the length of the passage or discourse. The standardized TTR is raised and applied in the study. For example, the TTR of each volume is calculated and averaged, generating standardized TTR of the sets. There are three preinstalled vocabulary lists, i.e., West's two-word family lists of general service words (2000 pre-family words and after-family words), and Coxhead's Academic Word List (570 word families).

Microsoft Word software is for document creation and word processing. It is developed by Microsoft Corporation. This software enables the creation, editing and formatting of text-based documents with ease and efficiency. It offers various tools and features to streamline the process. In addition, one vital point can be reviewed and edited, which provides the Flesch Reading Ease scores and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level.

Range ECV is a software for analyzing vocabulary width and depth. It was designed by P. Nation and A. Coxhead and written by A. Heatley from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. It can be downloaded online on the university website. Initially, it has installed three essential headword lists, named respectively basewrd1, basewrd2, and basewrd3.

In the present research, the three essential headword lists were replaced by seven essential headword lists, i.e., basewrd1, basewrd2, basewrd3, basewrd4, basewrd5, basewrd6, and basewrd7, standing for different grades of English curriculum standards: Basewrd1 contains vocabulary required for six-graders; basewrd2 includes types and word families for learners of 9th grade; basewrd3 has headwords for 10th graders; basewrd4 contains headwords of 11th Grade; basewrd5 has basic vocabulary of 1st-year college English; basewrd6 is a collection of words of 2nd-year college English; basewrd7 refers to a headword list of advanced words of college English.

Table 1. *Types and word families in 7 graded basic headword lists*

Basic Headword Lists	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Grades	6	9	10	11	1st-year	2nd-year	4th-year
Types	1308	2575	3133	998	3784	3526	3014
Families	493	973	1284	428	1426	1379	1118

The results retrieved from Range ECV can be shown as the following:

WORD LIST	TOKENS/%	TYPES/%	FAMILIES
one	2999837/58.61	1121/5.25	475
two	93423/18.25	2165/10.14	936
three	29908/5.85	2076/9.72	1068
four	7018/1.37	634/2.97	905
five	19259/3.76	2309/10.81	1209
six	6053/1.18	1361/6.37	905
seven	3742/0.73	908/4.25	647
not in the lists	52313/10.23	10781/50.48	1081
Total	511554	21355	16380

The first-row, WORD LIST, refers to nine base word lists corresponding to the numbers from one to nine. The second column is TOKENS, showing the total number of words in the input files. The third column is TYPES, which indicates the words and their inflective forms used in the input files. The last is FAMILIES, involving the words, their inflective and derivative forms. The number of "not in the lists" reveals the potential readability difficulty.

Objects in Self-created Corpus

Based on the books collected related to Chinese culture reading materials in English, there are nine publishers, about 130 books. Before and after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, there is a surge of book publications to introduce Chinese culture to interested Foreigners.

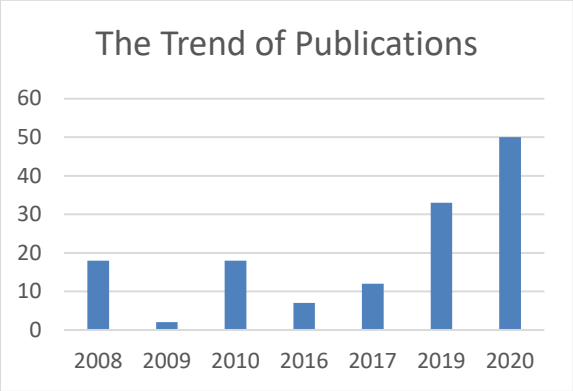


Figure 1. The trend of Chinese cultural reading materials from 2008 to 2020

Around 2008, there were two sets of books published by two different publishers, with 12 and 8 volumes, respectively: Talk about China in English includes history, folklore, arts, culture, famous cities, celebrities, tourism, media, sports, and famous colleges, universities, economy, films and TV series, and Introduce China in English focused on eminent persons, culture and arts,

charming cities, splendid development, folk customs, scenic spots, family life, and history. In 2010, China International Press published the first batch of Chinese cultural reading materials, consisting of 12 books such as Chinese Jade, Chinese Wine, Chinese Gardens, Chinese Tea, Chinese Literature, Chinese Festivals, Chinese Museums, Chinese Theater, Chinese Kongfu, Chinese Sculpting, Chinese Publishing, and Ancient Chinese Inventions. In 2016, it published the second batch of book sets, i.e., Chinese Furniture, Chinese Architecture, Chinese Characters, Chinese Bronze Ware, Chinese Ceramics, and Chinese Myths and Legends. It further issued in 2017 the third batch such as Chinese Philosophy, Chinese Food, Chinese Painting, Chinese Music, Chinese Clothing, Chinese Folk Arts, Chinese Arts and Crafts, Chinese Calligraphy, Chinese Vernacular Dwellings, Peking Opera, Chinese Cultural Relics, and Traditional Chinese Medicine.

After 2019, there is an increasing number of graded Chinese cultural reading materials for younger learners. Around the mid of 2019, the introduction of Chinese culture in English grew more popular under the perspective of English glocalization. Three sets of books are targeted at the Chinese young generations so that the youngsters can improve their ability in cross-cultural communication. The sets of China Retold in English edited by Hu Min are designed for learners of three English levels; The sets of Introduction of China in English include three volumes about Chinese traditional cultures, food, and geological and historical spots. Another set is Learn English Tell China's Stories, having eight volumes about traditional festivals, traditional arts and crafts, folk tales, idioms and their stories, scenic spots and historical sites, cuisine and its culture, famous people and their stories, and achievements in science and technology. Tales of China and This is China were different leveled sets for Chinese young learners.

Results

Basic Information of Chinese Cultural Reading Materials in English

A preliminary survey of the reading materials is done in terms of the number of volumes, year of publication, and the total quantity including the total number of words, the total number of sentences, and the like.

The five sets mentioned above are the objects for readability of Chinese culture reading material: 1) China Retold in English (hereafter RETOLD), three volumes. 2) Introduction of China in English (hereafter INTRODUCTION), three volumes altogether; 3) Learn English Tell China's Stories (hereafter LEARN), altogether eight volumes; 4) Tales of China (hereafter TALES), 20 volumes in sum; 5) This is China (hereafter THIS), altogether 40 volumes; The topics of these five sets have much in common, so that the corpus built from these five sets could provide systematical basis for comparison of readability.

Table 2. *Basic information of the five sets*

Book sets	NV	NT	TNW	ANW %	TNS	ANS%
RETOLD	3	222	190,806	859.49	11,179	50.36
INTRO-DUCTION	3	156	77,722	498.22	3810	24.42
LEARN	8	224	138,827	619.76	8,185	36.32
TALES	24	155	75,302	485.81	10,267	66.24
THIS	40	40	37,847	946.18	2,944	73.6

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Notes: NV stands for number of volumes; NT stands for number of texts; TNW stands for total number of words; ANW stands for average number of words; TNS stands for total number of sentences; ANS stands for average number of sentences.

According to Table Two, each set consists of multiple volumes. LEARN had the most significant number of texts, while THIS had the fewest. RETOLD had the highest numbers of words and sentences, i.e., 190,806 words and 11,179 sentences. This, on the other hand, had the lowest number of words and sentences.

However, the average number of words and sentences in each text yielded different results. Among the five sets, TALES had the lowest average word count per text, with 485.81 words, while THIS had the highest average word count of 946.18 words per text.

INTRODUCTION had the lowest average number of sentences per text, i.e., 24.42 sentences per text, while THIS had the highest average number of sentences, i.e., 73.6 sentences per text.

Contrastive Analysis of Text Readability in Terms of the Flesh Reading Ease Scores

Flesch Ease Reading scores, which are indexes for the years of education needed to understand the content. In the Flesch Ease Reading Ease test, the higher the scores the more readable the material, and vice versa.

Table 3. *Flesch ease reading test of the five sets*

Flesch Ease Reading	Sentence per Paragraph	Word per Sentence	Character per Word	scores	Years of education
RETOLD	3.57	17.13	4.6	61.83	8.77
INTRODUCTION	2.60	20.29	4.93	50.67	12.06
LEARN	4.21	17.29	4.63	59.80	9.10
TALES	3.2	7.8	4	90.8	2.5
THIS	1.9	12.4	4.3	71.9	6.3

(Notes: scores refer to the levels of readability: Scores of 0-30 mean very difficult; scores of 30-50 mean difficult; scores of 50-60 mean somewhat difficult; scores of 60-70 mean standard; scores of 70-80 mean relatively easy; scores of 80-90 mean easy; scores of 90-100 mean very easy.)

Table Three revealed the Flesch Reading Ease scores varied between 50.67 and 90.8, with a median of 61.83, and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level scores ranged between 2.5 and 12.06, with a median of 8.77. It also showed text readability indicators like sentence per paragraph, word per sentence, character per word, scores and year of education. This had the fewest sentences in a paragraph, i.e., 1.9 sentences per paragraph, while LEARN was just the opposite, with 4.21 sentences per paragraph. As for word per sentence and character per word, INTRODUCTION recorded the highest while TALES was the lowest. Regarding Flesch's Reading Ease score and years of education, INTRODUCTION and TALES were also the keepers of the two poles. TALES scored highest and required the most petite year of education, i.e., 2.5, while INTRODUCTION had the lowest score, but the most years of education, 12.06. THIS ranked next to TALES in every aspect.

Contrastive Analysis of Text Readability in Terms of Vocabulary Width and Depth

The ratio of type and token of a text, i.e., TTR, indicates vocabulary width and word levels indicate vocabulary depth. TTR could also testify to its readability.

Table 4. *TTR and word levels of the five sets*

Topics	RETOLD	INTRODUCTION	LEARN	TALES	THIS
Types	13138	8161	10290	4581	5485
Tokens	192946	76002	133321	66667	42618
TTR%	6.81	10.74	7.72	6.87	12.87
Standardized TTR%	32.24	35.72	33.67	26.43	30.67
Token coverage	90.1	88.7	90.3	92.7	83.8
Level1%	58.31	54.41	57.20	68.12	57.00
Level2%	18.03	18.53	19.28	17.32	17.13
Level3%	23.66	27.06	23.52	14.56	25.86
Level4%	1.4	1.8	1.6	0.6	1.1
Level5%	4.2	4.7	3.9	2.0	2.6
Level6%	1.4	1.7	1.1	0.5	0.6
Level7%	0.8	1.0	0.6	0.6	0.3
Not on the lists	9.9	11.3	9.7	7.3	16.1

As seen from Table Four, the TTR of RETOLD was the lowest. The highest TTR went to THIS. In addition, the standardized TTR of INTRODUCTION was the highest, while that of TALES was the lowest. It indicated that TALES had more repeated use of words than the other four sets.

Token coverage is also known as vocabulary coverage (Schmitt, Jiang, & Brabe, 2011). TALES had the highest rate of token coverage and THIS was the lowest. It meant that TALES was a more well-known word covered. Vocabulary depth was indicated via words of different Levels. The ratio of level 1 in TALES was the highest, 68.1% and its ratio of "not in the lists" was the lowest, 7.3%. It indicated that there were most easiest vocabulary used in TALES.

To gain more detailed knowledge, another software, Range for Vocabulary Depth was applied to check the grade level. Middle school students, though having learned English for at least four years, may still have problems with vocabulary use.

Table 5. *Grade level in the five sets*

Grade Level (%)	6	9	10	11	1st-year	2nd-year	4th-year	Beyond
RETOLD	96.7 (49.45)	40.8 (20.86)	12.4 (6.3)	27.3 (14.0)	81.5 (41.7)	25.6 (13.1)	15.0 (7.7)	30.6 (16.4)
INTRODUCTION	35.8 (47.21)	15.9 (21.07)	51.2 (67.74)	13.5 (17.7)	35.2 (64.1)	12.2 (22.1)	5.5 (9.9)	12.1 (15.9)
LEARN	65.2 (49.22)	30.1 (22.68)	90.9 (68.7)	21.6 (16.3)	51.1 (38.6)	14.3 (10.8)	35.3 (26.7)	18.9 (14.3)

	03)	68)	33)	37)	8)			25)
TALES	392(58.04)	147(21.81)	298(44.44)	44(0.66)	13(1.94)	362(0.54)	38(0.57)	810(12.00)
THIS	205(41.12)	91(18.26)	236(47.74)	51(10.02)	11(2.23)	258(0.52)	138(0.28)	1589(31.84)

TALES had the highest number of words of primary school, i.e., 58.04%, and middle school, i.e., 21.81%, which ranked second to that of LEARN, i.e., 22.68%. Words of Grade 10, 11, 1st-year, 2nd-year, and 4th-year of college accounted highest in INTRODUCTION. The highest grade level of beyond college was in THIS, i.e., 31.84%. In addition, Table Six also showed that TALES had the lowest word level of Grades 10, 11, 1st-year, 2nd-year of college and beyond college.

For a general understanding of text readability in the five sets, all the factors were examined in their correlations, as shown in Table Six (See Appendix A).

Table Six showed the interrelations between factors of readability, which showed that there lay strong correlations between the Flesch level, the years and the level of learning, i.e., the difficulty of reading texts, but there was no correlation of these factors with the TTR rate and the word level of the reading texts.

Discussion

Through the assessment of the sample textbooks, we made use of the Flesch Reading Ease scores and years of education from Microsoft Word software (Microsoft Corporation, Bellevue, WA), TTR from AntWordProfiler (Laurence Anthony's computer software, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan), and word levels of Rangers to investigate the readability of the five sets of books.

It has been found that the current Chinese stories in Engish very much in degree of reliability as seen in terms of TTR, the Flesch Reading Ease score, sentence length and other factors. Another finding is about the ideal reading materials for middle school students like TALES, which has more words covered within the word list, a higher Flesh Reading Ease score and short sentence length.

1) According to the Flesch Reading Ease scores, the higher the score, the fewer years of education it is, thus the more readable the text is. TALES scored the highest and had the fewest years of education, so TALES was the most readable. THIS ranked next to TALES, which means THIS was the next option for middle school students to keep for Chinese cultural reading.

2) TTR is an indicator of text difficulty and vocabulary width. Word level indicates vocabulary depth. The higher the ratio, the more tokens, the more difficult (Read, 2000). However, its credibility is highly risked by the length of the text. Therefore, in many cases, the standardized TTR was generated to indicate the correct vocabulary width (Ma, 2016). The ratio of the "not in the lists" words posed a threat to middle s Through comparison, it showed that TALES had more words covered within the word lists, specifically more words in level 1 and least words in "not in the lists", and thus the most readable one.

Words in "not in the lists" included a large number of proper nouns like names of regions and places (Jiayu Pass, Quanjude, etc.), personal names (Tao Yuanming, Ehuang, Nüying, etc.), and abbreviations (UNESCO, TCM, etc.). Without pre-learned knowledge of these expressions, it's hard to comprehend or interpret. The higher the number of these expressions was, the less readable the reading materials were. This indicated that the English version of Chinese cultural reading materials inevitably contained many localized expressions, thus increasing the reading difficulty.

3) The results of years of education also reflected that both TALES and THIS were possibly suitable middle school students. For example, the Flesch Reading Ease score of TALES was 90.8, which meant that readers with 2.5 years of education or more would have no difficulty in reading, and the Flesch Reading Ease score of THIS was 71.9, which indicated that students with 6.3 years of education or more would understand well. Generally speaking, middle school students have learned English for about 5 to 6 years, namely, 5 or 6 years of education, which is less than the required years of education of THIS. As shown in Table 6, there existed a strong relationship between years of education and the grade level. In this sense, the readability of TALES is higher than that of THIS for middle school students. TALES was more readable than THIS.

Compared with other sets, texts in TALES were of various writing styles, such as fairy tales, historical stories, and song lyrics. In addition, the text averagely had short sentences, as shown in Table Three.

In conclusion, based on the analysis of Flesch Reading Ease scores and TTR indicators, it could be determined that TALES is the most readable reading material among the evaluated cultural reading materials. With the highest Flesch Reading Ease score and the last year of required education, TALES presented itself as a suitable option for middle school students for English-localized Chinese cultural reading. What's more, the comparison of word coverage with the word lists revealed TALES covered more words, especially those in level 1 and fewer words that were "not in the lists". These expressions, including proper nouns, personal names, and abbreviations, could pose difficulties for comprehension without prior knowledge. On the other hand, the correlation between years of education and reading levels further supported the suitability of TALES for middle school students with 2.5 years of education. Additionally, TALES offered a

diverse range of writing styles, ranging from fairy tales to song lyrics, with averagely shorter sentences, enhancing its accessibility and readability.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that Chinese culture textbooks designed for middle school students should possess good adaptability in terms of readability. The indicators for vocabulary width and depth helped present readability. A readable material helps facilitate a better understanding of Chinese culture and stimulates students' interest in learning. However, it's also recognized that further adjustments and development of the textbooks' adaptability are needed based on students' grades and curriculum requirements. Additionally, to enhance students' attraction to Chinese culture, it is crucial to increase the diversity and interactivity of the books.

As Krashen (1985) and Ellis (1985) mentioned, comprehensive input is key to efficient language learning. Krashen suggested "i+1", which means that language acquisition took place when the learner understands input that contains learned grammatical forms. That proved that the higher match between the language proficiency of learners, and the readability of the cultural textbooks made the textbooks better suitable for language learning or acquisition.

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Appendices

Appendix A Correlations between Factors of Readability (Table 6)

Table 6. *Correlations between factors of readability*

		Flesch	Years	TTR	Rank	Level
Flesch	Pearsons Correlation	1	-.994**	-.241	.548	.923*
	Sig. (Two-tailed)		.001	.697	.339	.025
	Items	5	5	5	5	5
Years	Pearsons Correlation	-.994**	1	.237	-.499	-.898*
	Sig. (Two-tailed)	.001		.701	.393	.039
	Items	5	5	5	5	5
TTR	Pearsons Correlation	-.241	.237	1	-.825	-.550
	Sig. (Two-tailed)	.697	.701		.085	.337
	Items	5	5	5	5	5
Grade	Pearsons Correlation	.548	-.499	-.825	1	.826
	Sig. (Two-tailed)	.339	.393	.085		.085
	Items	5	5	5	5	5
Level	Pearsons Correlation	.923*	-.898*	-.550	.826	1
	Sig. (Two-tailed)	.025	.039	.337	.085	
	Items	5	5	5	5	5

Notes: *p<.05, **<.01 (Flesch stands for the Flesch level; Years stands for years of education; TTR stands for Type-token ratio; Rank stands for the word rank reflected in terms of grades; level stands for the 7-word levels as indicated above;

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Implementing a Three-Stage Approach to Teach Writing Skills Using the Corpus of Contemporary American English in a Foundation Program Context

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Abstract
This study investigates the effectiveness of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as a teaching tool for enhancing writing skills in English as a Second Language (ESL) learners within a Foundation Program context. The primary research question is: How does COCA influence the writing abilities of ESL students? The aim is to explore COCA's potential to facilitate a process-based approach to writing, addressing common challenges ESL educators face. This study is significant as it contributes to integrating technology into second language learning through the application of a comprehensive linguistic corpus; COCA features over one billion words and offers various search functionalities, such as List, Chart, Collocates, Compare, Word, and Keyword in Context (KWIC). The research uses qualitative analysis to evaluate COCA's impact on learners' writing processes and outcomes. Findings indicate that COCA significantly enhances students' writing skills across three structured stages: the brainstorming stage for gathering information, the while-writing stage to minimize incorrect vocabulary usage, and the post-writing stage focusing on feedback and assessment. The results demonstrate that employing COCA within a student-centered framework promotes engagement and skill development in writing. The study concludes with recommendations for further research to validate COCA's effectiveness in teaching other language skills, including grammar, reading, and vocabulary, thereby maximizing its utility in comprehensive English language learning and ensuring that it becomes a vital resource for ESL educators.
*Keywords***:** Corpus of Contemporary American English, Corpus linguistics, ESL learners, three-stage approach, writing skills

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Introduction:

As a productive skill, writing is considered a big challenge for students at both school and university levels. Students need help expressing their ideas for many reasons, such as mother language interference, exposure to authentic context, and teachers applying the right approach while teaching this skill. These difficulties make students resort to various techniques, such as using Google Translate and plagiarism. Furthermore, teachers use a teacher-centered approach to solve these issues and encourage students to imitate a product presented as an example. Many studies have proved that the product-based approach to writing does not improve students` creativity or writing skills (Ghofrun, 2016). By using this approach, teachers do not expose students to authentic context, which makes them lose the opportunity to learn how words are semantically collocated, how sentences are grammatically composed, and how their paragraphs are linguistically combined. Therefore, students only follow a product regarding ideas and structure, which hinders their creativity and writing skills.

Having such challenges and problems, and since technology is being incorporated into ESL teaching, this research claims that using corpora is highly effective and recommended to overcome these issues. To apply this successfully, two academic steps should be considered in parallel. First, a process-based approach comprises three stages: the brainstorming stage, the while-writing stage, and finally, the post-writing stage. Each stage is equally important to students. The second step is using COCA, Contemporary Corpus of American English. This e-tool can lead to a student-centered approach inside and outside the ESL classroom. By using this effective e-tool, students can learn how language is naturally used, and they will be exposed to an authentic context of real corpora. This will lead to autonomous learning in which students can inductively learn the necessary writing skills, improving their creativity while using such a productive skill.

The difficulty of successfully teaching writing skills to English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in a Foundation Program setting is the leading research issue this study attempts to solve. Conventional approaches frequently fail to give students real-world writing experiences and the encouragement they need to advance their language skills. Innovative methods and resources are needed to engage students and improve their writing skills, especially when it comes to using real-world language settings to get over common problems like improper word usage and a lack of feedback.

The investigation of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as a technology tool for enhancing writing education in ESL contexts is what makes this study significant. The study adds to the larger conversation on integrating technology into language instruction by assessing COCA's efficacy. It draws attention to how linguistic corpora can offer rich, contextually relevant examples that promote student engagement and the growth of writing abilities. Additionally, the results can help ESL teachers learn helpful teaching methods and resources that complement contemporary pedagogical approaches like student-centered and process-based learning.

This study aims to:

1-Examine how employing COCA affects ESL students' writing abilities in a Foundation Program setting.

2. Investigate how COCA can support a process-based approach to teaching writing, emphasizing the phases of brainstorming, writing, and post-writing.

3. Determine which particular COCA characteristics are most helpful for improving ESL students' vocabulary usage and general writing performance.

Corpus of Contemporary American English as an E-Tool:

COCA is a free e-tool that can be accessed online by both teachers and students. It was developed and improved by Professor Mark Davies from Brigham Young University, and it was first introduced online on February 20, 2008. It is the most extensive, freely available corpus of modern American English. There are five different genres: spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic. These genres are equally divided by more than 520 words. Furthermore, this e-tool is being updated now and then with the most recent developments, which appears due to many improvements in the linguistic level of modern American English.

Despite its complicated usage, careful exploration and the availability of some relevant computer software like WordSmith, Antconc, and Range will surely provide a helpful experience using this e-tool. The advantages of this website are significant as there is a large amount of data. Furthermore, the website is regularly updated with newly used data from native speakers. It is worth mentioning that most contemporary corpora, such as British National Corpus (BNC) and American National Corpus (ANC), are private. However, you can access all the corpora available by accessing the website https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/ and creating an account.

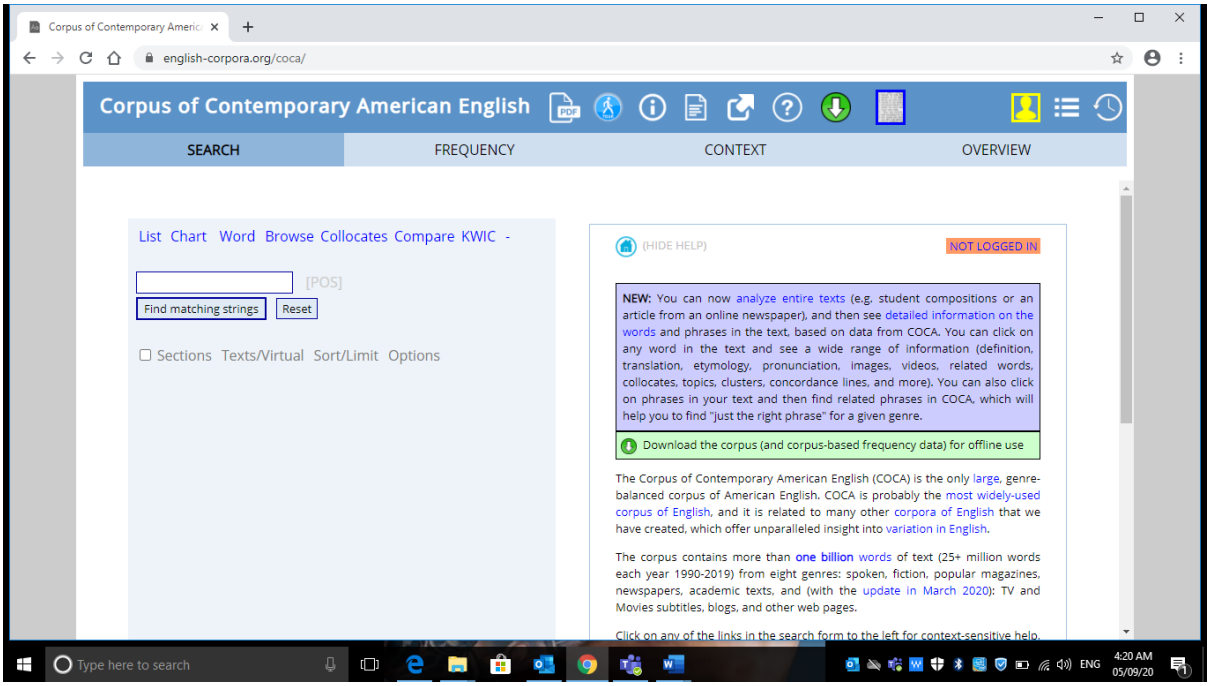


Figure 1. COCA's Landing Page

Figure one shows the main page of the website. There are six features to use to surf the website. These features are List, Chart, Word, Browse, Collocates, Compare, and KWIC. Each feature allows the user to investigate the corpora based on his/her purpose. Below is a brief description of each one:

1-List:

This is the primary function in which a word/ phrase can be linguistically examined to see its context. You can type any word or phrase and decide the number of words before or after it to see the most used words that can linguistically occur within the context of the investigated word.

2- Collocates:

It is an exciting function that lets users know which word collocates with which word. A collocation is a set of words that usually co-occur with each other. You can type the word and decide its part of speech. Then, you can get the primarily collocated words that may linguistically appear in the same environment.

3- Compare:

This function or feature allows you to examine the usage of two synonyms and see their linguistic context. Synonyms are words that have the same meaning but slightly differ in usage.

4- Chart:

It is a function in which you can find the main context of a word/ phrase. For instance, some words can appear in academic contexts. However, some other words can appear in a more informal context.

5- KWIC:

KWIC (Key Word in Context) is a feature that allows learners to figure out the prepositions that co-occur with the word/phrase under examination. This is very important for learners as prepositions have complicated contexts that second-language learners usually misunderstand.

6- Word:

This newly added function provides the user with possible synonyms, clusters, and types of texts within which the word under investigation can occur.

Literature Review:

Teaching writing has been a crucial issue of academic research lately. Some studies proposed modern methods and mechanisms for teaching writing, and others directed attention to using corpora in teaching writing in general. Some researchers started experimental research to test the effectiveness of corpus-based data in a teaching approach on several students and figured out the positive outcomes of using the corpora on their language skills. Other studies used corpus-driven data to develop lessons for teaching English and created word lists to help students improve their language capability.

Sanosi (2024) studied using corpus linguistics to enhance students` cohesion when writing. The study had two primary questions: Do the types and quantities of conjunctions used by EFL learners vary from those of native speakers? Does the quality of conjunction usage, particularly syntactic location, differ between EFL learners and native speakers?

To achieve this, Sanosi examined the use of conjunctions by EFL learners using a corpus linguistic approach. The research used two corpora, namely, a learner corpus called ALAWEC, which included 125,314 words written by Saudi Arabian Arab EFL college students, and a reference corpus of writing in native English, the British Academic Written English (BAWE) corpus. The 125,347-word excerpt was chosen because it matched the ALAWEC corpus's student level, genre, and text type. Sanosi (2024) utilized the mixed method, using the corpus analysis software Lancsbox to calculate the frequency of each conjunction in each corpus. Secondly, the relative frequency of conjunctions in each corpus must be determined. Thirdly, the range of

conjunctions was assessed to see how evenly they are distributed across the corpus files. Finally, a t-test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the differences in conjunction frequency between EFL learners and native speakers. For the qualitative analysis, Sanosi used the syntactic placement of conjunctions, concentrating on conjunctions, which have been regarded as an indicator of informality and possibly poorer writing quality, at the start of sentences. Five conjunctions—and, or, but, so, and then—that are frequently found in internal clause positions were selected to investigate their occurrence in starting positions. The researchers employed Lancsbox's intelligent search function to find and examine these occurrences.

Because it makes it possible to analyze actual language use methodically and quantitatively, Sanosi could spot trends and variations in conjunction usage by contrasting EFL learners' corpus with native speakers. The study's main findings indicate that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners tend to overuse conjunctions compared to native speakers, mainly additive conjunctions, while certain conjunctions like "however," "then," "therefore," and "yet" are more frequently used by native speakers. Both groups exhibit similar patterns in conjunction usage, predominantly relying on additive conjunctions and utilizing temporal conjunctions the least. Additionally, there are no statistically significant differences in the syntactic placement of most conjunctions between EFL learners and native speakers; however, EFL learners notably use the conjunction "and" at the beginning of sentences more often. Overall, the study concludes that while EFL learners overuse certain conjunctions, they employ a comparable range of conjunction types as native speakers, and their syntactic placement of conjunctions is mainly consistent with that of native speakers, except for the use of "and."

Zhong and Wakat (2023) examined and evaluated the efficacy of corpus-integrated teaching for EFL students in the Chinese context. Although decades of research have shown the potential advantages of Data-Driven Learning (DDL), the study addressed the lack of corpus utilization in Chinese EFL classes. Eighty mixed-level Senior 2 and 3 students at a private senior high school in western China participated in the study, which used a developmental, explanatory sequential mixed methods and quasi-experimental design. A 100-point grammatical proficiency pre-test, semi-open interviews with teachers and students, and classroom observations by two university instructors were used to gather data. Eight weeks of corpus-integrated courses were created and put into practice in response to the pre-test findings, which showed deficiencies in verbs, nonfinite verbs, prepositions, relative clauses, conjunctions, and word building. These courses used AntConc and AntWordProfiler and a 710,000-token corpus compiled from Bookworms literary novels, New Concept English textbooks, COCA, and GloWbE. Concordance-based printouts were given to the students, who then participated in exercises to enhance their comprehension and use of grammar, such as examining concordance lines, recognizing grammatical patterns, and finishing other tasks. Follow-up interviews and post-tests were used to evaluate the intervention's efficacy. Both Senior two and Senior three students' pre-test and post-test scores differed significantly, according to the results, demonstrating the beneficial effects of DDL-inspired teaching on their grammar skills. Applied linguists, educational psychologists, textbook authors, and language teachers must work together to develop and implement corpus-integrated lessons. The study also highlights the efficacy of inductive learning, in which students learn and apply grammatical rules through corpus analysis. However, it also recognizes the difficulties of integrating corpus literacy into regular classes, including the need for teachers to possess technical knowledge and possible opposition to change. According to the authors, these

issues might be resolved by incorporating corpus literacy into teacher education programs and offering continual training.

In order to provide more helpful language learning resources, Rafatbakhsh and Ahmadi (2019) sought to determine the frequency of various idiom categories in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2nd ed., was the source from which the researchers extracted 1506 idioms categorized under 81 topics. A bespoke script was developed to search COCA for every grammatical and spelling variation of each phrase to account for differences in form. According to the results, "behind the scenes" was the most common idiom in COCA, occurring 4.71 times per million words, while 234 idioms were utterly absent. With 10.26 occurrences per million words, "secrecy" was the most common theme, while "fools and foolishness" was the least common, with 0.16 occurrences per million. The study concludes that corpus-based frequency analysis of idioms can provide insightful information to learners, teachers, and material developers, enabling them to rank the most helpful idioms for various learning scenarios.

In a particular context, Daskalovska (2015) explored the activities based on corpus for learning verb-adverb collocations, comparing them to regular activities in the course book. The study results showed that the participants who used the online concordance achieved much better in the tests they took. The findings of this study highlighted how motivating and engaging the corpus-based activities were to the participants. Consequently, the online corpus is a vital and effective tool that positively impacts L2 learners.

Literature illustrates how influential online corpora are in teaching English as a second language. However, this paper deals with the effectiveness of using a theoretical framework to enhance the writing skills of ESL learners in the GFP context, specifically COCA (Contemporary Corpus of American English).

How to apply COCA effectively in teaching writing skills while introducing a process-based approach of three stages:

As mentioned previously, this study aims to address the effectiveness of using COCA in teaching writing skills within a student-centered approach and using a process-based approach to enhance these skills successfully and overcome the challenges discussed above. Although the practical usage of COCA in teaching the English language needs to be addressed in previous studies, recent studies have shown that this e-tool can introduce an authentic environment for students to develop their skills in some specific types of writing, such as academic writing. Therefore, this study focuses on effectively using COCA in the general context.

Methodology:

The efficacy of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) in improving writing abilities among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in a Foundation Program setting is investigated in this study using an action research paradigm. During writing tasks, participants used COCA as a linguistic resource as part of a methodical research strategy. Students' writing was evaluated before and after the intervention to measure their skill growth.

Stage 1: Brainstorming:

As it has been known, the first stage in the process-based approach and the most crucial stage is the stage where learners must be exposed to idea inspiration and vocabulary preparation.

From a language acquisition point of view, it is believed that acquiring words and ideas comes first before producing. Hence, it is crucial to make learners aware of the relevant contexts of both words and ideas related to the topic of the writing piece. This is technically called a linguistic input, which will help learners in their output. As mentioned above, providing students with a model of a piece of writing will hinder their creativity and expand their ideas and vocabulary. Therefore, an essential skill, critical thinking, will be restricted. Moreover, a student-centered approach will not be technically applied. Therefore, teachers can introduce one function of COCA to the learners and use some keywords that are related to the main topic of the paragraph/essay.

Let us address this with a concrete example. Suppose the essay topic is the causes and effects of "plagiarism." The teacher can guide his/her students in this stage to use the Collocates function, for instance, to give them the necessary ideas and vocabulary to brainstorm the relevant ideas for the requested essay topic.

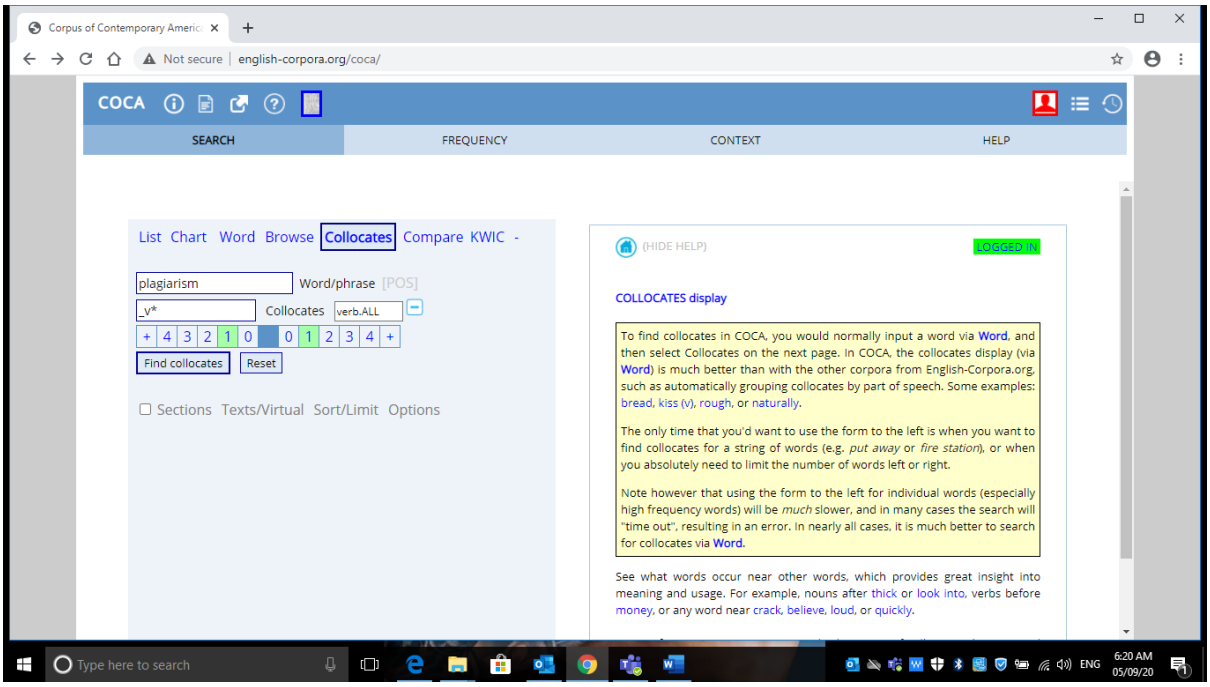


Figure 2. COCA Searching Interface

As shown in Figure two, it is evident that the Collocates function has the main word related to the chosen topic, "Plagiarism." Selecting the type of the part of speech that collocates with the noun "Plagiarism" by deciding only one verb before and one verb after. Consequently, the following figure will be displayed:

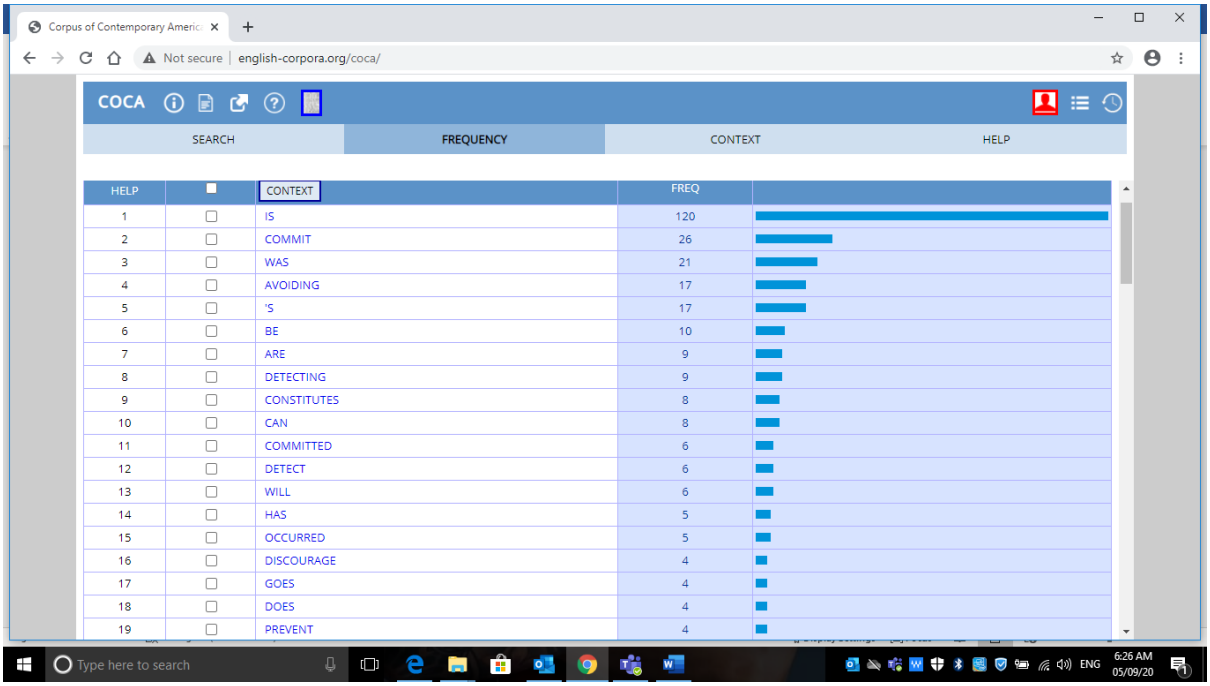


Figure 3. Statistical information about Collocates of Plagiarism from COCA

As can be seen from Figure three, the verb "is" has the highest frequency. The second verb is "commit". Now, if we click the verb "commit," we will get plenty of examples in which sentences related to the collocation "commit plagiarism" are given within different examples, as it is shown in Figure four:

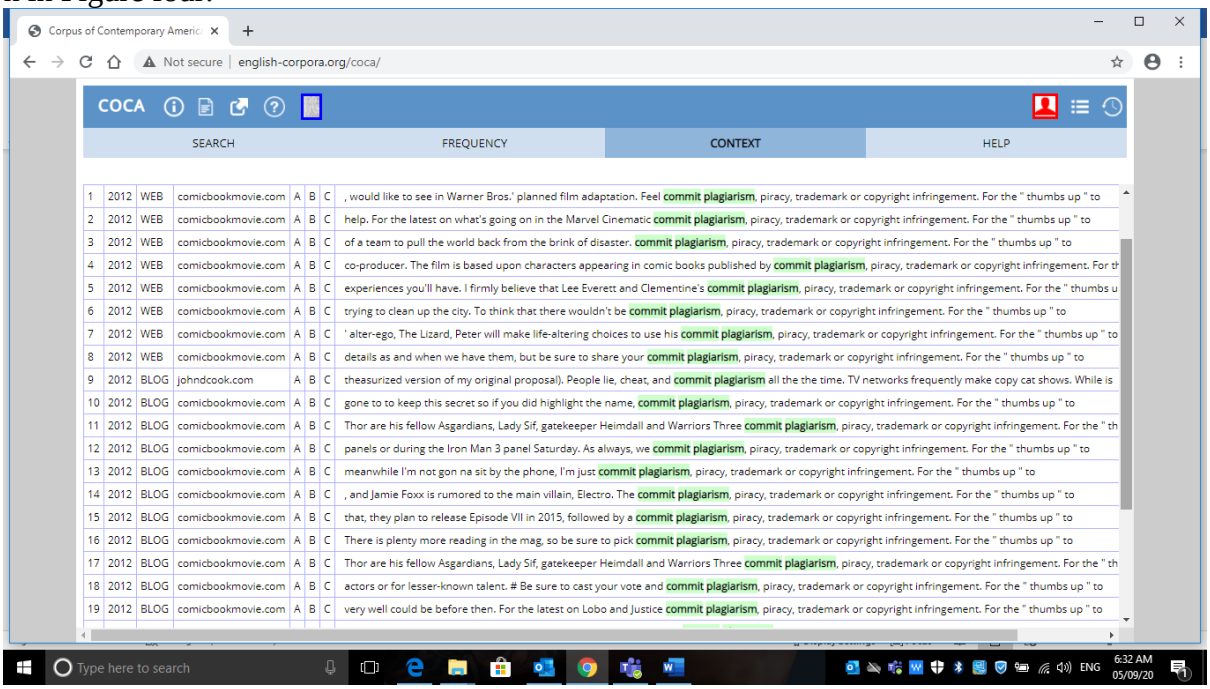


Figure 4. Different sentences (contexts) related to Collocates "commit plagiarism" retrieved from COCA.

Such examples help learners brainstorm ideas and collect the vocabulary needed to write about the related topic. Learners can click on other verbs in the List to get more example sentences related to the task. Therefore, this process helps students stimulate critical thinking, interests, and innovative thinking in collecting information.

Stage 2: While Writing:

This stage is critical for learners to improve their lexical accuracy and linguistic complexity. Such a function is more valuable than using a bilingual dictionary. This can help learners accurately select the most appropriate lexicon to fit their ideas. Now, usually, what happens with learners is that they try to use their mother tongue language to translate the ideas that they have already collected during stage one. Furthermore, some students use Google Translate to enter the sentence in their mother language and consequently get the translation into English. Many studies have shown that there are better tools than Google Translate for getting a correct translation (Jaganathan et al., 2014). The following errors can occur while learners are using this translation e-tool:

1- Theft is one of the most dangerous phenomena that a student can be exposed to.
2- Much effort must be made to curb plagiarism.
3- Transcription from the internet is considered one of the causes.

The first issue with the first sentence is using the word “theft” to refer to “plagiarism." This false semantic usage can be avoided using one of the COCA functions. The teacher can guide his/her learners to use the List function to search for the word “theft” and see its context. The learners can also be guided to use the Compare function to compare the two words “plagiarism” and “theft” and figure out the differences.

The second issue with the second sentence is a collocates error: “curb” is used before “plagiarism.” As shown in figure (4) above, the verb “curb” never occurs with the word “plagiarism.” This will lead learners to look for a more natural verb that native speakers can use to refer to the same idea.

The third issue with the third sentence also concerns word choice. The word “transcription” cannot come here to describe the process of copying and pasting from the internet. Therefore, students can be guided to use the primary function, which is List, to find out the problem with the word "transcription," or they can also use the Compare function to see the difference in meaning between “copying” and “transcription.”

In addition to the lexical errors that learners might use during this stage, COCA can help learners to differentiate between synonyms. For instance, during their writing process about plagiarism, they might need to discuss how legitimate plagiarism is to students and teachers. Therefore, they might have doubted using the two synonyms "illegal" and "unlawful." Here, learners can be guided to use the Compare function available on COCA. It is straightforward to click on the Compare button and enter the two adjectives as word one and word two. Since the two words are adjectives, and the primary function of adjectives is to describe nouns, learners are guided to specify the part of speech to collocate with the noun. Additionally, the span can be set as four words to both sides of the node word. Then, by clicking the “sort/limit” button and keeping the default setting, we will get the results shown in Figure six.

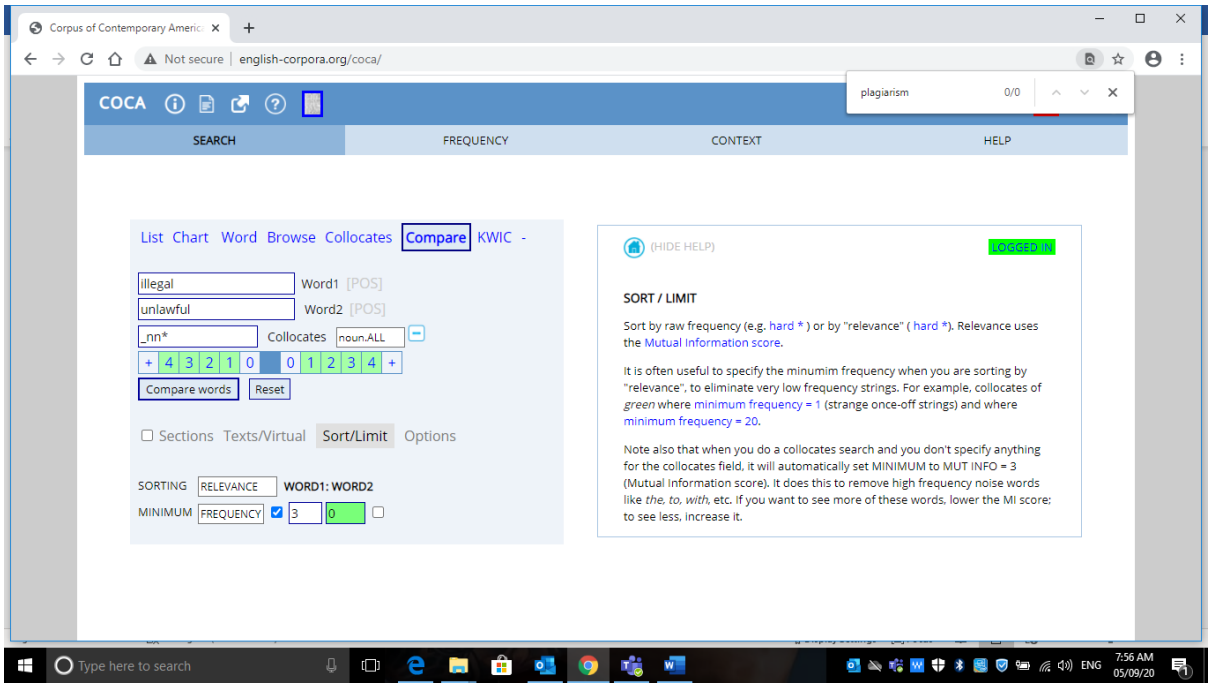


Figure 5. COCA interface for comparing illegal and unlawful



	WORD	W1	W2	W1/W2	SCORE
1	IMMIGRANT	584	0	1,168.0	88.6
2	ABORTION	484	1	484.0	36.7
3	IMMIGRANTS	4812	10	481.2	36.5
4	POPULATION	228	0	456.0	34.6
5	IMMIGRATION	3025	7	432.1	32.8
6	ARMS	149	0	298.0	22.6
7	GUNS	273	1	273.0	20.7
8	FISHING	136	0	272.0	20.6
9	LOGGING	136	0	272.0	20.6
10	PERCENT	131	0	262.0	19.9
11	MILLIONS	122	0	244.0	18.5
12	DUMPING	121	0	242.0	18.4
13	PROSTITUTION	106	0	212.0	16.1
14	ALIENS	2234	11	203.1	15.4
15	CONTRIBUTIONS	196	1	196.0	14.9
16	TRAFFIC	89	0	178.0	13.5
17	DRIVER	85	0	170.0	12.9

	WORD	W2	W1	W2/W1	SCORE
1	DETAINER	12	0	24.0	316.5
2	WOUNDING	6	0	12.0	158.2
3	MATERIALS	294	25	11.8	155.1
4	DISSEMINATION	9	1	9.0	118.7
5	ASSEMBLIES	4	0	8.0	105.5
6	COUNTERMEASURES	4	0	8.0	105.5
7	RESTRAINT	42	6	7.0	92.3
8	COMMAND	14	2	7.0	92.3
9	CONFINEMENT	6	1	6.0	79.1
10	CAREGIVERS	3	0	6.0	79.1
11	ALBUM	3	0	6.0	79.1
12	DISPLAY	3	0	6.0	79.1
13	EDUCATORS	3	0	6.0	79.1
14	MOBS	3	0	6.0	79.1
15	SUMMONS	3	0	6.0	79.1
16	ENEMY	48	9	5.3	70.3
17	DEPRIVATION	10	2	5.0	65.9

Figure 6. List of nouns significantly collocated with illegal in contrast to unlawful

Figure six shows that the most frequent word that collocates with the adjective “illegal” is “immigrants” with (4812) frequency where, and the most frequent word that collocates with the adjective “unlawful” is “materials” with (294) frequency. A clear explanation the teacher can

provide learners is that the two nouns highly used to collate with these two adjectives are concrete words rather than abstract words. On the other hand, the word “plagiarism” is abstract. Therefore, learners should be encouraged to consider abstract nouns that can be collocated with “illegal” and “unlawful.” It .” can be deduced that words like “wounding,” fi,” ing,” “traffic,” and “confinement” can be collocated with the two adjectives. Therefore, learners can conclude that both adjectives can be correctly used to describe the word “plagiarism,” as the following two examples illustrate:

1- Is plagiarism unlawful?
2- Plagiarism is an illegal academic violation.

Stage 3: post-writing:

This stage is crucial for both learners and teachers. As long as the teacher and peer feedback play an integral role, giving feedback to learners individually is a heavy load on the teachers. Simultaneously, without introducing timely feedback to students` writing products, they will be less enthusiastic about developing their writing skills. Therefore, COCA can be integral to the self-assessment and peer assessment processes.

First, the teacher can select three essays from their peers representing three differences: Good, Average, and W. Hence, feedback can be given on the three chosen products. This COCA-assisted assessment can be an example of self-assessment or even assessment. The teacher can focus on three critical dimensions: Content, structure, and language, alerting the learners to the strengths and weaknesses of each draft.

The quality of the content can be evaluated by checking the percentage of ideas expressed in the selected essays. For instance, the categorization of the collocates in COCA can help assess the structure of the writing by examining the logical order and the apparent precision presented by the learners, considering that the quality of language is semantically evaluated. It is worth mentioning that COCA can provide learners with syntactic features that enable them to obtain high-quality writing by reading different genres of essays available on COCA. Learners should pay attention to two critical factors in this regard. First, they need to ensure that their grammar is correct. Second, they need to make sure that their writing is complex in terms of using various types of sentences, such as simple, compound, complex, and compound complex.

Consequently, the texts available on COCA can be appropriate examples for checking grammaticality and structure. Lastly, accuracy can be checked by determining whether synonyms and collocations are misused. The above procedures maintain that COCA can be used effectively to check the level of the learners` outputs and give them an appropriate assessment. Therefore, COCA can enhance the assessment process by giving comprehensive global feedback, specifically local feedback on his/her learners` writing pieces.

After all of the steps mentioned above are followed to assess a piece of writing using COCA, learners can make a self-assessment by following the procedures adopted by their teacher, considering the three aspects of evaluation: Content, Structure, and Language. On the other hand, self-assessment can only sometimes be successful, especially when the level of the learners is not proficient. Therefore, the learners can be guided to peer assessment, in which they can be divided into pairs and given feedback on their products, showing their strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, they can suggest more correction and revision procedures. It is worth mentioning that peer assessment and feedback can enhance learners` autonomy. Furthermore, they can encourage learners to work on more than one draft, and thus, this leads to the practical application

of the process-based approach to teaching writing skills. Finally, critical thinking skills, a student-centered approach, and creativity can all be successfully enhanced.

Findings and Results:

According to the study's findings, utilizing the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as a teaching tool significantly improved the writing abilities of ESL students. In particular, participants' written work demonstrated notable gains in coherence, grammar, and lexical resources. Because they had access to real-world examples of language use in various circumstances, students who participated in COCA could employ a greater variety of vocabulary, according to an analysis of writing samples from before and after the intervention. This exposure made Their writing more prosperous, allowing them to use more complex and contextually relevant word choices. Additionally, the study showed significant improvements in grammatical accuracy; students showed improved comprehension and use of intricate sentence structures, which led to a more diverse and exciting writing style.

The student's capacity to link concepts and keep their writing flowing significantly increased in terms of coherence. The COCA insights made clearer linkages between concepts possible, which also made it easier for them to employ a variety of cohesive devices, including conjunctions, transitional phrases, and reference signals. Their essays consequently became more rationally organized and cohesive, which made it simpler for readers to follow their ideas and stories.

In conclusion, the application of COCA not only increased students' exposure to natural language and motivated them to improve their writing techniques methodically. The beneficial results demonstrate how well technology and real-world language resources may be incorporated into ESL lessons, increasing student ownership and engagement in the writing process. These results imply that COCA and similar tools can effectively improve many writing aspects, making them valuable elements in curriculum design for language competence improvement.

Discussion:

The study's findings highlight the critical role that the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) plays in improving the writing abilities of ESL students. The output of students` writings, in particular, shows significant gains in lexical resources, with students demonstrating a notable rise in the diversity and suitability of words employed in their writing. The theoretical framework of language acquisition, which holds that exposure to real-world linguistic materials promotes a more profound comprehension of word usage in context, is consistent with this observation. Beyond well-known, fundamental vocabulary, learners could recognize and apply various lexical choices as they worked through COCA's extensive database. As a result, their increased lexical vocabulary demonstrated a greater degree of linguistic proficiency in addition to improving their writing communication.

Additionally, the study results show that students' written outputs have improved coherence and grammatical precision. Through methodical COCA engagement, students could examine real-world instances of coherent devices and syntactic structures, which enhanced their writing. Students gained a better knowledge of how to form more complex and logical sentences, as evidenced by the observed rise in the appropriate use of conjunctions and transitional phrases. This increase is critical because overall argument clarity and fluidity—critical qualities for academic discourse—are linked to successful cohesiveness in writing. Furthermore, since COCA use and cohesive writing are positively correlated, adding authentic linguistic resources to ESL curricula

may improve students' writing skills over time by empowering them to create texts that are not only grammatically correct but also coherent and convincing. These results emphasize the value of integrating technology and resource-based learning into language instruction, highlighting the function of COCA as an effective instrument for promoting increased linguistic growth in ESL students.

Conclusion:

The present study investigates the effectiveness of COCA, Contemporary Corpus of American English. The study is based on teaching the wrong skills and applying a process-based approach. This approach is composed of three main stages. The first stage is the brainstorming stage, during which COCA can help learners collect relevant information regarding the topic of their writing product. In addition, the use of COCA helps learners prepare relevant vocabulary. The second stage, while writing, focuses on linguistic accuracy and complexity. It has been shown that using different functions in COCA can enhance learners` accuracy in choosing the right word.

Furthermore, learners can check the complexity of their sentences and use various types of sentences. The third stage is the post-writing stage, in which an assessment can be made by selecting three samples. T, learners are guided to conduct either self-assessment or peer assessment. Finally, the research proves that COCA can promote learners` writing skills and enhance a student-centered approach.

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Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in Vocabulary: A Study on Tishk Language Preparatory School Students

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Abstract
This study investigated the positive contribution of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) to students' vocabulary learning and course grades in the language preparatory school of Tishk International University, Iraq. Future researchers in Iraq will find it helpful since there are so few case studies of this kind of study. In this context, control and experimental groups were created, and while the control group learned vocabulary with traditional methods, the experimental group applied vocabulary learning integrated with mobile devices. To obtain qualitative data, a pre-test was used at the beginning of the study, and a post-test was applied at the end of the six-week study. A semi-structured interview was also conducted with the students to support these documents. As a result of the six-week study, when the data obtained using SPSS-29 was examined, it was revealed that mobile-integrated vocabulary learning made a serious contribution to students' vocabulary learning and, at the same time, provided significant support to student grades. While positive opinions were generally received in the interview analysis, some concerns were observed, such as distracting the students' attention. Based on all this data, it turns out that MALL substantially supports vocabulary learning and student grades when appropriately applied.

Keywords: language learning, mobile-assisted language learning, mobile devices, preparatory school students, students' grades, vocabulary teaching
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Introduction

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has gained grave importance in education in recent years with the development of tablets, laptops, and smartphones (Azi, 2023). Among today's popular education methods, project-based learning, collaborative learning, and game-based learning and teaching have moved educators away from teacher-centered education, encouraged them toward student-centered education, and revealed the importance of MALL (Kara, 2023). According to today's scholars and modern teaching methods, students can express their thoughts in environments where they can express themselves comfortably (Kucuk, 2023). In other words, Yucedal (2023) reported that students feel more of a sense of duty and gain self-confidence when integrated into the learning process rather than remaining passive. Since research methods and fields are very diverse today, the more students are directed to research, the more their curiosity increases, and they are allowed to feel like valuable individuals in society. While making these orientations, today's educational tools and the students' wishes should be considered, and the student's interests should never be put in the background. In this context, mobile-assisted learning provides good opportunities to meet the needs of students and teachers. It has been observed that when students are provided with internet-supported technological devices, especially mobile phones, their motivation and active participation in classes increase (Boussaid, 2024; Sepyanda et al., 2023). In general, the following statement can be used: If mobile phones are integrated into education in a planned and drawn-out way, the positive results will astonish everyone and increase the quality of education.

The most crucial reason mobile phones are used and preferred in all areas of life, especially in education, is that they can meet users' needs in many areas (Sabiri & Shah, 2023). Students can read books, watch matches, get help with homework, send messages, make video calls, and benefit from many other aspects via mobile devices. Apart from these areas, mobile devices have also gained the position they deserve in education (Nasution et al., 2023). Especially in countries with high welfare levels, technological mobile devices have been perfectly integrated into education and are actively used. Recently, mobile vehicles have become a savior during COVID-19, when students cannot be active at school due to illness (Kucuk, 2024). In addition, these devices have greatly supported students in receiving online or hybrid education (Kara, 2023). MALL has great importance not only for students but also for teachers (Kucuk, 2023). Teachers upload their lesson videos to various platforms so students can follow the lessons. This method allows them to reach students and not fall behind the curriculum. Teachers can also share online quiz links with students to evaluate the information they have learned while uploading lessons to the systems. When students finish their exams, they can see the correct answers that their teachers have uploaded to the system, and they improve the quality of education by correcting their mistakes. Thanks to these online quizzes, teachers can reach students quickly, the environment is not harmed because the paper is not used, and learning becomes more fun because students study in an environment they love (Yildiz, 2017). In addition, today's students and their parents prefer to access everything with a quick click rather than using paper and books as before. For this reason, through mobile devices, parents can see the grades their children have received and communicate with teachers simultaneously. For this reason, today's large educational institutions have invested heavily in learning management systems (LMS) and are reaping the rewards. Likewise, mobile tools benefit students and teachers and all individuals' personal development (Agrram et al., 2024; Celik et al., 2022). For example, a farmer can learn information about his animals that he does not know from the internet; a villager can do his job over the phone rather than going to the city center; a lawyer

can follow his case files via mobile devices, or a person in a nursing home can chat with friends online rather than complaining about loneliness. In line with these statements, it can be argued that mobile devices are in every aspect of life and are of great importance to people.

MALL is essential in foreign language teaching and contributes significantly to developing students' primary language skills (Küçük, 2023). One condition for the realization of MALL is the combination of classical education methods with technology. As soon as this integration is achieved, the advantages offered by MALL will be visible. For example, after teaching a topic in foreign language classes, the teacher can instantly test the students' academic levels by giving them a short quiz in the lesson's last five or ten minutes. Students can perform speaking activities via chatbots in their homes and comfortable environments and achieve fluency in their speech. On the other hand, thanks to mobile devices, students in writing lessons can check sample essays and choose models for themselves, or they can check the spelling and spelling rules of the essays they have written via mobile devices (Celik & Kara, 2024). This way, feedback will be received quickly, and the learning process will be accelerated. After all these processes, students can submit the homework they have prepared to their teachers within the exact second, and teachers can also give feedback on the student's assignments. In addition, students prefer writing on mobile devices to writing on paper and notebooks because the writing process is faster and more fun in online environments. Considering all these factors, MALL will maintain its importance today, in the future, and worldwide.

Literature Review

The popularity of technology has recently gained importance not only for those who benefit from this business in commercial areas but also for teachers, scholars, students, and educational institutions in the field of education (Kucuk, 2023). Many studies have investigated MALL's educational benefits, especially in foreign language learning (Kucuk, 2024; Yildiz, 2017; Yucedal, 2023). MALL emerged to support teachers combining computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and mobile learning (Nasution et al., 2023). In other words, it is integrated into education to support students' traditional learning methods with technology and to support education. Although the integration of MALL into education and foreign language learning progressed slowly when it first emerged, it gained rapid momentum in the late 2000s (Kucuk,2024; Salimi et al., 2024).

The role and importance of MALL in education has never lost its popularity. It has made much talk about itself in recent years. Parsa and Anjomshoa (2022) conducted a study to investigate the effect of MALL on the acquisition of grammar in Iranian institute students. In their study, which was conducted by creating control and experimental groups, the grammatical accuracy of the students in the experimental group who used game-based applications was much higher than that of the other group. As a result of their studies, they observed that such game applications increased students' motivation and participation in class (Parsa & Anjomshoa, 2022).

Many studies have been done about mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and vocabulary acquisition (Parsa & Anjomshoa, 2022; Sabiri & Shah, 2023; Kara, 2024). These studies have proven that technology-supported education is beneficial for vocabulary learning and that MALL is a very effective method compared to the traditional method. Many studies have been published examining telephone-assisted vocabulary learning when the subject is examined in more detail (Kara, 2023; Kucuk, 2024). When these studies are examined in general, it has been shown that mobile-assisted or telephone-assisted vocabulary teaching, unlike traditional methods,

provides students with richer visual resources and directs students to group activities, resulting in beneficial results.

In a study by Suwantarathip and Orawiwatnakul (2015), it was researched that integrating mobile devices into lessons greatly benefits vocabulary development. While conducting this study, they focused on the thesis that sending short messages to students could impact their vocabulary learning. As a result of the study, it was revealed that sending feedback to students via text messages increased both their motivation and their familiarity with the words. As a result of another similar study conducted on students, it was concluded that using mobile devices improved students' vocabulary and language skills (Shi & Tsai, 2024). They stated that this is because phones, which students use daily and are a constant part of their lives, play a dominant role. Based on these reasons, today's teachers will make significant progress in students' vocabulary and foreign language development if they integrate phones into the lesson correctly and for the purpose. Moreover, if students are guided correctly, more effective, collective, and productive results can be achieved.

In a recent study conducted by Yucedal (2023) on 60 students, a detailed study was presented on how Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) affects students' writing competence. In this study, control and experimental groups were created, and these two groups had essays written for 12 weeks. The control group wrote essays using classical methods, but the experimental group was supported with mobile devices. As a result of the qualitative and quantitative data obtained, it has been demonstrated that MALL increases students' grades and motivation and generally positively affects their perspective on English lessons. In another similar study, Gheytasi et al. (2015) stated that smartphones have become a part of life and that using them correctly will accelerate language learning and add beneficial results to this process. As a result of studies conducted on 60 high school students, the effects of smartphones on students' reading development were investigated. The study showed that the experimental group formed by integrating MALL produced more effective results than the control group, which performed reading activities following classical methods. The same study was conducted by Plana et al. (2013) on university students. Similar results were observed in this study. It has been noticed that students' grades have increased significantly in language classes enriched with smartphones and technology.

When research and studies examine the effects of mobile devices on vocabulary teaching, we see striking results. In his study, Fageeh (2013) investigated the effects of mobile devices on students' motivation and came to the following conclusion. Since students can use mobile devices wherever and whenever they want, their motivation and success in vocabulary lessons have increased. In a similar study, Alhadiah (2020) put forward a study to measure Saudi EFL students' opinions and attitudes about MALL. As a result of this study, which lasted 14 weeks, it was stated that the students had positive attitudes about MALL; they liked the ease of use of these tools. They wanted to pursue MALL-integrated vocabulary education in the future. In addition to this information, Alavinia and Qoitassi (2013) stated that mobile applications produce positive results in vocabulary learning for students when their pedagogical purposes are expressed correctly. Bieńkowska et al. (2021) conducted an extensive study on 114 students to investigate the effect of MALL on vocabulary teaching. In their studies, they wrote that it is wrong to put language students into a specific mold and dictate a goal to them. In addition, it is understood from the study that in classrooms enriched with mobile devices, students' motivation is strengthened, they feel like they belong to a community, and they have self-confidence.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined the positive benefits of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on vocabulary learning and teaching. It also examines the change graph in the course grades of students receiving MALL-integrated vocabulary education. In this context, two research questions ere created.

1. How does Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) affect students' vocabulary learning?

2. What difference will there be in the course grades of students receiving an education using traditional methods and MALL-integrated education in vocabulary lessons?

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, a mixed-method design was applied. At the beginning of the study, a pre-test was applied to measure the students' vocabulary levels. A post-test was applied to examine the levels reached by both the control and experimental group students due to the six-week study and the differences between them. In this way, quantitative data was obtained. At the end of six weeks, a semi-structured interview was conducted to obtain the students' opinions about mobile-assisted language learning, and qualitative data was obtained by recording the students' opinions.

Participants

For this study, students from two different classes of the language preparatory school of Tishk University were selected using the Stratified Sampling Method in the 2023-2024 academic year. Students were placed in control and experimental groups according to the voluntary procedure, and general information about the study was given to the students before the study started. Fifteen students were placed in the control group, the same 15 students in the experimental group, and the English level of the students was at B2 level according to the common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR). Both groups had male and female students, and the study lasted precisely six weeks.

Data Collection Procedure

This is a 6-week study at the language preparatory school of Tishk University in the 2023-2024 academic year. Before starting the study, the students were given the necessary information about the study, and the activities that would be done during the six-week study were clearly explained to the students. After this stage, the students were voluntarily placed in control and experimental groups. An attempt was made to accommodate students of mixed genders in both classes, and 15 students were assigned to each class. A pre-test, among the sources of Oxford University Press's Scope book and created to determine the students' vocabulary knowledge levels, was administered to both classes, and the student's grades were recorded.

After determining the students' starting levels for the study, the lessons were taught using traditional vocabulary teaching methods to the students assigned to the control group. To explain it in a little more detail, the students in this group tried to find the meanings of foreign words they did not know by using their dictionaries during the lesson, and when they had difficulty, they got support from their teachers and tried to find the meanings of the words. On the other hand, students in the experimental group were allowed to use their mobile devices during the lesson, and an interactive lesson-teaching environment was created. Students in this class looked up the meanings

of words they did not know in online dictionaries through the internet on their phones. If there were still those who did not understand, they looked at the images of the words and got information about the words they did not understand. In addition, some students looked at how the new words they learned should be used in sentences on some word platforms and then took notes in their notebooks. While writing these words on their phones, if they made any spelling mistakes, they were informed about the correct spelling and pronunciation of the words, thanks to the automatic correction applications on their phones. Students who do not like to work hard could write words they did not know on ChatGPT to learn their meanings and gain extensive information about how the words should be written correctly and how they should be used within the word.

As a result of the six-week study, a thirty-question post-test, prepared by Oxford University Press and checked by the professional teachers at the university language school, was applied to find out the students' level of vocabulary learning, and the student's grades were recorded, just like in the pre-test. As a result of this six-week study, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the students in the experimental group, and the answers given by the students were analyzed. This interview aimed to get students' opinions about Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and determine how this technique contributes to their vocabulary development and grades in vocabulary lessons. Before the interview questions were directed at the students, they were examined by an expert staff, and it was discussed whether they were appropriate for the student levels. Some questions unsuitable for the students' level were corrected at this stage. In addition, care was taken to protect privacy, and students were informed that their answers would not be shared with other students or teachers using their names.

Findings

Table 1. *Pre-test and Post-test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups.*

Variables	**Measurement**	***N***	***M***	***SD***	***t***	***df***	***p***
Pre-test	Control	15	65.33	12.269			
Pre-test	Experimental	15	64.53	13.437	.170	28	.866
Post-test	Control	15	66.93	8.924			
Post-test	Experimental	15	79.80	9.135	-3.902	28	.001

Table one illustrates the impact of Mobile Assisted Language Learning on students' vocabulary acquisition and the alteration in their course grades. Analysis of SPSS t-statistics revealed no significant difference between the control and experimental groups when the Pre-test was administered at the study's outset. Based on the findings of this pre-test, sourced from Oxford University Press and approved by the university examination council, the average score of the experimental group is 65.33, while the average score of the control group is 64.54. The results indicate that the groups were constructed uniformly and that there was no substantial disparity in the students' academic levels at the study's inception. Upon conclusion of the six-week study, a post-test was administered to both groups to assess their vocabulary proficiency. The pre-test results indicated a minimal difference of 0.8 between the two groups, which escalated to 12.87 in

the post-test results. The control group's score, which underwent conventional and teacher-centred vocabulary instruction, rose from 65.33 to 66.93. Conversely, the results of the experimental group reveal remarkably significant findings. The initial level was 64.53 at the commencement of the study, increasing to 79.80 by its conclusion, as indicated by post-test findings. SPSS-29 t-statistics analysis indicated a significant difference of .001 between the two groups. Upon examination of all the acquired data, it was demonstrated through assessments that MALL significantly enhanced students' vocabulary acquisition and academic performance in their textbooks.

Interview Analysis

A semi-structured interview was conducted to obtain the opinions of the students participating in the study about Mobile-integrated vocabulary teaching and to find out how MALL benefited their grades in vocabulary lessons. The interview analysis of 15 students is as follows.

When the results of the semi-structured interview applied to the students were examined, they generally stated that the students saw MALL as an interesting and effective method. Most students appreciated this method of learning new words, as they could access mobile devices whenever and wherever they wanted, thanks to mobile devices. The students particularly emphasized that pictures, videos, and multimedia features that enable interactive work on mobile devices make learning more fun and allow them to remember words more permanently. They also stated that this process significantly positively contributed to their course grades, as they could obtain the word translations or visuals they needed whenever they wanted due to the accessibility of mobile devices outside of class.

Another thing that the students emphasized was that they were constantly exposed to the language through mobile devices, thanks to MALL. They stated that notifications and reminders, especially on mobile devices, constantly present them with new words and that some students learn these words even if they are unintentional. The common point that students generally express is that they live in the age of technology and that they love and respect teachers who allow using mobile devices in language classes more than others. Some students expressed that their mobile devices were just tools they used to pass the time in their normal times. However, they were grateful to their teachers who integrated these devices into vocabulary learning. Another point obtained from student interviews is that these devices increase the competitive classroom environment and benefit students' personal development. They stated that this situation allowed students to comprehend the course materials more effectively.

In addition to the benefits mentioned above, a few students touched on some negative aspects of MALL. The most expressed concern is that it causes a lack of attention due to other applications on mobile devices and that it sometimes negatively affects the ability to focus on the lesson. Although there were generally positive comments about MALL, some students stated that an adequate explanation should be given to students about using these devices before such applications are carried out. Despite these minor difficulties, the general conclusion obtained from the interview analysis is that mobile devices positively contribute to students' vocabulary learning and improve course grades.

Discussion

This study revealed that MALL increases the speed of students' vocabulary learning and positively contributes to students' grades in vocabulary-containing courses. As in the Kucuk (2023) study, this study shows that integrating technology, especially mobile devices, into vocabulary and

language lessons provides students with more effective and attractive environments. When the quantitative data obtained from pre-test and post-tests and the qualitative data obtained from student interviews are examined, we can reach the following discussions.

First, in the light of the pre-test, which is the first step of the study, and the post-test applied to the students at the end of the study, we see that mobile-integrated vocabulary learning positively contributes to the student's grades and vocabulary development. As in the Kara (2023) study, no significant difference was observed between the control and experimental groups in the pre-test analyses applied to the students at the beginning of the study. According to SPSS-29 t-statistics analyses, the control group showed an average of 65.33 because of the pre-test, while the experimental group showed a similar result of 64.53. These results revealed that both groups were formed correctly, and their academic levels were close to each other. On the other hand, because of the six-week study, the control group recorded a small acceleration, as in the study of Celik and Kara (2024), while the experimental group showed serious academic improvement. While the control group achieved a success rate of 66.93 in the post-test results, the experimental group received mobile-integrated vocabulary learning and showed a surprising average of 79.80. The p-value of .001 proves that MALL-integrated education seriously contributes to students' vocabulary acquisition.

These results obtained are like the results of many other studies (Kara, 2023; Kara & Kucuk, 2023). According to the general conclusion obtained from these studies, it can make learning more effective and enjoyable when integrated correctly and according to its purpose. Educational videos, images, educational games, dictionary applications, and spelling correction applications, especially on mobile devices, provide students with easy access to information that is not available in traditional methods (Shi & Tsai, 2024). According to the data obtained from the post-test results, it was seen that mobile-integrated vocabulary learning enabled students to both learn vocabulary and increase their course grades in a positive way.

In line with the qualitative information obtained from the semi-structured interview analysis obtained from the students, we see how MALL benefits their vocabulary learning and what contribution it has to their course grades. As in the Kucuk (2024) study, when the interview analyses are examined, it is seen that many of the students are satisfied with the MALL integrated vocabulary education, and this satisfaction is understood in their answers to the interview questions. Many of the students who participated in the study mentioned the convenience of mobile devices due to their accessibility anytime and anywhere. Students stated that they especially liked the interactive aspects of mobile devices and were pleased to use them. Finally, students stated that they participated in classes more actively thanks to MALL and switched from passive to active roles. These findings show that today's students are searching for a change and are unsatisfied with traditional methods. As Kucuk and Daskan (2024) say in their study, while we live in the age of technology, we need to eliminate the teacher model hiding behind old blackboards and embrace smart boards and mobile devices.

In addition to the generally positive feedback obtained from the interview analyses, there was some worrying feedback. These generally occur when students are distracted by applications unrelated to the course and lose concentration while using mobile devices. For this reason, more effective results will be produced if both teachers and students are informed correctly about the study before conducting a mobile-assisted language learning study and if they work under control.

Conclusion

This six-week study was conducted to investigate the effect of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) on students' vocabulary learning and course grades. During the study, the development of both the control group, which followed the traditional and teacher-centered method, and the experimental group, which worked with integrated mobile devices, were monitored. We see how MALL affects learning outcomes in line with both the quantitative data obtained from pre-test and post-tests analyzed using SPSS-29 and the feedback obtained from semi-structured interviews. From the data obtained, we clearly understand that MALL increases not only students' vocabulary development and course grades but also students' motivation and active participation in classes.

In line with the quantitative data obtained, a significant improvement was noted in the vocabulary and course grades of the experimental group that received MALL-integrated education compared to the control group that learned vocabulary with traditional methods. Particularly because of the data obtained from post-test analyses, students who received education integrated with mobile devices showed serious academic success compared to their other friends. This great improvement in students' vocabulary learning and course grades shows us that mobile devices' dynamic and interactive features seriously support students' vocabulary learning. In addition, MALL's ability to be accessed anytime and anywhere has helped students continue their learning process outside of class.

In addition to this information, students' positive thoughts and concerns about MALL were analyzed in line with the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews applied to the students. Students generally expressed positive opinions about mobile-integrated vocabulary learning and emphasized that this application is convenient and effective. They stated that they liked the flexibility aspects, such as being able to look at word meanings, pictures, and videos in the lessons. Interview data also revealed that mobile-supported education creates a competitive and interactive environment among students. Besides, as Kucuk (2024) said, some students have expressed some concerns about mobile devices. Some of these concerns are as follows. While students use mobile devices in vocabulary lessons, their attention shifts to other applications, and they become disconnected from the main purpose. These concerns have shown us that while MALL provides many advantages in foreign language education and vocabulary teaching, educators must develop strategies to minimize students' distractions.

As a result of the qualitative and quantitative data obtained, it was determined that MALL had an undeniable contribution to vocabulary learning and course grades. In order to make the learning process more interactive, competitive and entertaining, MALL provides richer and higher quality opportunities compared to traditional methods. By using the right strategies, the challenges that may arise can be minimized and mobile assisted learning can be applied to students in the most appropriate way in the age of technology. As a result of these methods, serious differences will emerge in both students' vocabulary learning and course grades.

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Effectiveness of Taboo Word Game on Augmenting Business Vocabulary Competency Through Reflective Action Research

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Abstract
Teaching vocabulary in English as a Second Language contexts sparks ongoing debate, especially regarding whether to employ explicit methods or rely on implicit approaches like providing meanings and examples. One of the promising solution is language games, offering students a non-traditional and engaging way to apply their language skills. This study investigates the effectiveness of the *Taboo Word Game* as a tool in enhancing the business vocabulary of 23 private college students in Malaysia. It is significant because not only does it leverage an engaging, interactive approach to language learning, but it also encourages students to think creatively and expand their lexical range. The data were collected using Action Research via pre-post tests, students' reflective journals, and researchers' reflections, analyzing quantitative and qualitative findings. Results show that the *Taboo Word Game* significantly improves students' vocabulary competence. Students' reflections on the other hand, revealed several key themes, including *Taboo Word Game'*s positive impact on vocabulary acquisition, its promotion of collaborative learning, the enjoyment it brings to the learning process, and the development of English communication skills. The implication for vocabulary instruction, even at the college level, is clear. Incorporating games into the curriculum is an excellent way to meet student's educational needs while also catering to their preferences. This study underscores the potential of language games like the *Taboo Word Game* as a valuable tool in English as a Second Language, making learning more engaging and effective.

Keywords: English as a Second Language, language games, vocabulary competence, taboo word game, reflective action research

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Introduction

Mastering the English language can be captivating and challenging for individuals with limited vocabulary. English Language is a fascinating yet critical language to master when a language learner has limited vocabulary (Mohd Mokhtar & Rahelan, 2024; Trang et al., 2023) Vocabulary in communication is necessary for comprehension, transmitting information and sharing common understanding from one person to another(Ahmad et al., 2024; Panmei & Waluyo, 2023; Rahim et al., 2021). However, the process is more likely to be passive or unsuccessful if the English Second Language (ESL) learners do not possess pertinent vocabulary. On this occasion, it is noticeable that the targeted participants have great ideas but cannot convey them due to a lack of vocabulary (Lestari & Damanik, 2024; Tefa et al., 2024; Warnby, 2023; Faharol Zubir et al., 2018). During conversations in a second language, individuals often exhibit a distinct pattern. When faced with a lack of vocabulary or the inability to recall a specific word, participants frequently alternate between their native language and the target language.

Despite being aware of the importance of English vocabulary, ESL learners are still reluctant and not confident to exchange ideas in English Language because of not getting the right words to convey (Ina et al., 2015; Khamis & Abdullah, 2017, 2018). In the context of language acquisition, it is noteworthy that when an individual engages in conversation in their target language, there is a discernible pattern wherein, upon encountering a lexical gap or the inability to retrieve the precise term, the interlocutors tend to oscillate between their native tongue and the second language, thereby illustrating the complex dynamics of multilingual communication (De Wilde, 2023; Levy & Hanulíková, 2023). In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education aspires to increase the quality of graduates and to increase graduate employability, whereby unemployment among graduates could be attributed to lack of experience, poor communication skills, low English proficiency, and mismatch of the profession and the marketplace(Ina et al., 2015; Suryani et al., 2024). Poor vocabulary and inability to communicate their messages during job interviews have impacted their chances of employability (F. Zubir et al., 2018). In addition, (Mohd Mokhtar & Rahelan, 2024) claim that “the English language proficiency of many students in Malaysian schools remains low, even after efforts to raise awareness of the language have been made. This is partly due to deficient vocabulary levels. A lack of ability to read, write, listen, or speak the language will eventually result from this” (p.1224).

Concurrently, it has been argued that the methods of teaching vocabulary in ESL contexts are highly debatable and implicit (Panmei & Waluyo, 2023). It was claimed that the teaching of vocabulary is not given a similar weightage with other skills. Besides, the methods of vocabulary teaching are inconsistent with learners’ competency and many students face one form of difficulty or another at different stages of vocabulary learning (Aneeis Hashim et al., 2023; Yaacob et al., 2019). “Nevertheless, finding the right methods and material that are engaging, interesting, and relevant at the same time assisting the students in learning is one of the biggest challenges in teaching English” c. Therefore, this study attempts to highlight the effectiveness of using the *Taboo Word Game* to enhance college students’ vocabulary competence. The research objectives of the study are formulated as follows:

1. To investigate the effectiveness of using Taboo Word Game (TWG) on business vocabulary competency among college students.
2. To explore the students’ experiences of using Taboo Word Game (TWG) in enhancing business vocabulary.

This study is significant because not only it leverages an engaging, interactive approach to language learning, it also promotes active recall, quick thinking, and effective communication skills, as students must find alternative ways to convey meaning. Additionally, incorporating games like *Taboo* in academic settings can increase motivation and reduce the anxiety often associated with vocabulary learning. It is a practical and enjoyable strategy to support college students' language development. The findings will contribute to second language vocabulary competence among college students and researchers from other contexts can replicate this study to suit their contexts.

Literature Review

Vocabulary in Language Learning

Harmer (2007) akin vocabulary to vital organs and the flesh for the body of language and the ability to manipulate grammatical structure is more promising when the right words are used. This study adds that practical communication among ESL learners as well as teaching and learning of the second language would be tremendously difficult with the absence of vocabulary.

Prior research revealed that there are numerous methods for expanding one's vocabulary and that learning new words requires repetition (Al-Ghazo & Ta'amneh, 2022). The difference between explicit vocabulary instruction and incidental vocabulary learning among English teachers from America, Europe, Asia, and Africa was also extensively studied, and found that both ESL and EFL teachers prefer incidental vocabulary learning (Astika, 2015; Ismail et al., 2021, 2023; Zhang & Graham, 2020). However, despite the preference, many ESL teachers opt for explicit learning in teaching vocabulary such as emphasizing word lists that learners need to know, deciphering word formation, and introducing and building fluency in new words. Astika (2015) for instance, found that the EFL teachers favour teaching vocabulary by guessing meaning from the context. It is argued that non-native learners should be exposed to English through reading more to promote incidental vocabulary development. Taking heed of these studies (Al-Ghazo & Ta'amneh, 2022; Astika, 2015; Zhang & Graham, 2020), the potential of instructional strategies of incidental learning and guessing meaning in teaching ESL/EFL vocabulary is to be explored.\

Teaching of Vocabulary through Games

The advancement of technology somehow accelerates the use of technology for language learning. The adeptness of technology prepares students with better presentation skills, innovative qualities, knowledge, and competitiveness (Khamis, 2020; Zain & Sailin, 2020). Games are extensively studied in ESL classrooms as they are effective in language learning, particularly in vocabulary acquisition (Al-Obaydi et al., 2023; Cabrera-Solano, 2022; Levy & Hanulíková, 2023; Rasti-Behbahani, 2021). These studies mentioned, clearly explained the benefits of games in language learning which include providing exposure to the target language, increasing engagement, improving language skills, structures, and vocabulary, and enhancing learners' involvement in communication. Additionally, teaching language skills using games has been proven to work with learners, regardless of age (Yaacob et al., 2021)In a study on children aged 6-7 years old, games have been reported as having many benefits for younger children regarding vocabulary acquisition. Many other studies also promote the advantages of using games in language learning (Cabrera-Solano, 2022; Hanghoj et al., 2022; Pozharytska et al., 2023), suggesting that integrating language games would be a worthy method in teaching vocabulary for all ages.

In contrast, researchers also argue that proper use of games in teaching may be hindered by the teachers' lack of knowledge of the computer games and effective teachers' feedback (Cabrera-Solano, 2022) which include being too absorbed in the game that could sideline the intended skills for learning, especially in the absence of precise instructions, and guidelines (Liu & Duan, 2022; Willilams et al., 2021; Yau & Ifenthaler, 2020). In other words, random tapping on a word and information alone, without proper instructions does not guarantee that the acquisition of the word has been obtained by the learners.

Related Studies on Taboo Word Games in Vocabulary Learning

Taboo Word Game is a dynamic and interactive approach to teaching vocabulary, where students learn through engaging, real-time language challenges. In the game, players take turns describing a target word to their team without using specific "taboo" words or phrases closely associated with it. This restriction pushes students to think creatively, encourage using synonyms, descriptive phrases, and broader vocabulary to convey meaning. The game format not only promotes vocabulary expansion but also reinforces understanding of word associations, connotations, and contextual applications. By challenging players to avoid standard terms, *Taboo* helps students avoid relying on basic vocabulary, fostering critical thinking and enhancing their language skills in a fun, low-stress environment. This playful, collaborative aspect of learning can be especially practical in language classes, where it boosts engagement, communication skills, and vocabulary retention.

Recently, many studies have shown the effectiveness of *Taboo Word Games* in teaching vocabulary among secondary school students in EFL contexts like Indonesia (Agung & Sri, 2023; Lestari & Damanik, 2024; Lumbangaol, 2021; Siregar & Fithriani, 2023; Tefa et al., 2024). While most of these studies noted improvements in vocabulary retention, increased engagement, and reduced anxiety in learning English as a foreign language, they were mainly focused on vocabulary competence in secondary education, but very few concentrate on tertiary education, particularly college students. In support of that, Bader and Razzaq (2021) claimed that "despite the fact that these studies addressed the use of games in learning vocabulary, none of them sought to deal with this strategy to teach English vocabulary" (p. 75). In a study conducted among a group of female refugee students belonging to low-income families and not truly motivated to learn English in Jordan, Bader and Razzaq (2021) discovered that games also had a positive impact on at-risk students' motivation (Bader & Razzaq, 2021). Furthermore, research on TWG's efficacy in improving L2 vocabulary among ESL college students is still scarce, as recent studies have concentrated on shared knowledge concerns (Pollmann & Krahmer, 2018) rather than vocabulary development. Therefore, this study would further examine the efficiency of teaching L2 vocabulary using *Taboo Word Game.*

Theoretical Underpinning

Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis and Davies and Elder's (2004) Technology Acceptance Model serve as the theoretical underpinning of this study. According to the Affective Filter hypothesis, personality traits, motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence are examples of affective factors that may hinder the acquisition of a second language. Krashen further suggested that learners fare better with good self-image, high motivation, self-confidence, extroversion and a low level of anxiety. Meanwhile, another underpinning theory is the Technology Acceptance Model (Davies & Elder, 2004) which is based on two primary factors which are perceived ease of

use and perceived usefulness. These two factors influence an individual's intention to use new technology. The TAM model posits that a person is more likely to use digital games when they perceive them as providing mental stimulation and as easy to learn. Davies & Elders (2004) hypothesize that the users' atitudes in using technology depends on their perceptions of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Perceived ease of use signifies the degree to which they believe technology does not exert extra effort. Perceived usefulness means that if they think that technology would enhance their performance, they are more likely to accept it. In other words, if they consider technology is easy to learn, they will adopt it.

Methods

This study adopts the Action Research model (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Action research components are the inclusion of both action and reflection. Action research is different from the standard practice of teaching by including both problem-posing and problem-solving. In turn, gives insights into changes and improvements in the teaching situation. While teachers may be complacent about research-based knowledge or even exclude research from their teaching (Ismail et al., 2021; Kroksmark & Åman Och, 2018), Action Research (AR) is taken up by some teachers as Action Research embraces problem identification, action planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection(Aneeis Hashim et al., 2023).

Participants and The Course

One private college in Penang Malaysia, was chosen based on convenient sampling. A total of 23 students who registered in the Certificate of Business Management program were selected to participate. These students were taking BLL0033 English Language Competency. After completing 2 years of the certificate program, they would progress to either a Diploma in Accounting (DIA), Diploma in e-Commerce (DEC), Diploma in Management (DIM), Diploma in Culinary Arts (DCA) or Diploma in Hotel Management (DHM). The selected students' achievement level in English was moderate based on their SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education). One of the researchers cum instructor, and students have 2 hours of face-to-face lecture with 1 hour of tutorial classes per week. Table One shows the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. *Demographic information of the participants*

Category	Group	Number of participants (n	Percentage (%)
Year of Study	Semester 1	9	39
	Semester 2	10	43
	Semester 3	4	18
Ethnic	Malay	5	22
	Chinese	9	39
	Indian	9	39
Age	18	14	60
	19	6	26
	20	3	13

As indicated in Table One, the students aged between 18 and 20, with mixed ethnic backgrounds, nine Chinese, nine Indian and five Malay students. ten of them were in the second semester, nine were in the first semester, and four were in the third semester. The ethnicity is taken into account for possibility of having different mother tongue.

Research Instruments

Multiple data collection methods were carried out including pre and post-tests, observation, students' and researcher's reflections. Pre-tests and Post-Tests were conducted to understand and gain insight into the participants' business vocabulary competency level before and after the implementation of TWG. Observation, on the other hand, is the act of noticing something or inference from something experienced, particularly classroom atmosphere. In this study the observation was on the students' interaction, and reactions towards the TWG. The researcher recorded pre-while-post observations throughout the action research cycles. Statements and reflection notes based on the observation were also added as modifications for the following cycles. As for reflection, students wrote a 100-word journal at the end of the game reflecting on their experiences of participating in the study. The teacher stimulated students' reflective writing by posting questions that can be used to write their entries. A pre, while and post-reflective writing were conducted throughout the 3 cycles of action research. Next, a focused group interview was conducted to gather students' experiences and perspectives of TWG. The interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. Students were also required to keep a reflection journal record in Padlet.

Pilot Test

A pilot study was conducted at ATC, a private college in Penang, to validate the research instruments. Twenty students undergoing a Diploma in Business were selected. They have similar levels of English proficiency and background to the main participants. The instruments and the items were tested for relatively high internal consistency. A reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is acceptable in most social science research. Revision was conducted on the problematic parts and items of the tests.

Data Collection Procedures

This action research involves three cycles which include problem identification, intervention and evaluation. The research took place over one semester. The action research cycle includes planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. In Cycle 1, a pre-test was conducted to examine students' vocabulary competency before the implementation of TWG. In Cycle two, an intervention was conducted whereby students were introduced to TWG using a business vocabulary e-book for 1 hour each week for four weeks. In Cycle three, the effectiveness of TWG was evaluated based on the post-test, students' reflections, and interviews. An ebook, 'Business Vocabulary in Use' (Mascull, 2009) was selected. The selection is because the book content and the vocabulary are relevant to the course.

Taboo Word Game

This study utilized the *Taboo Word Game (TWG)* as an intervention. *Taboo* is a word-guessing group game. In this game, a player known as the describer, illustrates the word from a card. The guessers identify the target word. Five to six printed forbidden words were pasted on the cards that the describer must not use. In *Taboo Word Game*, the target word was written in bold on the top of the cards. Three to five "taboo" words were written in the lower lines and should not be used. In the game, the player must work on getting the players on their team to guess the word on the card. In giving out clues to their team members, the player must not use the words written on top of the cards or in the lower lines.

In this study, the game is adapted to the selected participants. The word cards contain words targeted for business vocabulary. The researcher selected fifty target words from the e-book and the course structure. A two by four card was created for each target word. The total is 50-word cards. In the game, a set of 50-word cards were used. The cards were split among the players during the first session and the second session. In the final match, five groups of students play simulteneously using five different colors of word cards. This game cultivates students' linguistic knowledge through reformulation and rephrasing; otherwise, the player is disqualified. *Taboo Word Game* was effectively adjusted and applied in various instructive settings. In this intervention, new game cards were added without major transformation to exploit mutiple fields, including business, science, and mathematics.

Data Analysis

In the course, to determine the effectiveness of the TWG to improve vocabulary competence and to explore the students' experiences during the process, the collected data from pre and post-tests were analyzed using the statistical procedure of paired-sample t-test by comparing the mean scores using SPSS Statistics Version 24. Meanwhile, qualitative data from students' journals were examined using thematic analysis to determine the students' perspectives on TWG to develop business vocabulary competency involving seven stages: transcribing, reading and familiarizing, coding, generating, defining and naming, reviewing and finalizing themes or subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Findings

The findings on the pre-post test results for the quantitative data and students' reflections on the qualitative data are discussed. Table Two shows the findings on students' vocabulary competencies.

Table 2. *Pre-test and post-test mean scores of business vocabulary competency*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std Mean Error	Correlation	Sig
Pre_Test	17.1739	23	4.17408	0.87036	0.633	0.001
Post_Test	19.0435	23	3.11124	0.64874	0.633	0.001

The findings in Table Two indicate that the average mean for post-test scores was higher than pre-test scores, and the difference between the two mean scores was significant. There is a strong positive correlation between TWG and the post-test.

Table Two shows the Pre and Post-Test Results of students' vocabulary competencies. A paired sample t-test was performed to test the hypothesis of the pre-test (M = 17.1, SD = 4.17) and the post-test mean scores (M = 19.0, SD = 3.11). Before conducting the analysis, the assumption of normally distributed difference scores was examined. Table Three shows the assumption was considered satisfactory with the t value = 2.746 (22 degrees of freedom).

Table 3. *Pre-test and post-test results of students' vocabulary competencies*

Mean	Std.Deviation	Std Error	Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre	1.869	3.26	0.680	3.28	-0.457	2.74	22	0 .012
Post	57				71	71	6	

The findings in Table Three indicate a significant difference of p= 0.012 between the pre- and post-test scores. The findings suggest TWG helped to improve students' vocabulary competencies.

Students Perspectives On The Use of TWG In Enhancing Their Business Vocabulary

Next, students' reflective journals were analyzed to explore students' experiences of using TWG. Four themes were identified based on thematic analysis. The four themes are: TWG is beneficial for vocabulary learning, TWG develops a collaborative learning culture, TWG enables learning to be fun, and TWG provides an opportunity to improve communication skills. The following extracts illustrate students' perspectives on the usefulness of TWG in their business vocabulary acquisition based on their experiences.

TWG Benefits Vocabulary Learning

The highest occurring theme in the students' reflections is that TWG was perceived as beneficial for vocabulary learning, as 82% mentioned it in their journals. The students declared that TWG enabled them to gain new business vocabulary and to understand its meaning. Student 7 explained that he gained knowledge of the words by using the synonyms, and antonyms provided, while student 8 mentioned that the game helped her to understand the meaning better. Both students 7 and 8 explained that TWG helped them to remember or recall the words quickly.

> "This game helped us to gain knowledge and help ourselves to remember what the word is about. We could use the help of sentences, synonyms and antonyms, to explain the particular word…There is certainly some benefit in this game." (Student 7, Reflective journal).

> "It can help me learn the word and recall back the word easily. This game can help us use our brain more efficiently and improve our English skills." (Student 8, Reflective journal).

> "This game helps me understand a lot of words I can't <understand>and sentences I can't< understand>. This game will be of great help to me in the future and, practicing new vocab every week may be a good thing" (Student 10, Reflective journal).

Student eight, for example, explained that she learned to use her brain more effectively and improved her English. Similarly, Student 10 said she could understand more words and sentences through this game and recommended it be used every week. Similarly, Student 23 felt that TWG was beneficial as he could memorize new business words without drilling exercises. He said,

> "TWG is a beneficial game for us. Even without exercise or drilling. I think now I'm ready for the exam since I have memorized the words through TWG. I have learned a lot of words during the games." (Student 23, Reflective journal).

Student 20 mentioned that she learned many new words, and most importantly, the game made the students speak English more. Meanwhile, Student 22 explained that he liked the game because he could relate the meaning of the new business words to real life. He stated that "*this game makes the words like normal words; it's like automatic*". In other words, the element of incidental learning makes him feel more aware of the meanings.

> "…I have learned so many new words and knowledge, taboo game also can help us to remember the new words. The benefit of the game is that it make people speak more English and learn more new words." (Student 20, Reflective journal)

> "This is an awesome way to learn business words! Even the terms that I don't know last time now I can easily remember and understand. This game makes the words like normal words it's like automatic. I can relate the meaning to real life. Now I'm very confident. I can do my final exam better in English, and also basic business management cos every word that we play is related to each other subjects, and I'm happy to kill two birds with one stone." (Student 22, Reflective journal).

Interestingly, Student 11 revealed that the game trained him to react faster upon seeing new vocabulary. As such, he felt that he had improved his English. "I like the game because it helps to improve my language skills. The game trains my reacting speed, understanding those words that I do not understand. It also improves our English language levels. I learned a lot of new vocabulary from playing this game." (Student 11, Reflective journal).

TWG Provides an Opportunity to Improve Communication Skills

Students revealed that working in smaller teams enabled them to finish all the word cards fleetingly because communication between team members occurred efficiently. Eleven students agreed that TWG could improve their communication skills. The following are their perspectives on communication skills. Student 19 mentioned that the game helped him to achieve his learning objective, which is to improve his English speaking ability. Similarly, Student 20 indicated that he learned new words from this game and that these words that he recalled helped him to speak more English with his friends.

> "In my opinion the taboo is an entertaining game. It help us to achieve our learning objective. Moreover, we also discover the meaning of different words and how to use them in a sentence. It is really worth playing this game because this game helps us to increase our knowledge." (Student 19, reflective journal).

> "I have learned so many keyword and knowledge, taboo game also can help us to remember the new words. The benefit of the game is can make people speak more English and learn more new words." (Student 20, reflective journal).

Finally, Student 22 indicated that this game, which was conducted in a fun way, helped her to become more relaxed and 'cool' as she did not have any fear of making mistakes.

> "It helps me to relax and to stay cool in the class, and not worry about making mistakes even if I cannot guess the word or cannot explain. My team and I still have fun and enjoy the game." (Student 22, reflective journal)

In summary, the students communicated their desire to have such safe learning environment, and atmosphere. This environment enable them to communicate in the target language freely. Many of them stated that when they were having fun playing, they were not anxious about using the target language, and they did not worry about making mistakes. Consequently, this has encouraged them to communicate more in English.

Discussion

The first research question was to investigate the effectiveness of using the Taboo Word Game (TWG) on business vocabulary competency among college students. The pre-test and post-test scores indicate that there was a significant difference between the use of TWG and vocabulary competency before and after the game. This difference explains that TWG helped college students to improve their vocabulary competencies. The findings are align with earlier studies (Agung & Sri, 2023; Lestari & Damanik, 2024; Lumbangaol, 2021; Siregar & Fithriani, 2023; Tefa et al., 2024). In addition, the second research question identified four themes: TWG is beneficial for vocabulary learning, develops a collaborative learning culture, enables learning to be fun, and provides an opportunity to improve English communication skills. These findings are align with other past studies that indicate that games are beneficial for vocabulary acquisition because they are fun and challenging (Cabrera-Solano, 2022). Students were found to be more engaged in the vocabulary learning process.

When collaboration with peers is encouraged, their anxiety is lowered, and motivation is increased because they are aware that their teammates would provide support for them. They would not get upset if their attempts were wrong. They were no longer afraid of making mistakes in this fun learning environment. As such, Krashen's Affective Filter seems relevant in this context. The context is that, when anxiety is reduced, their motivation to learn new vocabulary is increased. They lamented that they communicated more in English during games. Affective Filter becomes a positive push factor during game time involving collaboration with classmates. The researcher also has personally encountered competitive relationships among high-flyers and bliss ignorance among weaker learners. Hence, witnessing both leagues of learners work together to achieve a common goal was a delightful moment; especially when the collaborative culture of learning is developed in the language classroom. In addition, Davies & Elder's (2004) Technology Acceptance Model is also relatable in this study. When the students perceived that technology incorporated into games was helpful for their language learning, they were more willing to adopt it.

Students' motivation to participate and learn vocabulary also increased due to the effort taken by the researcher cum instructor to observe, reflect and revise the game in each cycle using an action research approach. Undoubtedly, the Action Research approach has provided an avenue for the researcher to improve his practices while enhancing students' learning. The researcher learned from the adjustments made to the game activity to suit learners' competencies and preferences when learning vocabulary (Yaacob et al., 2018; Suryani et al., 2023). Similarly, Astika's (2015) findings on incidental vocabulary learning are somehow relatable to this study in her view that EFL teachers also preferred incidental learning for their students particularly in using the context to guess the word meaning. While studies like those of Ifenthaler and Yau (2020), Liu and Duan (2022), and Willilams et al. (2021) have shown that factors influencing the success rate of learning among college students are varied and complex, pedagogical and instructional strategies help to foster language learning. We have provided evidence that college students also preferred games as one of the instructional strategies in their English language learning. Therefore, language instructors need to equip themselves not only with technological knowledge but also with technological pedagogical content knowledge. After all, communication knowledge is required to suit the 21st century learners' needs and preferences. TWG is highly suitable to be included as a classroom activity in future English classes, even with adult learners. Participants in our study also believed that TWG is helpful in learning new business vocabulary.

Conclusion

This study was set to investigate the effectiveness of using *Taboo Word Game* in enhancing business vocabulary competency among college students and to explore their experiences using it. Earlier studies have indicated that games could enhance ESL students' vocabulary. Future research should investigate ESL teachers' adoption of technology in their language classrooms and provide more pedagogical training in supporting their teaching. Besides, we also discovered that the reflective Action Research approach was helpful in finding ways to improve vocabulary learning among ESL college learners. The reflection expands the understanding by suggesting alternative perspectives and documenting learning as such, providing new considerations for evaluation. Reflection allows us not only to evaluate our practices critically but also to keep trying new ways to enhance our students' learning.

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Exploring the Link between English Language Instructors' Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Satisfaction with Teaching Online

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between English language instructors' perceived levels of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) and their satisfaction with teaching online. 205 English instructors working at universities in Turkey participated in the study. A mixed-method approach was employed for data collection, incorporating quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were obtained through the TPACK-EFL and the Online Faculty Satisfaction (OFSS) scale, while qualitative data were gathered via in-depth interviews with the instructors. The findings revealed a significant relationship between instructors' TPACK and their satisfaction with teaching online. This research carries several important implications for TPACK in language teaching and its implementation in both online and classroom settings.

Keywords: online language teaching in Turkey, online language teaching, satisfaction with teaching online, technological pedagogical content knowledge for language education, mixed-method approach, Turkish universities

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Introduction

Although online distance learning opportunities have developed over the past few years, their widespread adoption in all areas of education worldwide has increased significantly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The abrupt and rapid shift from face-to-face to online learning environments, called as emergency remote teaching (ERT), posed significant challenges for educators across various disciplines. Faculty members with no prior online teaching experience were given minimal preparation time - typically only one week - to transition their face-to-face courses to an online format (Marasi et al., 2020). In this period of global and local disruption of traditional teaching routines, educators' satisfaction with navigating this unfamiliar environment is likely to profoundly impact the teaching process and the well-being of both instructors and students.

Instructor satisfaction with online teaching is defined as the perception that the online teaching process is efficient, effective, and personally beneficial (Bolliger et al., 2014). It is also considered a strong predictor of the success of any online education program, impacting instructors, students, and program outcomes (Stickney et al., 2019). The Online Learning Consortium (2021) emphasizes that quality online education is built upon five pillars, and faculty satisfaction is one of them.

Due to its specific characteristics and requirements, online language teaching poses several challenges. Lack of face-to-face interaction and sometimes real-time communication may negatively affect language education's communicative and interactive essence. (Matiso & Makena, 2022). Therefore, teachers in online education need a distinct set of skills from instructors trained for traditional, face-to-face classrooms and those needed by online educators in other disciplines (Moorhouse et al.,2021). Although it is generally assumed that effective online teaching goes hand in hand with basic ICT competence, it requires much more to address broader pedagogical concerns. According to Bennett and Marsh (2002), these include recognizing key differences and similarities between face-to-face and online learning environments, as well as developing strategies to support online learning, such as helping students take advantage of both independent and collaborative learning opportunities.

The TPACK framework emphasizes the importance of teachers having a balanced understanding of how technology, pedagogy, and content intersect in educational contexts. It is particularly relevant to emergency distance learning, as it can help teachers create engaging online activities, assess student learning, and maintain continuity of quality education. Therefore, there may be a significant connection between language teachers' TPACK and their level of satisfaction with teaching online.

Instructors with strong TPACK can experience greater satisfaction with online teaching by enhancing student engagement, supporting interactive language practice, delivering timely feedback, addressing diverse learning styles, offering authentic language resources and multimedia materials, and effectively resolving technical issues, among other factors. (Quyang & Scharber, 2018; Major & McDonald, 2021).

Although the TPACK levels of language educators in various contexts have been widely studied, to the researcher's knowledge, there is a lack of specific studies examining the direct relationship between (TPACK) and instructors' satisfaction with online teaching. Therefore, this

paper aims to present findings from a more extensive study, specifically focusing on the relationship between instructors' TPACK and their satisfaction with teaching online.

This study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring the relationship between language teachers' TPACK and satisfaction with teaching online. Adequate TPACK may enable English instructors to effectively utilize online platforms, digital tools, and resources, thereby creating engaging and interactive online learning environments and ensuring the continuity and quality of language teaching across various modalities (Antari et al.,2023; Darsih et al.,2023). To our knowledge, no study has yet investigated the relationship between these two variables. Therefore, this study is expected to significantly contribute to the literature by demonstrating how possessing adequate TPACK enhances online language teaching.

Literature Review

The context of online education during the pandemic differs significantly from that of pre-pandemic studies, given the unique challenges and circumstances of the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) period. As previous studies do not adequately capture the specific conditions and demands of teaching in this unprecedented context, the literature review on online education in this study will focus exclusively on research conducted during or in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several studies have explored teachers' and faculty members' experiences and perceptions during the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) process and identified key factors influencing online teaching satisfaction. A major theme was the need for adequate ICT competence. Many educators felt unprepared for the use of online teaching strategies and digital tools, highlighting the need for additional training (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Related to this, computing self-efficacy and online teaching efficacy were found to be positively correlated with higher satisfaction among Chinese teachers (Chen et al., 2023; Du et al., 2023).

Challenges such as unreliable internet connections, high costs, and power outages were also found to contribute significantly to dissatisfaction with online education (Pete & Soko, 2021; Ontha et al., 2020). Similarly, university teachers reported high levels of stress and low job satisfaction due to inadequate IT infrastructure, lack of student engagement, and difficulties with online assessments (Ali et al., 2021). Teachers also reported an increase in workload and demotivation due to the additional effort required for online lesson preparation (Ontha et al., 2020).

Institutional support, interaction during online classes, and self-efficacy in both computer use, and online teaching were critical factors in increasing satisfaction with online teaching (Pham & Nghiem, 2022). In addition, studies have shown that technology pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) and work engagement were positively associated with instructor self-efficacy, satisfaction with teaching, and future intent to continue teaching online (Huang et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some studies have found an improvement in satisfaction over time. For example, teachers with access to improved digital tools, such as Microsoft Teams, reported greater satisfaction due to improved interaction and usability (Durak & Cankaya, 2020).

Several studies have investigated language teachers' experiences of teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the findings are broadly consistent with the research from other teaching disciplines outlined above. The technical and infrastructural challenges faced by educators are a recurring theme. For instance, Talidong (2020) found that although Filipino English language teachers acknowledged the benefits of online learning, they experienced significant challenges, including poor internet connections, technical difficulties and conference tool

overload. Similarly, a study by Hazaea et al. (2021) found that in low-tech Arab countries, such as Yemen and Libya, online teaching was severely disrupted due to a lack of technical infrastructure.

Language teachers' ICT competence also emerged as a critical issue. Vietnamese vocational English teachers, for example, reported that their positive attitudes towards online teaching were tempered by difficulties related to their digital skills and online classroom management (Tue & Hanh, 2021). This view is repeated in the Turkish EFL context, where teachers expressed the need for more training on how to use digital tools effectively and how to adapt communicative language teaching methods to distance learning (Tumen Akyildiz, 2020b; Turegun Coban & Kuyumcu Vardar, 2021).

The increased workload associated with ERT was also highlighted in some studies. Vietnamese English teachers identified heavy workloads, together with students' varying levels of technological competence and the need for technical support, as key challenges (Tue & Hanh, 2021). Similarly, Turkish EFL teachers (Turegun Coban & Kuyumcu Vardar, 2021) found the process of adapting to online teaching challenging, with technical issues adding to the workload.

Despite these challenges, the teachers identified some positive aspects of ERT.. For example, Turegun Coban and Kuyumcu Vardar (2021) found that Turkish EFL student teachers and their instructors appreciated certain features of distance education, such as the flexibility of time and space, the affordability of online education, and the opportunity to share a wide range of resources. In addition, the ability to review recorded lessons was also highlighted as a benefit, which, in certain contexts, could enhance learning outcomes.

Regarding pedagogical adaptation, using digital platforms was an important part of facilitating online teaching. Linh et al. (2021) reported that Vietnamese tertiary English teachers preferred platforms like Gmail, Google Classroom, Zoom, and Google Meet, mainly because of their practicality and alignment with teachers' digital competencies. These platforms helped teachers to manage their online classrooms more effectively by enabling the delivery of live lessons.

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, it can be inferred that teachers' ability to integrate technology into their teaching is essential for the successful implementation of remote instruction. The studies reviewed suggest a strong need for continuing training in digital literacy and online pedagogy to equip language teachers better to teach remotely in future crises.

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)

The TPACK framework was introduced to provide a theoretical basis for integrating technology into teaching. It highlights that educational technologies arise from the intersection of pedagogical, content, and technological knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Previous studies of technology use in education have focused primarily on teachers' technological knowledge, but it is now recognized that this alone is insufficient. Teachers need to integrate their technological knowledge with content and pedagogical knowledge, a concept known as TPACK (Voogt et al., 2016). This framework shows how these three areas of knowledge interplay can lead to effective, discipline-based teaching using educational technologies (Harris et al., 2009).

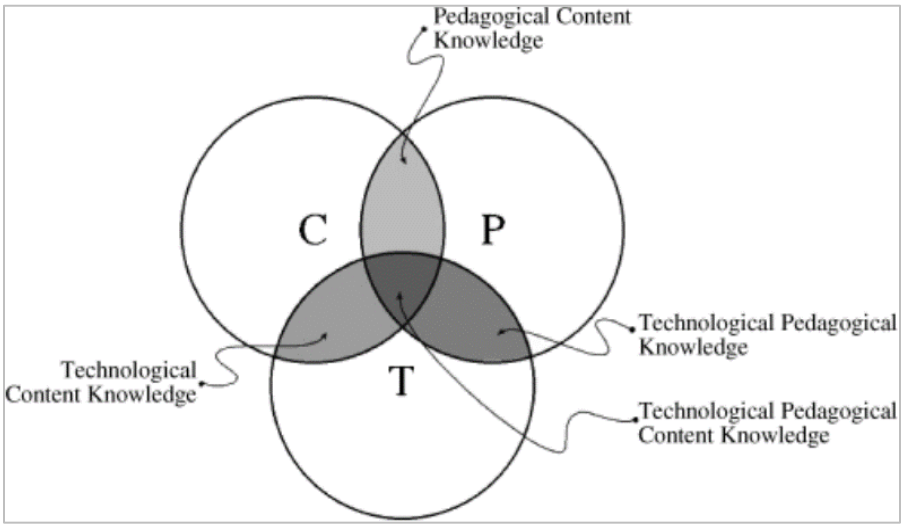


Figure 1. Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework (Mishra et al.,2006)

As shown in Figure 1, the TPACK framework emphasizes integrating content, pedagogy, and technology to support effective teaching with technology. Content knowledge (CK) refers to a teacher's understanding of their subject, whereas pedagogical knowledge (PK) includes skills related to teaching methodology, lesson planning, and classroom management (Koehler et al., 2013; Shulman, 1986). The intersection of CK and PK, known as pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), is "…the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular aspects of subject matter are organized, adapted, and represented for instruction" (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p.1021).

Technological knowledge (TK) includes the ability to use hardware, software, and communication tools, but goes beyond technical skills to understanding of how these technologies enhance learning (Voogt et al., 2016; Compton, 2009). Technological content knowledge (TCK) focuses on the relationship between technology and content and supports teachers in selecting appropriate technologies to represent subject matter (Cox & Graham, 2009; Koehler et al., 2013).

Technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK) is defined as "knowledge of the existence, components, of various technologies as they are used in teaching and learning settings, and conversely, knowing how teaching and capabilities might change as the result of using particular technologies" (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p.1028). It refers to understanding how technology can support teaching and learning in pedagogically sound ways, regardless of specific content (Angeli et al., 2016). It fosters creativity by enabling teachers to adapt non-educational technologies for educational purposes (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

Technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) emerges from the complex interplay between CK, PK, and TK. It goes beyond the individual elements to provide a comprehensive framework for teaching with technology (Harris et al., 2009) and forms the core knowledge required to effectively integrate technology into the classroom. Mishra et al. (2009) describe how the TPACK framework provides a fresh perspective on educational technology, as in the following:

> How does the TPACK framework offer a new way of thinking about educational technology? First, by stressing how technology interacts with pedagogy and content, innovations are not necessarily relevant for teaching. Instead, emphasis is put on evaluating

> the entire teaching performance, not just one aspect of it. Second, using the TPACK framework helps educators reason about which technologies are worth learning; not to learn every technology and then figure out how to apply it. (p.51)

It is emphasized that teachers must combine their technological knowledge with pedagogical and content knowledge—referred to as TPACK—for effective integration (Voogt et al., 2016). Mishra et al. (2009) highlight TPACK as the most critical form of teacher knowledge, uniting content, technology, and pedagogy to create effective teaching experiences.

Previous Studies on Language Teachers' TPACK

Several studies have examined language teachers' TPACK levels, often through self-report questionnaires. Teachers generally reported being satisfied with their TPACK competencies, particularly in content knowledge (CK), but highlighted weaker competencies in technology-related areas such as technological knowledge (TK), technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK) and technological content knowledge (TCK) (Cheng, 2017; Atar et al., 2019; Wu & Wang, 2015; Chai et al., 2013). Similarly, in Wu and Wang's study (2015), English language teachers reported their need for further development in TK.

The effectiveness of TPACK in improving language learning outcomes has been highlighted in several studies. A TPACK-based online writing course improved Taiwanese nursing students' writing skills (Tai et al., 2015), while TPACK-led reading instruction improved Jordanian EFL students' reading performance (Abu-Hardan et al., 2019). Teacher training using the TPACK model also significantly enhanced the CALL proficiency of Taiwanese English teachers (Tai, 2015).

Lastly, research into developing TPACK among language teachers shows that telecollaboration, Web 2.0 tool integration, and digital storytelling positively influenced TPACK development (Bueno-Alastuey et al., 2018; Bustamante, 2020; Sancar Tokmak & Yanpar-Yelken, 2015). This section presents the summary of the existing literature on online language teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and TPACK in language teaching. The following section provides details about the methodology of the study.

Methodology

Research Design

Given the study's aims, a mixed methods approach was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The reason for this is that reliance on either quantitative or qualitative methods alone does not adequately respond to the requirements of the main approaches used in the social and human sciences (Creswell, 2003). As Malina et al. (2011) point out, combining these two approaches allows researchers to delve into more complex dimensions and relationships within the human and social world, resulting in stronger research findings than either method could achieve on its own.

Participants

This study used a convenience sample of 205 EFL instructors from 12 different state universities in Turkey for the quantitative phase, selecting participants based on accessibility and willingness (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 EFL instructors who were also selected using convenience sampling. The

interviewees were selected from among the survey respondents who had volunteered for further participation.

Data Collection Instruments

This study collected data using a background questionnaire, the TPACK-EFL survey, the OFSS survey and semi-structured interviews**.** The TPACK-EFL survey, which was developed and validated by Baser et al. (2016), was used for the assessment of EFL educators' perceived level of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK). The survey consists of 39 items grouped into seven factors according to the TPACK framework.

The Online Faculty Satisfaction Survey (OFSS), developed by Bolliger and Wasilik (2009), was used to measure satisfaction with online teaching. The OFSS consists of 28 items grouped into three factors: student-related, teacher-related, and institution-related. Two items in the OFSS survey are specifically related to general satisfaction with online teaching.

The qualitative phase involved using semi-structured interviews with 10 questions. These questions are based on a literature review (Durdu & Dag, 2017; Ritter, 2012; Donmez, 2016) and the researcher's own ideas and experience. Two experts in the field of language education, one of whom has conducted research on ERT, validated the content of the interview questions and suggested minor revisions. After piloting, further adjustments were made, and two questions were removed. The final interview format consisted of 10 questions. As stated earlier, this paper presents findings from a more extensive study. Therefore, in line with the objectives of this study, the responses to one of the questions served as the qualitative data set for the research

Data Analysis

In this study, the quantitative data collected from the TPACK-EFL and the OFSS surveys were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 24.0, while the qualitative data from the interviews were examined using content analysis. Correlational statistics were employed alongside qualitative data from the interview question to address the research question: *"Do you believe your ability to use technology in teaching English affects your level of satisfaction with online teaching? If yes, how would you describe this relationship?"*The findings are illustrated in the following section.

Findings

This study attempted to determine whether a statistically significant correlation exists between EFL instructors' TPACK levels and their satisfaction with teaching online. The findings obtained from the correlational analysis are illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1. *Correlational Analysis Findings between TPACK and Online Teaching Satisfaction*

	N	R	Sig
TPACK			
	205	.289	.000
Online Teaching Satisfaction			

As Table 1 presents, the analysis indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between these variables (N = 205, r = .289, p=.000), suggesting that a higher level of TPACK is associated with a higher level of satisfaction with online teaching. However, with a correlation coefficient (r) of .289, the strength of the relationship between these variables can be described as weak. The qualitative data's findings supported this significant relationship between TPACK and

satisfaction with online teaching and provided insights into why the relationship was not particularly strong.

In support of the quantitative findings, half of the interviewees (N = 8) expressed their belief in the connection between TPACK and their satisfaction with online teaching. Below are some illustrative statements**:**

> *I definitely think that the more competent we are in using technology, the more knowledge we have about using technology for language teaching, the better we are in online teaching. Otherwise what will happen if I cannot upload a video or start a recording. How will students participate in the lesson if we cannot do any of these. The problems we are talking about now would really be quite a small thing compared to the bigger problems that would arise, so I think it is definitely directly proportional. They are completely intertwined with each other, so I think that without one, the other will never happen.* (Instructor 16)
> *I think there is a relationship between the two. Remote teaching alone was difficult for us. If our TPACK had been low, this would have made the remote teaching process even more difficult. I would have had a harder time with this process. Yes, it is already a difficult process. I mean, remote teaching is already a difficult process because it is something new. It would definitely be more stressful.* (Instructor 7)
> *There are many teachers who retired in this process. If you do not know how to start and end the lesson, how to send students to the rooms or how to copy a link, how to use Google docs with students, if you do not know the reasons and purposes behind this, you cannot teach online. I mean, teachers who cannot do these things feel bad.* (Instructor 15)

Although they valued the relationship, some participants (N=5) stated that a sufficient level of TPACK was not enough for them to be satisfied with online teaching, and they attributed this to low student motivation (N=4), low participation in online courses (N=5), and problems with internet connection (N=3). Example comments are given below:

Of course, it is useful to be good at technology. Even if it is not much, I can do this, I know that. But there are so many different factors that affect me negatively, such as connectivity and students' low participation in online courses. Therefore, I cannot say that it had a great effect on my satisfaction level. (Instructor 3)

If I couldn't use technology well, I would feel very bad and demotivated in the online setting. The lessons would be unsuccessful. It would probably be a stressful situation. Therefore, the level of satisfaction with teaching online is definitely related to TPACK but it is not only related to it. Because of all the factors I have just mentioned, especially those that are related to students, I say enough is enough. (Instructor 5)

We did not have much opportunity to put our TPACK knowledge into practice. While we were teaching online. We did not have the opportunity to open videos, use programmes or make competititons in the online setting. The reason for this is students' low attendance to classes. Since the students did not attend the class, I could not do any of them. In that sense, I think emergency remote teaching process was inefficient. (Instructor 8)

In sum, both quantitative and qualitative findings indicated a statistically significant but weak relationship between teachers' TPACK and their satisfaction with online teaching. This

relationship is influenced by factors such as low student participation in online classes, their lack of motivation and problems with internet connection, which have a negative impact on teacher satisfaction. Thus, while a sufficient level of TPACK is important, it alone does not guarantee satisfaction with online teaching.

Discussion

This paper aimed to explore the relationship between EFL instructors' perceived TPACK levels and their satisfaction with teaching online in an emergency remote teaching context. Data were collected using quantitative and qualitative methods and analyzed using correlational and content analysis techniques. The findings indicated a statistically significant but weak relationship between instructors' TPACK and their satisfaction with teaching online. Although participants acknowledged the importance of TPACK for effective online teaching, factors such as low student participation, lack of motivation, and problems with internet connection had a negative impact on their satisfaction with teaching online. Thus, while having a sufficient level of TPACK is essential, it alone is not enough to ensure satisfaction in online teaching.

Although previous studies have explored aspects of TPACK and online teaching, the relationship between TPACK and satisfaction with online teaching has received limited attention. This study thus contributes uniquely by demonstrating that TPACK can, to some extent, predict satisfaction with online teaching. This finding supports Huang et al.'s (2022) study, which found out TPACK and work engagement were positively associated with instructor self-efficacy, satisfaction with teaching, and future intent to continue teaching online. It is also in line with the previous research that showed computing self-efficacy and online teaching efficacy were positively correlated with higher satisfaction among Chinese teachers (Chen et al., 2023; Du et al., 2023)

It was also revealed that having sufficient TPACK, while important, is not sufficient to ensure satisfaction due to negative factors such as low student motivation and participation, as well as problems with internet connection. These findings are consistent with previous research that identified these challenges as barriers to effective online teaching (Pete & Soko, Talidong, 2020; Ali et al.,2021). In summary, those with inadequate TPACK faced greater difficulties during emergency remote teaching, while those with sufficient TPACK were still hindered by external issues, limiting their ability to fully apply their knowledge.

Conclusion

The findings of this study hold significant implications for future online teaching and the integration of TPACK in online language education. The findings demonstrated that TPACK can somewhat predict satisfaction with online teaching. However, it also highlighted that, while crucial, possessing adequate TPACK alone is insufficient for achieving satisfaction in teaching online. This suggests the need to raise TPACK awareness among educators teaching online, regardless of their subject area. Specifically, for online language teachers, ongoing in-service training should focus on developing the four language skills using interactive and collaborative tools. This approach could help address the lack of student motivation, identified as one of the major challenges in online education. Moreover, it is essential to standardize regulations for managing online education, particularly concerning student attendance, to prevent inconsistent practices. Implementing clear rules regarding attendance is necessary for more effective online learning.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the study had a relatively small sample size, which could limit the statistical power of the survey. Secondly, participants were selected through convenience sampling, meaning that those who were easily accessible or willing to participate may not fully represent the broader population. As a result, generalizing the findings to the entire population is challenging. Additionally, the non-randomized nature of convenience sampling makes it difficult to replicate the study with consistent results. Lastly, this sampling method may introduce bias, as volunteers could possess different characteristics, motivations, or interests compared to those who did not participate.

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The Impact of Using Virtual Vocabulary Learning Applications on Enhancing Law Students' Lexical Competence at the Tertiary Level

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Abstract

Technological advancements have transformed foreign language learning and teaching practices in the 21st century. Correspondingly, numerous online applications have arisen to meet the needs of English learners, one of which is Quizlet, a virtual vocabulary learning initiative. Having seen the growing popularity of Quizlet, the researcher investigated its effectiveness in developing 60 law students' lexical competence within 12 weeks in the spring semester of the 2023-2024 academic year at a private university in Iraq. The participants were chosen via convenience sampling to represent the control and experimental groups. Control group students' vocabulary lessons were based on a paper-based format through coursebooks and worksheets; however, experimental group students' lessons were enriched with Quizlet to learn legal terminology through flashcards, games, tests, and self-study folders in an Academic English course. Vocabulary exams, questionnaires, and interviews were used to collect data using mixed methods research design principles. Quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS via descriptive statistics or independent samples t-test, respectively; however, qualitative data gathered by interviews were categorized under specific themes through content analysis using MAXQDA. The findings revealed that Quizlet-enriched instruction paid off with higher vocabulary exam marks, satisfaction, and motivation rates. On the other hand, control group students did not progress noticeably. The findings of this study can offer specific implications for educators interested in integrating technological tools into vocabulary lessons.

Keywords: English learners, foreign language learning, legal terminology, lexical competence, Quizlet, private university in Iraq, tertiary level, vocabulary learning

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Introduction

The significance of the English language in today's global context cannot be overstated. In other words, its prominence is stark in various domains, including education, business, science, technology, and diplomacy, where it functions as a lingua franca to bridge the language gaps among nationals whose native languages differ. Thus, over 1.5 billion people use English to communicate natively or as a second language (Decorte et al., 2024; Ly, 2023). Besides, over 750 million people are trying to absorb the principles of English so they can speak it fluently as a foreigner (Zoghlami, 2023). Additionally, English is the official language in 75 countries, accounting for 39 % of the global population (Heinzmann et al., 2024). Considering those facts, stakeholders in the education sector pay the utmost attention to sharpening learners' English at all stages. In addition, English is the most popular language in language learning apps, educational videos on YouTube, and school learning management systems. Subsequently, English plays an integral role in college admission exams and standardized language tests. After that, English holds significant importance in the business world for several reasons, so commanding English precisely is standard in many job adverts. Its importance lies in conducting international trade, expanding networks, receiving fresh news, and training colleagues so that the companies' revenues may increase accordingly (Yucedal et al., 2022). Next, English matters considerably in science because English materials exceed all other languages on websites, which include articles, books, videos, magazines, and encyclopedias. Moreover, English has an irreplaceable place in technology as well. To illustrate, being a part of a global team, coding, assembling, and problem-solving can be put into practice easily when English serves as a lingua franca among people (Wright, 2016). Similarly, diplomats or leaders can communicate with their counterparts in English to save time and keep privacy. As evident, English's influence has been recognized in many fields.

Technological advancements have made the intrusion of technological tools in English classes possible. They have been employed in education to fulfill several functions. For example, Zoom, Google Meet, and Webex meetings cover online courses, conduct exams, assign homework, and welcome submissions (Mekheimer, 2024). Thus, the steps of digital transformation are felt deeply, thereby promoting collaboration and communication incessantly. Furthermore, Kahoot, Quiziz, Google Forms, and Microsoft Forms are used to create engaging exams that allow students to answer questions remotely (Ebadi et al., 2023). It is worth mentioning that they are user-friendly and can be used flexibly with any device through QR codes or links. After that, Miro, Listium, and Padlet capture learners' attention, allowing them to write on a virtual board and activate peer learning instantly (Tella & Garzon, 2022). Online writing platforms can foster students' curiosity because they exchange their ideas and shape their style by analyzing their friends' works. Afterward, Wheebox, Socrative, and Zip Grade applications are versatile to conduct standardized tests on paper or online and get immediate feedback, which includes precise statistical analysis to come to reliable interpretations and make necessary adjustments for the betterment of education before it is too late (Kim, 2020). Next, Memrise, Rosetta Stone, and Duolingo are complete sets to learn English online through texts, videos, and gamified quizzes (Abubakr Abdulrahman et al., 2022; Issa, 2024). It can be concluded that technological tools have many roles in English, such as customizing lessons and addressing specific needs wisely.

Innovations in digital technologies regarding CALL and MALL have substantially changed the nature of vocabulary teaching in English classes. Correspondingly, there has been

a considerable rise in the number of vocabulary apps on Google Play, Apple or Amazon App Store. Brainscape, Anki, and Drops are commonly used to learn English through flashcards and related quizzes. In this regard, Quizlet stands out from others for its distinguishing qualities for learners. It has increased in popularity since its advent in 2005 as a multinational American company (Shi & Tsai, 2024). Its active users have surpassed 50 million from over 130 countries. Although Quizlet has been acknowledged as an efficient tool in English classes, its influence spans math, science, and history. It has over 500 million user-generated audio-enriched flashcards, which can be turned into word games and live quizzes with different questions, such as open-ended, multiple-choice, and true-false (Aprilani, 2021). It has two versions to welcome users in a costless or paid format according to their needs. Additionally, its adoption of AI technologies was realized earlier than its rivals in the market (Ebadi et al., 2023). It is convenient to use individually or race with other teams as a group. Moreover, its user-friendly interface tracks students' progress with a click, reducing teachers' workload sharply. Vocabulary learning is a fundamental aspect of personal and professional development that influences people's lives in various ways. For instance, a rich vocabulary breadth encourages the speakers to express their ideas more persuasively in communicative acts (Basöz & Erten, 2019). Additionally, figuring out words in context increases the comprehension rate of the readers, thereby affecting their reading scores positively. After that, writing performance can be significantly enhanced when relevant words for the topic are internalized. Moreover, commanding words can decrease hesitation in speaking tasks so that learners can speak more fluently and confidently (Feng & Webb, 2020). Similarly, critical thinking can be fostered more effectively when learners know certain words and use them more eloquently to defend their ideas in debates or essays. Furthermore, the cognitive development of learners who can articulate their ideas more creatively with the power of novel words is overt because they can enhance their memory in agility. It is also expected that learners can transfer this knowledge to their social, personal, and professional lives, which will increase the significance of learning novel words (Wong & Samudra, 2021). Considering the untapped potential of vocabulary, linguists and educators have proposed several theories to sharpen learners' English systematically. Explicit, implicit, constructivist, and behaviorist learning theories have left a lasting impression on learners and teachers because they simplify vocabulary learning through direct or indirect exposure to construct meaning and practice the words regularly (Hao et al., 2021). It seems that vocabulary learning has been implemented with traditional and modern theories so learners can reap the benefits through various reflections.

Expressing oneself is the primary goal in language learning and teaching so that speaking and writing competency can be gradually enhanced. Nonetheless, a growing number of students have difficulty in completing such tasks successfully. When their ideas are investigated thoroughly, it has been observed that insufficient vocabulary knowledge is one of the main reasons that hinder writing creatively and speaking fluently. Apart from traditional vocabulary teaching techniques, gamified vocabulary learning has gained increasing popularity because technology-enhanced tools have infinite potential to capture students' attention (Chkotua & Bingol, 2018; Tran et al., 2018). Thus, it is expected to bridge the gap between student's current vocabulary knowledge and desired vocabulary breadth based on their levels. The findings of this study may shed light on using appropriate technological tools in education to increase the vocabulary power of students at the tertiary level in Iraq. Accordingly, this study can be regarded

as the guideline to set the framework for technology-integrated vocabulary instruction at educational institutions in Iraq.

Literature Review

Vocabulary knowledge is an essential building block of language learning through which chains are connected to speak sensibly, write elaboratively, comprehend the texts accurately, and precisely grasp details in listening tasks. In this regard, it fulfills a complementary role so that learners' English can be more satisfactory. Its significance in language learning has been acknowledged in English classes, so educators have sought ways to expand learners' word power by integrating technology. Thus, the benefits of educational technology can be reaped in vocabulary learning and the teaching process, which can be challenging for many learners because knowing a word necessitates sharpening spelling, pronunciation, and meaning collaboratively. Accordingly, Quizlet has received considerable attention in EFL, ESL, and ESP settings because it offers flashcards and various types of tests in a team or individual mode to accommodate learners' specific needs since its commencement in 2005. Once literature has been scanned thoroughly, many studies have found a positive correlation between Quizlet and various dimensions, such as vocabulary retention (Pham, 2022), reading (Ho & Kawaguchi, 2021), speaking (Wang et al., 2021), autonomous learning (Nguyen & Chu, 2024), self-efficacy (Ebadi et al., 2023), motivation (Setiawan & Wiedarti, 2020). Additionally, its role in sharpening the knowledge of formulaic sequences, such as idioms, collocation, and phrasal verbs, has been acknowledged (Pintado, 2021; Solhi Andarab, 2019). To name a few, Sevigny et al. (2024) completed a comprehensive study to measure the effectiveness of Quizlet on university students in Japan, where experimental group students increased their performance in recalling high-frequency vocabulary and using them appropriately in fill-in-the-blank activities. Similarly, Bayaksud et al. (2024) found that Quizlet is a promising tool for enhancing students' vocabulary retention for high school students in Malaysia as well. After that, Siswandi et al. (2024) pointed out that students' engagement and motivation levels increased considerably after exposure to Quizlet-enriched instruction, so students' overall linguistic skills were positively affected. Besides, Nguyen and Chu (2024) stressed that Quizlet fostered self-study because it is a complete set to discipline students and track their progress with a user-friendly interface by choosing intervals. Subsequently, Wiwin and Widiati's (2022) study revealed that Quizlet promoted digital literacy to take advantage of educational technology in English classes so learners could delve into many connected tools to enhance their vocabulary knowledge substantially. Another notable study was carried out in Thailand on low- low-proficiency students by Waluyo and Bucol (2021), whose studies unearthed that students could seize the opportunity by increasing their enthusiasm to learn novel words and apply them to academic settings according to their needs through Quizlet-integrated curriculum. Furthermore, Tran et al. (2018) realized the connection between Quizlet and fostering 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, responsibility, and leadership in their ground-breaking study. Some noteworthy studies mainly focused on pinpointing the correlation between Quizlet and teaching terminology for some fields. For instance, Wright (2016) channeled students' energy into revising technical terms and taking relevant quizzes in a business communication course at a university in Japan, where students enhanced their vocabulary capacity substantially. Similarly, Chaikovska et al. (2022) acknowledged that using Quizlet could foster students' learning in terms of vocabulary size and test-taking skills at the tertiary level in

Ukraine. After that, Hsu and Chao (2024) found that Quizlet can expand Tai students' word power in technical terms in a military college.

Some notable studies were done in Iraq, where the current research was undertaken. To name a few, Majeed and Mahdi's (2021) study showed that university students could benefit from Quizlet-based instruction in English classes regarding expanded vocabulary and increased fluency. Additionally, Yucedal et al.'s (2024) study revealed that online vocabulary learning apps paved the way for raising standards in English classes, thereby elevating students' overall proficiency at the tertiary level. Likewise, Alkhateeb's (2024) study revealed that Quizlet prepared the students for formative assessments, so students' English grades increased considerably in wide-scale tests for university admissions. Complementing other studies, Ono's (2016) study revealed that Quizlet-enriched blended learning could develop students' vocabulary breadth regarding medical terminologies. Considering all studies, it can be concluded that Quizlet has far-fetched effects in teaching English to students regardless of their fields and majors.

Research Aim and Research Questions

A gap in the literature has been noticed in the Iraq context about the impact of vocabulary learning tools, particularly Quizlet, on expanding students' word power in Academic English courses at the tertiary level, although Quizlet-focused studies are numerous globally. To address this gap, the present study has investigated the influence of Quizlet on increasing students' vocabulary knowledge in an Academic English course integrated into the curriculum to teach English terminology to students majoring in law. Accordingly, the given questions below were formulated to be addressed thoroughly:

1) How effectively is Quizlet increasing students' vocabulary grades in an Academic English course?

2) What are students' thoughts about Quizlet enriched instruction in general?

Method

The current study's design was an explanatory sequential mixed method, which required the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data, thereby getting an accurate picture of students' differences between two timespans, namely pre-test and post-test. Explanatory sequential mixed methods are designs in which researchers gather quantitative data in the initial phase and complement them with qualitative data in the subsequent stage (Serafini & Reid, 2023). Thus, triangulation can be ensured by comparing each data set with the others to determine whether they complement each other harmoniously. Its convenience and overt benefits prompted the researcher to conduct the study under the explanatory sequential mixed method design heading.

Participants

The study population consisted of all junior and senior students majoring in law at a private university in Erbil, Iraq, in the 2023- 2024 academic year. They were chosen on purpose because they received academic English courses to sharpen their word powers in legal terminology, which were two hours per week spanning two semesters. 60 students out of 120 were chosen by adopting the principles of the convenience sampling method. When their demographic qualities were examined, it was observed that the number of male students (n=33) was higher than their female friends (n=27). Additionally, their ages ranged from 18 to 26. The university offers English Medium instruction in all departments except law, which allows code-switching in specific courses. Students

are accepted to the law department according to their scores in university entrance exams run by the Ministry of Education. Students take placement exams to pinpoint their levels and are categorized to accommodate their needs appropriately. After measuring their levels, first- and second-year students receive General English courses. In contrast, junior and senior students must take Academic English to meet the needs of the 21st century in courts with bilingual services.

Data Collection

The researcher employed a well-reputed test to measure students' levels fairly and assign them to classes to represent the control and experimental groups. More specifically, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT hereafter) was integrated into the study to determine students' overall proficiency in English in terms of macro and micro-skills. Of particular attention is that OPT was piloted on other students, culminating in a .95 Cronbach Alpha Index, so it was sufficient to meet the reliability criteria successfully. Having completed the placement test and piloting, students were ready to undergo the treatment period.

Vocabulary exams were formed according to the essential words covered in the Career Paths- Law coursebook units, which Express Publishing released. The chosen words are illustrated below in Table One:

Table 1. *Essential Words of Each Unit*

Units	*Words*
1	complaint, plaintiff, defendant, attorney, paralegal, jury, judge, crime, civil, wrongdoing
2	dispute, settle, appeal, lawsuit, proof, client, trial, promotion, compensation, case
3	database, digest, reference, encyclopedia, case annotations, document, conviction, offender, dismissed, gather
4	legislation policy, statute, pertain, precedent, state law, constitutional law, precedent, obey, sue
5	intake memo, fee agreement, retainer agreement, demand package, correspondence, medical records, police report, pre-litigation, folder, enclose, agenda
6	bankruptcy, claim, review, court of appeal, supreme court, discretionary, objection, tax court, reserved, likelihood

According to Table One, crucial words important for being knowledgeable in law are extracted from the book. Subsequently, those words are turned into flashcards for use in various Quizlet forms. Students' pre-test and post-test vocabulary questions are formed according to the covered words. Several questions were created, encompassing multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, matching, and true-false. It is worth noting that ELT experts checked all questions to ensure content and face validity, so students took the tests in an error-free format. Afterward, questions were piloted on other students whose levels were close to participants. The result of the pilot study revealed that the Cronbach Alpha index was .95, which was high enough to meet the reliability criteria.

The questionnaire consisted of 8 items created based on a five-point Likert scale to understand Quizlet-enriched vocabulary instruction better. The questionnaire items were modified in line with the recommendations of Aprilani (2021), who developed a questionnaire scale to assess students' satisfaction levels via technological tools. It is important to note that in the pilot study, validity and reliability figures were adequate to meet the criteria, thereby scientifically conducting the study.

The interview was also subjected to a strict procedure to guarantee optimal quality. The researcher exclusively formulated the questions. Subsequently, six English specialists with more than 10 years of experience started and concluded a meticulous evaluation procedure. Their ideas were noted, and necessary modifications were made based on their insightful comments. Once potential hindrances were removed, the interviews were directed to the participants.

The data collection process was initiated and finalized in the spring of 2023-2024 when students were exposed to Quizlet-enriched instruction within 12 weeks. More specifically, both groups tried to expand their vocabulary powers with the standard course book; however, the experimental group students' lessons were enriched with various exercises on Quizlet. To name a few, they tried to grasp the meaning with flashcards, played some vocabulary games, completed tasks solely or as a group, took multiple-choice quizzes, and matched photos with definitions. The lecturer monitored students' performance every week and shared the reports with students so that students could plan their schedules for the upcoming weeks. On the other hand, the control group students tried to learn the words using worksheets. Their lessons were not flipped from traditional to online means. Of particular attention is that the researcher received the approval form from the university scientific committee after thoroughly emphasizing objectives, goals, and ethical considerations. In addition, consent forms were signed by students voluntarily. Some students hesitated to join the study, so they were removed and replaced with other volunteers.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data from vocabulary exams or questionnaires. SPSS 29 measured students' vocabulary learning performance and attitudes towards Quizlet using relevant tools. The former was measured by activating independent samples t-test, whereas the latter was used to obtain mean scores and standard deviation. Kaur et al. (2018) state that descriptive statistics help researchers to portray the figures more meaningfully by forging the relationships between variables. Later, the researcher analyzed the interviews via content analysis, so themes were created to come to more reliable interpretations about the influence of Quizlet. According to Serafini and Reid (2023), content analysis offers a wide range of options for researchers to compile, classify, and analyze qualitative data practically. The content analysis process consists of four distinct stages: meticulous examination of the transcribed data, allocation of codes, categorization of data, and transformation of categories into themes.

Findings

Findings of the Quantitative Analysis

Vocabulary exams, the questionnaire, and the interview comprised quantitative data regarding pre-test and post-test figures. They were analyzed using descriptive and content analysis principles, so statistical measurements were integrated to address the research questions with quantitative data.

The Analysis of the Vocabulary Exams

Vocabulary exams were created based on the official supplementary materials of Career Path, which were specifically designed to teach technical terms for certain professions by Express Publishing. More specifically, six units were covered, which included legal terms, concepts, resources, preliminary, and court structure. Ten essential words for each unit were extracted, and pre-test and post-test questions were created accordingly. The researcher created all questions in collaboration with colleagues at the same university. Later, ELT experts examined all questions

and composed the report to increase the intelligibility of the items for the participants. Upon the completion of exams, the precise descriptions are clearly illustrated in Table Two.

Table 2. *T-test Results for Independent Groups Performed for Pre-test Scores*

Group	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Experimental	30	57.50	6.917	58	.161	.873
Control	30	57.17	8.972	58		

Table Two shows that a significant difference was not observed in pre-test scores in each group, with a .873 p-value higher than 0.05. This was also confirmed by the mean scores of 57.50 and 57.17, respectively. Post-test scores are given in Table Three.

Table 3. *T-test Results for Independent Groups Performed for Post-test Scores*

Group	*N*	Mean	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Experimental	30	71	15.669	58	3.266	.002
Control	30	59.17	12.183	58		

As depicted in Table Three, a substantial difference was recorded in post-test scores with a .002 p-value, less than 0.05. The same difference was also figured out in mean scores, 59.17 for the control and 71 for the experimental groups. In other words, control group students increased their average by two points, whereas it was approximately 15 points in the experimental group. These results revealed that experimental group students whose curriculum was enriched with Quizlet increased their vocabulary marks more substantially than control group students.

The Analysis of the Questionnaires

The questionnaires were also designed to measure whether students' opinions differed before and after the study. Table Four visualizes the statistical analysis.

Table 4. *Combination of Pre-Test and Post-Test Questionnaire Results*

No	Item	*Min*	*Max*	*Mean*	*SD*	Variance
1	Flashcards are useful to increase word power through Quizlet	4	5	4.83	.379	.144
2	Speller mode is beneficial for writing words accurately.	3	5	4.66	.546	.299
3	Scatter mode is useful for finding the correct definition of the word through gamified tests.	3	5	4.80	.610	.372
4	Gravity mode is engaging in finding the definition by racing time.	2	5	4.66	.884	.782
5	Long-term learning mode helps me to refine my knowledge through repetition.	2	5	4.63	.850	.723
6	API function is user-friendly for creating flashcards or tests to be shared with my friends.	2	5	4.70	.915	.838
7	The flexibility to do activities individually and collaboratively is intriguing.	4	5	4.60	.498	.248
8	Quizlet expands my vocabulary breadth in general.	4	5	4.96	.182	.033

The items in the questionnaire sought specific implications of Quizlet-enriched instruction on students' vocabulary expansion in Academic English classes in Table Four. To begin with, Item One, designed to forge the possible connection between using flashcards and empowering word

power, revealed that students' vocabulary breadth increased significantly with a 4.83 mean score. It hints that flashcards are beneficial in absorbing fundamental words related to law-focused terminology. Subsequently, Item Two was related to the correlation between activating the spelling function of Quizlet and writing the words accurately. In this respect, the mean score of 4.66 unearthed that they noticed Quizlet's positive effects in writing the words precisely without being trapped by grave spelling mistakes. Furthermore, Item Three showed that activating gamified activities through scatter mode helped the students find the proper definition of the word more instantly by considering the mean score of 4.80, which was quite noticeable. It can be inferred that gamified drills matter to increase students' satisfaction and engagement rates. After that, Item Four analysis revealed that time-lapse-based exercises through Gravity mode increased students' motivation to match words with definitions within the given period by considering the mean score of 4.66. Next, Item Five sought the answers to whether Quizlet significantly impacted students' vocabulary knowledge in the long run. It revealed that repetition through guided activities yielded better results in comprehending and using the words practically, with a 4.63 mean score. This figure shows that well-established guidance spanning the whole semester matters if the ultimate goal is enriching their vocabulary knowledge. Students' opinions about the API feature of Quizlet were investigated thoroughly in Item Six, which unearthed that the freedom to customize items and share with friends was highly appreciated, with a 4.70 mean score. It confirms that learners value the importance of forming some files individually and disseminating them through Quizlet. Quizlet's flexibility in taking activities alone or with group members was evident according to the mean score of 4.60 in Item Seven. It is safe to conclude that granting freedom and flexibility under the teacher's guidance offers excellent potential to capture learners' attention and precisely accommodate their needs. The final item was integrated into the questionnaire to receive students' overall opinions about Quizlet's role in enhancing vocabulary capacity, culminating positively with a 4.96 mean score. Considering all items in the questionnaire, it can be postulated that Quizlet has far-fetching effects on students' vocabulary performance without leaving any room for doubts.

Findings of the Qualitative Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were formed to reflect students' opinions on Quizlet-based vocabulary instruction. Accordingly, the following questions were directed:

Description of Content Analysis Through Interview

Participants' opinions were categorized under several themes to emphasize Quizlet-enriched instruction's positive and negative aspects. Table Five visualizes positive reflections, whereas Table Six illustrates some drawbacks.

Table 5. *Positive aspects of Quizlet*

No	Theme	Frequency	%
1	Fun and engaging	24	80
2	Interactive	27	90
3	Memory-oriented	22	73.3
4	Visually stimulating	25	83.3
5	Transparent	24	80
6	Up to date	30	100
7	Sustainable	29	96.6
8	Relevant	22	73.3

Once students' ideas in the interview were analyzed thoroughly, several positive themes emerged to be highlighted in Table Five. Firstly, they asserted that having fun and engaging activities (f=24, 80 %) is one of the essential advantages of Quizlet-oriented vocabulary instruction. It seems that getting pleasure enhances students' continuous engagement in learning words. In the second place, constant communication between classmates and teachers was appreciated by the great majority of students (f=27, 90 %). It can be postulated that pair work activities and peer learning motivate students to join activities more ambitiously. Subsequently, sharpening memory with guided practices increased students' enthusiasm considerably (f=22, 73.3 %). It can be concluded that investing in memory enhancement endeavors receives compliments from the students because they observe the positive influence on them in the short and long run. In addition to others, combining definitions with catchy images was favored by most students (f=25, 83 %). They posited that visual images and concise definitions complement each other excellently. Another central theme that deserves special attention is the contribution to transparency (f=24, 80 %), thanks to the flexibility to monitor students' progress via activity records. It allowed the teacher to weigh the pros and cons and make necessary modifications to enhance their performance in vocabulary classes. Next, the content was updated in line with the units, substantially increasing students' motivation, which could be noticed starkly (f=30, 100 %). It reveals that all students prefer up-to-date content. Furthermore, creating and editing the flashcards online raised students' awareness (f=29, 96.6 %) to behave more environmentally. Sustainability is an intensely debated topic at educational institutions, raising students' alertness during treatment. The final theme was integrating relevant items into Quizlet tests, supported by approximately three-quarters of the students (f=22, 73.3 %). Considering all themes, it is safe to conclude that Quizlet has received many student compliments. Some drawbacks of Quizlet are visualized in Table Six.

Table 6. *Drawbacks of Quizlet*

No	Theme	Frequency	%
1	Complicated	3	10
2	Time-consuming	4	13.3
3	Technical difficulties	6	20
4	Eye-fatigue	7	23.3

However, this does not necessarily mean that all themes were positive in the interview. To name a few, the students mentioned having various modes of activities in a complicated format (f=3, 10 %), allocating much time to absorb the words (f=4, 13.3 %), encountering technical issues (f=6, 20 %), and suffering from vision-related problems (f=7, 23.3 %).

Apart from content analysis, notable comments of some students are given below to exemplify their genuine points of view:

Learning the basics of legal terminology was so appealing to me. We learned the definitions of the words with balanced exercises. Additionally, I learned how to manage my time wisely because gravity mode urged the learners to find the accurate answer within seconds. Additionally, taking the quizzes conveniently in a single or group mode increased our motivation because we could learn individually and cooperatively. Finally, the API feature trained us to figure out the words and transfer them to long-term memory because repetition yielded better results. (St 8)

I am a visual learner interested in learning words with catchy illustrations. When I was exposed to the instruction to internalize words with relevant images, my chance to remember the definition of the words and use them in context was tripled. Thus, descriptions and images supported each other to command more words. I also applied such methods to other courses to expand my vocabulary knowledge. I searched the dictionary, downloaded a relevant photo, and created flashcards. To cut the long story short, visually stimulating images fostered my learning in terms of vocabulary. (St 16)

I enjoyed having classes through Quizlet in general. However, some drawbacks of Quizlet should be considered. For instance, compiling many words into the platforms is complicated to classify and keep in mind. Additionally, it takes much time to memorize all the words if you are a perfectionist. Afterward, my mobile phone was not new, so I had technical difficulties due to the frozen screens. Finally, I suffer a lot when I look at the screen incessantly because checking the screen many times causes eye fatigue. When such issues are resolved, Quizlet is a promising tool to enhance vocabulary performance and develop language proficiency significantly. (St 28)

Discussion

The primary goal of the present study was to determine the effect of Quizlet application on enhancing law students' vocabulary breadth through vocabulary exams, questionnaires, and interviews. Correspondingly, research questions were formulated to investigate its impact quantitatively and qualitatively. In this respect, quantitative findings documented that Quizlet had far-reaching effects on expanding students' vocabulary breadth. Exam scores revealed that experimental group students whose lessons were enriched with Quizlet outperformed the control group students whose lessons were not different from previous cycles. The noticeable gains of the experimental group can be ascribed to visionary instruction, which allows the students to absorb words using online flashcards and relevant, interactive tests. It can be argued that technology-enriched educational tools have untapped potential to transform English classes so that students' vocabulary enhancement can be ensured. This finding resonates with the study of Ebadi et al. (2023), which hints that using technology in a balanced way yields better results in EFL classes, thereby developing students' vocabulary powers. Likewise, incongruent with Tello and Garzon's (2022) study, vocabulary learning tools such as Quizlet, Kahoot, and Jotform should be promoted more systematically with appropriate training sessions so English teachers can acknowledge the significance of such tools in the way of improving students' numerous skills.

In the second place, questionnaires shed light on essential points to contemplate while addressing the second research question. To name a few, taking advantage of flashcards was appreciated by students dovetailing with the study of Pham (2022), which unearthed that the value of flashcards should not be underestimated in language classes because they permit the students to study systematically and figure out the meaning by repetitive tasks. Spelling-oriented vocabulary teaching exercises captured students' attention because they learned how to spell and comprehend the meaning of the word at the same time. Hao et al. (2021) assert that knowing how to spell the words paves the way for accurate matching because they can have more self-confidence to match the words with definitions. In addition, students favored racing against time because they improved their time management skills and remained alert until they found the correct definition for the given word. This finding aligns with the study of Abubakr Abdulrahman (2022), which showed that timers could increase students' motivation and engagement when they took gamified vocabulary tests. Moreover, developing self-study habits was expressed as one of the positive sides

of Quizlet, which is consistent with the study of Issa (2024), which pointed out that online tools like Quizlet trains students to be lifelong learners because they can group the words and study regularly conveniently. Another important reflection of the questionnaire is about appreciating customized materials on Quizlet. Students underlined that there was a positive link between their increasing enthusiasm and creating their materials to be shared with others. In this regard, Aprilani (2021) postulated that it is not uncommon to notice that students' engagement increases as they have a say in the content of online tools. Furthermore, joining the exercises solely or collaboratively on Quizlet was another triggering point for students to be more active, which aligns with the study of Zoghlami (2023). He attests that each online learning tool should grant the freedom for the users to take quizzes alone or as a group member because it has its advantage, which should not be underestimated.

The final instrument was the interview, which was integrated into the study for triangulation data. The findings revealed that all data complemented harmoniously to prove that Quizlet has endless potential to enhance students' vocabulary capacity. To illustrate, its role in sharpening memory was emphasized. This finding was in line with the study of Alkhateeb (2024), who concluded that empowering memory with online learning tools pays off because they are handy, visually stimulating, versatile, and mostly costless. Thus, learners are inclined to use them more frequently. Another fundamental point highlighted in the interview was Quizlet's contribution to sustainability, allowing educators and students to create materials without using paper. In this respect, Hsu and Chao (2024) suggest that online language learning tools are environmentally friendly thanks to the advantages offered by technological tools, so they should be implemented more widely at educational institutions to reduce the number of cleared forests due to producing papers. Apart from being handy, visually stimulating, costless, and environmentally friendly, offering up-to-date content and the transparency to examine students' activity logs and grades were also expressed as positive sides of Quizlet. Wong and Samudra (2021) stated that editing content instantly and examining students' performance at any time just by clicking are pluses of Quizlet because they ensure up-to-date content and convenience for educators and users. On the other hand, some drawbacks of Quizlet were emphasized to notice and take preventive measures to increase the educational benefits of the platforms. To name a few, compiling many flashcards to memorize, feeling obliged to memorize a wide range of words, having frozen screens, and suffering from eye fatigue were cited as opposing points of Quizlet. In this regard, Heinzmann et al. (2024) pointed out that online learning tools have some pros and cons, so educators should stick to the principles of examining them thoroughly before implementation. Thus, the most suitable ones with the least risks can be chosen in cooperation.

Conclusion

This research purported to explore the potential effect of the Quizlet application on law students' vocabulary enhancement at a private university in Iraq. Findings revealed that Quizlet can expand students' capacity to learn more words about legal terminology, which is a prerequisite for defending the rights of plaintiffs or defendants. In other words, students' vocabulary marks elevated considerably after being exposed to the instruction through Quizlet. Conversely, students whose vocabulary lessons were covered according to the coursebook and official worksheets in the paper-based form did not progress substantially. Apart from exam marks, questionnaires and interviews showed that Quizlet has an enormous potential to increase students' motivation and satisfaction rates because they are expressed as visually stimulating, up-to-date, relevant,

transparent, and environmentally friendly, albeit posing some minor problems regarding feeling overwhelmed, consuming much time and suffering from eye-laziness. It can be stated that quantitative data complemented qualitative ones without leaving any room for hesitation.

Based on the findings of the study, some pedagogical implications are given. First, educational institutions that desire to reap the benefits of technology in English classes should equip their classrooms accordingly. Next, authorized bodies can increase the volume of in-service training to implement game-based language learning policies clearly; otherwise, some minor obstacles can disrupt the classroom atmosphere, reduce educational benefits, and deter educators from using them in their classes. Additionally, peer learning is at the heart of current teaching methods, which Quizlet can implement easily. Thus, educators can accommodate students' needs to learn in cooperation and get feedback from their classmates in a constructive mode, all of which boost their motivation considerably. After that, Quizlet's power to engage students with balanced activities should not be ignored so that monotonous and boring classes can be reduced dramatically. Afterward, Quizlet is a promising tool for developing various skills, such as spelling, writing, and pronunciation, supporting other macro and micro-skills in the long run. Thus, this learning cycle can be used to guarantee students' overall proficiency in English.

Regarding the study's limitations, many recommendations are made to inspire scholars to conduct further research about Quizlet. Firstly, the study was confined to measuring the differences between the vocabulary powers of learners, which can be expanded to investigating the role of Quizlet in enhancing other skills. Later, only the law department was included in the study, which can be enriched with other departments. Subsequently, only six book units were converted into Quizlet flashcards covering the whole book. After that, only junior students were participants, which can be increased with freshman, sophomore, and senior students. Finally, a private university was the setting that could be widened to other public and private universities in the region.

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Employing Drama Techniques in the Classroom to Improve the Speaking Skills of EFL University Students

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Abstract
This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of drama techniques in improving the speaking skills of Saudi EFL students in terms of accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. Therefore, the significance of the study is in its contributions to the field of second language teaching in Saudi Arabia, as well as in its potential to provide information to stakeholders such as researchers and English language teachers to explore to what extent drama techniques can have an impact on improving EFL students' speaking skills. This study employed a quasi-experimental research design with one class and two groups randomly divided equally. The research population consisted of first-year Saudi English majors, specifically all 60 female students enrolled in the speaking and listening course. One class was chosen as the experimental group (30 students) and another as the control group (30 students). The study was conducted over four weeks in the second semester of 2024. A speaking test was utilized as a research instrument. The data analysis results revealed an apparent weakness in the students' speaking accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency in both groups during the pre-test. However, the post-test revealed significant differences in the students' speaking accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency in both groups, indicating that drama techniques had a significant impact on students' speaking skills. The primary recommendation was to raise teachers' awareness of the drama techniques and activities to employ in speaking classes.

Keywords: Accuracy, drama techniques, EFL students, fluency, pronunciation, speaking skills, vocabulary

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Introduction

In recent decades, many countries have strived to increase the English proficiency of their students. Many countries aim to join the international community of trading nations where the language of business, technology, science, the arts, and communication is English (Alfarwan, 2021). Many such countries (e.g., Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia), however, are ones where English is only spoken as a Foreign Language (FL), with little local currency. Hence, the emphasis must be on achieving this goal through the educational system, where more FL instruction is supposed to be continuously revisited. However, students still encounter several difficulties with language learning. Research suggests that difficulties occur in all four language skills. Among the four language skills, speaking is one of the most difficult to acquire (Masrul & Asilestari, 2021). Speaking is a primary verbal language skill to form meaningful speech that conveys ideas, thoughts, and feelings, thus effective communication. According to Kumar (2021), speaking is one of the most often utilized yet most challenging language skills since it allows speakers to communicate their innermost ideas and aspirations to listeners. Henceforth, it is worth attention from language educators, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts like ours, where there is a perception that EFL learners have more language difficulties basically because of limited access to practice their English outside of class in natural settings (Uztosum & Erten, 2014). We focus on speaking in this research since it is impossible to include all language problems in one small-scale study.

Speaking links students and knowledge, both inside and outside the classroom. Students can communicate their understanding by speaking during the learning process,student-teacher interactions, and responding material. According to Suresh and Srinivasan (2014), teaching is an interactive process involving teacher-student exchanges during designated classroom activities. Moreover, part of teachers' responsibilities is to create a learning environment that encourages and allows students to improve their speaking skills. One way to improve students' speaking skills is by employing several techniques. Drama techniques are a methodology that differs from traditional education models. It has its characteristics and consists of pedagogical activities such as role-play, simulation, mime, and improvisation. In addition, it can be utilized to give students a chance to actively participate in the interaction process by using their personalities and emotional domains. Drama is a significant technique that positively impacts students' speaking skills, including accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation (e.g., Trivedi, 2013). Moreover, drama techniques foster critical thinking, self-confidence, and intellectual exploration (Anderson, 2011). Drama allows students to use a variety of vocabulary in various possible contexts, such as exposure to real-world scenarios, which is believed to foster speaking confidence and proficiency (Anton, 2006; Davies, 1990).

The study problem underscores that speaking is considered the most challenging skill for students. There is a consensus that students are not doing as expected in speaking and hence encounter many problems. Brown (2007) states that many students experience shyness and a lack of understanding about overcoming related obstacles. This is because, for instance, they had insufficient knowledge of speaking skills (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension), which contributes to fragile confidence (Hadijah, 2014). The use of traditional techniques in the classroom by a considerable number of English language teachers is a primary cause of these speaking skills problems. Moreover, we should encourage teachers to develop diverse methods to enhance students' speaking skills, such as utilizing drama techniques in the classroom (Culham, 2003). Educational drama is a highly effective strategy that significantly

improves students' cognitive, mental, psychological, physical, kinetic, and social development (Barakat, 2023). Therefore, it is timely to examine the impact of drama techniques on speaking skills in terms of pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary, and fluency.

The study aims to examine the status of all learners' speaking skills levels and determine how drama techniques can improve the accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency of Saudi EFL students' spoken English. Additionally, the study aims to provide teachers and other relevant stakeholders with practical pedagogy for drama techniques, thereby enhancing the spoken English skills of Saudi EFL students. Moreover, the study's significance lies in its contributions to second language teaching in Saudi Arabia. In the Saudi context, Alrajhi et al. (2013) found that such studies about drama techniques are necessary because most students have inferior speaking skills. Similarly, it is believed that these studies can assist EFL Saudi students in overcoming difficulties in speaking skills and verbal communication. On the one hand, the current research contributes to the existing relevant literature. It assists relevant stakeholders like researchers and EFL teachers to discover the extent to which drama techniques can enhance EFL students' speaking skills. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the general pattern of all students' speaking skills regarding pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary, and fluency in the pre-test?
2. Is there a significant difference between the group of students who received drama techniques and the group of students who used traditional methods in terms of accuracy?
3. Is there a significant difference between the group of students who received drama methods and the group of students who used traditional methods in terms of pronunciation?
4. Is there a significant difference between the group of students who received drama techniques and the group of students who used traditional methods in terms of vocabulary?
5. Is there a significant difference between the group of students who received drama techniques and the group of students who used traditional methods in terms of fluency?

Literature Review

Drama Techniques

Drama techniques have many different definitions. Holden (1981) describes them as made-up scenarios where students can be whoever they want. On the other hand, Zyoud (2010), claimed that drama is a valuable teaching tool that links linguistic expression to ideas (p.10). Drama techniques include role-playing, simulation, improvisation, and mime. Students can use these to improve their speaking skills so they can verbally communicate satisfactorily in the English language.

Drama Techniques Activities

Drama techniques include different language teaching activities. First, role play is one of the most common communicative classroom activities for helping students practice their second language and improve their speaking abilities (Blatner, 2009; Maley & Duff, 2005; Ulas, 2008). Further, role-playing encourages enhanced second-language learning, increased student cooperation, and a relaxed, engaging, and inspiring learning environment in EFL classes (Mollazamani & Ashtiani, 2008). Second, Dougill (1987) stated that mime is a "non-verbal representation of an idea or story through gesture, bodily movement, and expression" (p. 13). Thus, students avoid tension during classroom activities by performing in their native language in front

of their peers, eliminating the need to use a foreign language (Savignon, 1983). Using this strategy in crowded EFL classes can provide an opportunity for students with limited proficiency to participate in class activities. Third, improvisation, as Wessels (1987) stated, "Improvisation taps the students' already existing command of the language and tests their communicative strategies" (p. 85). Students are free to express themselves or create their personas if the concept is presented, and they act spontaneously when an unexpected situation occurs. Fourth, simulation is described by Buckner (1999) as "an intensive, interactive experience in which the content and roles assumed by participants are designed to reflect what people encounter in specific environments" (p. 1). Moreover, Livingstone (1985) said, "Simulation need not stick so closely to real life. The essential point is that the student brings his personality, experience, and opinions to the task" (p. 1). Simulation creates an atmosphere in which students can engage in meaningful activities.

Speaking Skills

Ulas (2008) states, "Speaking is the most common and important means of communication among human beings. The key to successful communication is speaking nicely, efficiently, and articulately, as well as using effective voice projection" (p. 856). Moreover, Calle (2018) suggests that speaking requires being "linguistically competent, knowing how to produce specific points of language, such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary" (p. 29). In addition, the chances of students achieving academic success and success in their daily lives will increase when they are capable of communicating in language well.

Speaking skills include general aspects such as critical information and definitions, while specific elements include terms, pronunciation, vocabulary, accuracy, and fluency, which are essential for effective speaking. According to Bailey (2006) and Cazden (2001), the four components of speaking proficiency should be understood by students, with vocabulary acquisition being one of the most crucial components. Connected to the vocabulary, Hornby et al. (2010) state that pronunciation is the pattern of a speaker's speech, the way the words are pronounced, and the way they speak a language. Furthermore, Amma (2005) and Juvova et al. (2015) define speaking fluency as a learner's ability to speak fluently without hesitating or extended thought intervals. Moreover, accuracy refers to speaking without errors (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). Therefore, the current study focused on examining essential items such as vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy.

The Impact of Employing Drama Techniques on Students' Speaking Skills

Drama in the EFL classroom can alleviate tension, allowing students to express their ideas and gain confidence. Bousselault (2010) suggested that drama is a valuable language teaching technique, promoting meaningful conversations and vocabulary acquisition. Studies indicate that drama instruction can enhance students' speaking skills by improving vocabulary, accuracy, pronunciation, and fluency.

Marfuah and Patmasari (2020) examined how drama techniques improved students' fluency, speaking proficiency, and comprehension with 260 senior high school students using a pre-and post-test. The results showed that the experimental and control classes did not show significant differences in pre-test speaking accuracy, fluency, or comprehension. After the drama techniques were implemented, students' speaking skills in the experimental group, which included accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, significantly improved. Furthermore, Dawoud et al. (2024) investigate using drama techniques in schools to enhance English speaking skills and understand

how sixth-grade students perceive drama techniques in the Palestinian curriculum. They conducted the study for nine weeks. They collected the data through thematic analysis and semi-structured interviews. Based on the study's results, students exhibited positive feelings, preferred drama techniques, and improved their speaking skills.

In fact, during drama activities, students improve their speaking skills and qualities such as teamwork, creativity, and confidence. According to Mugiraneza et al. (2024), drama activities improve students' speaking skills, including accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation, enabling them to communicate more effectively and efficiently. In addition, they stimulate students' imaginations and provide a safe and supportive environment in which they can explore issues and experiences. Nguyen (2023) investigated how drama activities affected speaking skills. In this quasi-experimental study, sixty eleventh-grade students from Can Tho City participated in the mixed method approach, focusing on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and discourse management. The results showed drama activities in speaking classes improved students' speaking performance, and their perception of drama activities was favorable. Moreover, Akyüz and Tani's (2020) study examined the impact of drama activities on students' speaking skills and language acquisition. The study involved 21 first-year university students. Data were collected through a pre-intermediate speaking test and questionnaire. The relevant findings showed that drama activities positively impacted students' speaking skills, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Alasmari and Alshae (2020) found that drama impacted English learning by sixth-grade female students in Sakaka City, Saudi Arabia. They used a mixed-method approach. The results showed that drama activities in language classrooms enhance language acquisition by enhancing communicative skills and increasing engagement with the learning process.

Drama activities in speaking classes helped students develop confidence, enjoyment, acting skills, vocabulary, and teamwork (Manurung, 2018). This is in line with a wide array of other relevant research studies and students at different levels of education, which support the benefit of drama techniques instruction on improving students' speaking skills. For instance, Kumar et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of drama techniques instruction on 30 university EFL students. The results showed a significant positive effect on students' acquisition of fluent speaking skills, besides the speaking skills mentioned above. In other words, drama techniques give students authentic scenarios in which they can participate mentally, physically, and emotionally. This demonstrates how using drama techniques can improve the students' vocabulary level, pronunciation, accuracy, and other pertinent aspects of their speaking skills. Therefore, we can hypothesize that using drama techniques with students to teach speaking will yield similar results. According to Djafar and Yunus (2023), drama techniques can help students express themselves fluently and accurately in English classes. They examined the speaking skills of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri six-Gowa using pre-experimental methods and speaking tests. After the introduction of drama techniques, the students' speaking skills scores, which were 48.32 out of 100 on the pre-test, increased to 68.18 on the post-test. Moreover, Altwissi's (2022) study found that drama techniques improved sixth-grade students' English language skills. There was a positive correlation between drama teaching and improved English language speaking results among 70 experimental and control groups.

Drama techniques enhance speaking skills in many studies. Careful execution of instruction based on drama techniques is crucial. For instance, the time students spend in the classroom during drama instruction is essential for achieving more realistic results. Rosyada et al. (2014) found no discernible impact of classroom drama techniques on students' speaking skills.

The short duration of three 45-minute sessions led to this outcome. Similarly, Conejeros and de Zarate Fernandez (2009) employed drama for two 45-minute sessions, but they found no discernible improvement in speaking skills. Therefore, as we will see later, we have considered these factors when conducting this study.

The analysis of relevant literature on drama techniques reveals a gap in previous studies in Saudi Arabia, which focused on general speaking skills rather than specific areas such as pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary, and fluency. In particular, numerous research studies indicate that this gap becomes more evident in EFL contexts like ours (e.g., Manurung, 2018; Kumar et al., 2022). Furthermore, the current study will bridge this gap and help EFL Saudi students overcome challenges in their speaking skills regarding accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. In addition, the researcher acknowledges that no prior research has been conducted in the current study context, which could potentially uncover possible dilemmas and offer practical solutions when necessary.

Methods

This is a quasi-experimental study in which two or more groups are compared or controlled to answer specific research questions using a pre-post test instrument. Richards and Schmidt (2013) stated that many quantitative educational studies are conducted using quasi-experimental designs because of the intricacies of teaching and learning in classrooms. The researcher chose this methodology because the data is quantitative, and the information found in the field has properties that can be represented by numbers and treated in that way, using drama techniques.

Participants

The study was conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2024. It involved all 60 level one female students studying for their bachelor's degrees in English language major at Majmaah University, in Majmaah governorate, a relatively new university in a small governorate located almost 200 kilometers from Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. The duration of the bachelor's degree program is four years, divided into eight levels, and each level is a semester of 16 weeks. The participants' ages ranged between 19 and 20 years old. This study used a purposive sample because the participants had taken the Listening and Speaking One course (ENG 112). The course aims to enable students to comprehend and produce spoken English. It also has the most significant number of students, which is satisfactory for a reseach like ours.

Research Instruments

The researcher employed a speaking pre-test and post-test adapted from Torrico (2015). The test consists of a pre-test and a post-test (see Appendix A). Two EFL teaching experts approved the modifications the researcher made to fit the study objectives. The pre-test is composed of conversations about holidays, food, and shopping. Three sample questions make up the test. The post-test consists of two samples: storytelling and discussion topics. The four criteria for evaluating scores for the test were accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency, the targeted aspects of this study.

Speaking Evaluation Rubric

To assess the students' speaking skills, the researcher used a speaking evaluation rubric adopted by Torrico (2015). The speaking evaluation rubric scores are: "Needs Improvement: 0–4, Satisfactory: 5–6, Good: 7-8, Excellent: 9–10". Additionally, the researcher adjusted four proficiency categories, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency, to align with the study's objectives. An applied linguist expert cross-checked this modification and approved it for the current study. (See Appendix B). Moreover, a sample of six tests of the students' speaking performance was recorded and rated by the researcher and another volunteer EFL teacher expert with solid background knowledge in speaking assessment who scored them independently using the above rubric. They achieved 82% agreement, which is an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability. They then discussed their discrepancies and reached a deal.

Research Procedures

The ethical approval and all relevant official requirements have approved this study. In addition, participants were assured that their personal information would not be used for any other purpose than for research purposes. The procedure in this study took place over four weeks. Moreover, the study involved administering a pre-test to all students before and after the experiment. Once the study was completed, post-testing was done to compare results between those who received drama instruction and those who did not. (See Appendix A.) The average time for students was about 8 minutes, on the pre-test and post-test. The pre-test and the post-test both took place over two days. The speaking test criteria rubric was the basis for the student's evaluation (see Appendix B).

The total number of sessions were 8, each taking 50 minutes, twice a week. The course teacher received explanations for all activities beforehand. The teacher introduced the researcher to the targeted students. The researcher greeted the students and discussed the study's objectives, randomly dividing the 60 students into two groups. The experimental group had 30 students who received drama techniques instruction. In the control group, 30 students received instruction using the traditional teaching methods outlined in their textbooks. Before the sessions started, the researcher designed a welcome card and a small gift and gave them to the experimental group of students. The experimental group received explanations of all the pertinent drama activities included in the presentation.

During February 2024, the first week consists of the first and second sessions. The first session began with applying drama techniques, starting with a role-play activity involving two topics. A job interview is the first topic covered, in which two students present scenarios to the class and exchange roles as if they were at a job interview. In the second session, the students exchange roles and perform scenarios based on the second topic, student and teacher roles.

The second week consists of the third and fourth sessions. The third session featured a simulation activity. Additionally, each of the two students was in a group. The simulation activity consisted of two topics. First, the two students discuss Corona and the events 2020, exchanging news as if they were news announcers. They received a camera and a microphone to enhance the naturalness of the role. The second topic in the fourth session is bringing actual objects from home. They are assigned roles as buyers and sellers of these objects. Students play the roles of seller and buyer. The objects included cosmetics, fragrances, clothes, and food.

The third week consists of the fifth and sixth sessions. The fifth session featured an improvisation activity where the students reenacted the events that occurred Jenny and her mother. Furthermore, each of the two students was placed in a group. The story begins with Jenny and her mother walking to the park during their vacation. When they walk, they stop and are surprised. She asked them to complete it, and they invented many events, including that Jenny and her mother witnessed a traffic accident. They also concocted the story of a lost and crying child unable to locate his family and the discovery of a wallet containing a lot of money in the park. In the sixth session, the researcher divided the students into six groups, each containing five students, for the second improvisation activity. The activity revolved around a group of people, with the students assuming the role of company employees on strike for higher pay. Students cited reasons such as the high cost of living, while others expressed about the long work hours and inadequate salary.

The fourth week consists of the seventh and eighth sessions. In the seventh session, the researcher presented a mime activity consisting of movement and feeling cards designed by the researcher. The researcher divided the students into six groups for the mime activity. In each group, there is a leader representing what is on the movement cards. In the eighth session, participants engaged in a mime activity using the feeling cards. The presentation of the cards was similar to that of the movement card. Following that, the teacher and the students received thanks for their participation. They also received a thank-you card and a small gift. The researcher designed the card.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using the statistical analysis program SPSS 26. Moreover, descriptive statistics were used to analyze pre-test results to understand the overall pattern of students' speaking skills in regarding pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary, and fluency. Additionally, the study utilized an independent T-test to compare speaking skills in accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency between the control and experimental groups.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the instruments' pre-test and post-test was derived from Torrico (2015) and proved effective. To test validity and reliability, the researcher used Alpha Cronbach in Table One.

Table 1. *Validity and reliability*

Reliability	Validity
0.978	0.957

Table One reveals that the experiment's items and axes exhibit high stability, as demonstrated by Cronbach's alpha stability coefficient. The total validity coefficient was 0.957, indicating high stability and closeness to the correct value. The experiment's reliability coefficient, calculated as the square root of the validity coefficient, stands at 0.978, surpassing the threshold of 0.5, thereby signifying high reliability. Therefore, the experiment has a high degree of reliability.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

The pre-test revealed the general pattern of speaking skills in terms of pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary, and fluency for all students.

Table 2. *The distribution of pre-test results of the study*

Questions		Agreement				Mean	Percent of Skills	Level of Skills
		Need improvement	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent			
Accuracy	F	24	31	5	0	1.68	42.0%	Need improvement
	%	40	51.7	8.3	0			
Pronunciation	F	26	31	3	0	1.62	40.5%	Need improvement
	%	43.3	51.7	5	0			
Vocabulary	F	24	31	5	0	1.68	42.0%	Need improvement
	%	40	51.7	8.3	0			
Fluency	F	27	28	5	0	1.63	40.8%	Need improvement
	%	45	46.7	8.3	0			

The pre-test results in Table Two indicate that students need to improve their speaking skills, as evidenced by the percentages of accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. First, regarding accuracy, 24 students needed improvement, 31 students got satisfactory, five students got good, and 0 students got excellent. The accuracy percentage is 42%. Second, regarding pronunciation, 26 students needed improvement, 31 students got satisfactory, three students got good, and 0 students got excellent. The pronunciation percentage is 40.5%. Third, regarding vocabulary, 24 students needed improvement, 31 students got satisfactory, five students got good, and 0 students got excellent. The vocabulary percentage is 42%. Fourth, regarding fluency, 27 students needed improvement, 28 students got satisfactory, five students got good, and 0 students got excellent. The fluency percentage is 40.8%. Based on the above results in terms of accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency, the percentages are less than 50%. Hence, this tells us that the students' speaking level has not received satisfactory input instruction, besides poor practice in and outside the classroom.

Independent Sample T-tests

The objective of the post-test was to demonstrate the variations in speaking abilities, including accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency, between the control group and the experimental group. The study utilized independent sample T-tests, resulting in the following findings:

Table 3. *Independent sample T-tests between the mean of accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency for two groups of the post-test*

Speaking skills	Sample	Mean Difference	SD Difference	T.test	P.value
Accuracy	Control group	-0.16	0.85	-6.25	0.000
	Experimental group	1.56	1.08		
Pronunciation	Control group	0.04	0.53	-8.30	0.000
	Experimental group	1.80	0.91		
Vocabulary	Control group	0.12	0.73	-8.29	0.000
	Experimental group	1.80	0.71		
Fluency	Control group	0.08	0.76	-5.40	0.000
	Experimental group	1.44	1.00		

From the above Table Three, it is found that there is a significant difference in speaking skills in terms of accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency between the control group and the experimental group. To illustrate thoroughly, first, there is a significant difference between the experimental group (M = 1.56, SD = 1.08) and the control group (M = 0.16, SD = 0.85), t = (6.25), because the P. value is (0.000) <0.05, in accuracy. Similarly, the significant difference extends to pronunciation between the experimental group (M =1.80, SD =0.91) and the control group (M =0.04, SD =0.53), t = (-8.30), because the P. value is (0.000) <0.05. In addition, the result showed a significant difference between the experimental group (M =1.80, SD =0.71) and the control group (M =0.12, SD =0.73), t = (-8.29), because the P. value is (0.000) <0.05. in vocabulary. Also, there is a significant difference between the experimental group (M =1.44, SD =1.00) and the control group (M =0.08, SD =0.76), t = (-5.40), because the P value is (0.000) <0.05. in fluency. Due to the use of drama techniques, the experimental group's speaking level was higher, the students' speaking skills have improved regarding pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary, and fluency.

Discussion

This section's discussion includes the first question and other related questions. The first question*: What is the general pattern of all students' speaking skills in terms of pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary, and fluency in the pre-test?*

The pre-test results revealed insufficient vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency in the students' general speaking patterns.Their low scores, significantly below the mid-scale 50, indicate a deficient speaking threshold level. Several reasons were highlighted, for instance, a lack of practice observed inside the classroom. This suggests the need for more techniques and activities relevant to speaking level improvement. Furthermore, there may be insufficient English practice in EFL contexts, such as Majmaah governorate (small town), the current context of this study, where there is little room for English language use. According to Hammad (2013), Saudi college girls' speaking skills are negatively impacted by their weak English skills, lack of opportunities for listening and speaking, and a lack of use of strategies like role-play and debate. These findings align with earlier research conducted by (Marfuah & Patmasari, 2020).

On the other hand, to answer the related questions. The second question: *Is there a significant difference between the group of students who received drama techniques and the group of students who used traditional methods in terms of accuracy?* The third question*: Is there a significant difference between the group of students who received drama methods and the group of students who used traditional methods in terms of pronunciation?*The fourth question*: Is there a significant difference between the group of students who received drama techniques and the group of students who used traditional methods in terms of vocabulary?* The fifth question*: Is there a significant difference between the group of students who received drama techniques and the group of students who used traditional methods in terms of fluency?*

The results of the post-test using the independent sample T-tests demonstrate that the experimental and control groups differed statistically significantly because the P value is 0.000 < 0.05. This indicates that the experimental group has dramatically improved their speaking skills, including accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency, compared to the control group. Drama integration into the classroom has been very beneficial for students. Therefore, students can convey their experiences through drama, a result of teamwork and initiative. Drama techniques gave students a setting in which they could practice speaking effectively (Schejbal, 2006). In addition,

drama encouraged a natural integration of language proficiency and interaction in the classroom, as proposed by Maley and Duff (2005). Drama techniques, a potent teaching tool, foster active learning and participation by enabling students to explore diverse scenarios and environments. As stated by Vila-Abadal (2009), teaching through drama is becoming increasingly popular in educational settings. Drama techniques activities, including role-playing, mimes, simulations, and improvisation, are effective in enhancing speaking skills. Moreover, drama techniques motivate students to engage in a more productive learning environment through group interaction (Via, 1976; Smith, 1984; Wessels, 1991). In line with several quasi-experimental studies that showed similar findings (e.g., Altweissi, 2022; Zahri & Asilestari, 2022; Djafar & Yunus, 2023), the drama techniques improve students' speaking skills. This corroborates Ulas's (2008) observation that these drama techniques give language learners of second languages opportunities to practice speaking English within meaningful dialogue. Drama techniques provide students with the opportunity to increase their speaking practice and enhance their ability to express themselves more effectively. On the contrary, other studies (e.g., Conejeros & de Zarate Fernandez, 2009; Rosyada et al., 2014) showed a different result, that there were no significant differences between the two groups, basically due to the short duration of drama techniques employment in classroom experiments, as was admitted in such results.

The current study focuses on speaking skills, specifically accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. The study compares the students' levels before and after the experimental period. Additionally, the significant differences observed between the two groups indicated the effectiveness of drama techniques. Ballantyne and Packer (1997) recommend using drama as a teaching method because it motivates students to actively participate in learning the target language and creates a welcoming, fun learning environment within the classroom.

Conclusion

The current study examined the impact of drama techniques on improving EFL students' speaking skills in terms of accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. Drama techniques play a significant role in students' speaking skills. The findings revealed that the students generally had weak speaking skills, which led to a low level of verbal communication in English. However, drama techniques improved Saudi EFL students' speaking skills in terms of accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency. The study found that drama significantly impacted Saudi EFL students' speaking skills, revealing significant differences in accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency through pre-test and post-test speaking tests. The findings of the study support and confirm that drama techniques are helpful and practical in helping improve EFL students' speaking skills. Additionally, the EFL classroom used drama techniques to foster a welcoming and enjoyable atmosphere. This is because drama activities, such as role-play, simulation, mime, and improvisation, made students share their thoughts and feelings when they worked together and weren't shy or afraid of speaking.

Implications

The pre-test results showed that students' general speaking patterns need improvement. To address this, course designers can spare some valuable space for speaking activities that improve students’ speaking skills. For instance, they can create as realistic a setting as possible for students to practice, and teachers in turn should make the most of activities such as role-playing, simulation, improvisation, and mime with their students to improve their speaking skills in terms of

vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency. Furthermore, drama activities proved to significantly enhance students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (Akyüz & Tani, 2020).

The post-test results indicated that the experimental group made more progress than the control group. As a result, by appropriately incorporating drama techniques into classroom teaching, students would learn and have fun. Similarly, EFL teachers are recommended to use drama techniques in the classroom. Furthermore, there are some general recommendations for students on how to improve their speaking skills, such as the Cambly application, which is an online platform where adults can converse with native English speakers while practicing and learning the language. According to Alshammary (2020), Cambly has a positive effect on speaking proficiency because it provides an enjoyable environment, promotes motivation, eases anxiety, provides practice opportunities, and enables individuals to feel more comfortable and confident in their abilities.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study sheds some light on the student's general level of speaking skills and the effect of drama techniques activities. However, there were some limitations, as occurs with any study. For instance, it was a gender-restricted study with only females. Besides, it was limited to 60 female students of level one from Majmaah University's English department in 2024. This is because the education system in the study context is gender-restricted, and the researcher could not teach male students. However, one possible way to overcome this barrier is to rely on a male teacher to do the work of male students, if possible. Future research would benefit from gender-related studies, such as comparing male and female students' speaking skills. This can show exciting and valuable results that can help EFL teachers understand both genders' ways of learning and developing speaking skills. In addition, the study was a single-method test. However, this was due to time constraints and the graduate program timeline. Nevertheless, the results obtained were believed to be exciting and insightful, achieving the study objectives. Yet, it would be more insightful to examine students' perceptions through questionnaires and interviews to support study test results.

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Appendices
Appendix A
Pre-tests and Post-tests

Pre-tests

"Sample 1"
"Having a conversation: Holidays"
"• Tell me what kind of activities you enjoy doing on holiday. Where did you go on holiday last year?"
"• What did you do and see on your holiday?"
"• Have you got any holiday plans for the summer?"
"• Will you go with your family or with friends?"
"• Would you rather go to the beach or to the countryside?"
"• Have you ever been camping? Was it fun?"
"• Do you like sightseeing and visiting monuments?"
"• Have you ever been abroad? Where to?"
"• Which country would you like to visit? Why?"

"Sample 2"
"Having a conversation: Food"
"• What's your favorite food? How is it made? What's it made of?"
"• Can you cook? What's your specialty?"
"• Who cooks at home? Do you ever cook for your family?"
"• I would like to eat some traditional Spanish food. What do you recommend?"
"• Have you ever eaten food from another country? Tell me about it."
"• How often do you go to restaurants?"
"• Do you think young people eat too much fast food?"
"• Would you watch programs about cooking on TV?"
"• Do you think cooking should be taught at school? Why/not?"

"Sample 3"
"• Having a conversation: Shopping."
"• Do you enjoy shopping?"
"• What sort of things do you buy?"
"• Where do you do most of your shopping? in a market, a shopping center, or in small shops?"
"• Who is responsible for shopping for food in your family? Do you ever help with the food shopping?"
"• Tell me about the most expensive thing you have bought."
"• I would like to buy some new clothes. Which shops would you recommend?"
"• Internet shopping is very popular now. Have you ever bought anything online?"
"• When is the best time to go shopping?"
"• Would you like to work in a shop? Why/not?"

Post-tests

"Sample 1"
"Storytelling tasks"
"Choose one story to tell:"
"Tell me about a holiday you had."
"Tell me about a difficult journey you had."
"Tell me about a perfect day you've had."
"Tell me about a special event in your life."

"Sample 2"
"Discussion topics"
"Choose one topic to discuss about."
"You should mention pros and cons, or advantages and disadvantages:"
"Young people under 15 shouldn't use mobile phones."
"Young people should start working earlier, for example while they are studying."
"Cultural places, such as museums and monuments, should be for free for students."

Appendix B
Speaking Evaluation Rubric

Table 4. *Speaking Evaluation Rubric*

Evaluation Criteria	"Needs Improvement 0-4"	"Satisfactory 5-6"	"Good 7-8"	"Excellent 9-10"
Accuracy				
Pronunciation				
Vocabulary				
Fluency				

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Facilitating Second Language Willingness to Communicate in English: A Systematic Review on Types of Classroom-based Instructional Practices and Their Effects

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Abstract

This study addresses the critical question of how classroom-based instructional practices impact second language willingness to communicate (L2 WTC) in English. Recognizing the central role of L2 WTC in fostering students' active participation in English communication, this systematic review evaluates the scope, effects, and contextual factors of instructional practices designed to enhance L2 WTC. The primary aim is to synthesize existing research to identify effective strategies for fostering L2 WTC among English as a second/foreign language learners. Specifically, the review explores: (1) the types of instructional practices implemented in classroom-based settings to develop L2 WTC and their contexts; (2) the observed effects of these instructional practices on L2 WTC; and (3) other variables studied alongside L2 WTC and their effects. Empirical evidence from studies published between January 2018 and December 2023 was systematically reviewed using the PRISMA method. A total of 45 studies were selected from databases such as ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and SpringerLink. The findings reveal that instructional practices focusing on interactive approaches, collaborative tasks, and personalized feedback are most effective in enhancing L2 WTC. Furthermore, variables such as anxiety, motivation, and perceived competence were found to significantly influence L2 WTC. This study highlights critical gaps in the literature, including limited longitudinal research and insufficient exploration of diverse learner populations. It concludes with recommendations for refining instructional practices and guiding future research to further enhance L2 WTC.

Keywords: Classroom-based instructional practices, foreign language learning, second language acquisition, systematic review, willingness to communicate

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Introduction

With the evolution of contemporary language pedagogy, there has been a significant focus on preparing individuals to effectively utilize the target language for practical communication. Thus, within language education settings, instructors aspire to cultivate learners who demonstrate a strong engagement in spoken communication in their second/foreign language (SL/FL). The WTC, as the prerequisite to developing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' communicative competence, has been gaining increasing attention and application in the English learning and teaching field (Peng, 2014). Considered as the probability of an individual choosing to initiate communication in the target language when free to do so, L2 WTC not only fosters genuine intercultural exchanges but also improves communicative competence (Sato, 2023). To develop students' communicative competence, language educators must grasp the concept of L2 WTC and employ strategies to enhance it (Chen et al., 2021). In addition, as L2 WTC is a dynamic construct influenced by numerous factors, educators need to understand how various affective, linguistic, and communication factors interact and how this interplay affects students' L2 WTC.

Despite the efforts of numerous scholars and educators to enhance learners' L2 WTC through diverse instructional methods in the classroom, and despite the abundance of WTC studies, there remains a lack of systematic organization and synthesis of such literature. To address this gap, this study systematically reviews and appraises existing evidence from past research to investigate the effects of various instructional practices on L2 WTC, aiming to identify and evaluate classroom-based strategies that effectively enhance learners' WTC. Furthermore, this review aims to explore not only the effects of instructional practices on WTC but also the interplay of other variables that have been studied alongside WTC. This systematic review is particularly significant because it consolidates the fragmented findings from recent studies, enabling educators, researchers, and practitioners to better understand the approaches that work, the contexts in which they are effective, and the broader implications for teaching practice.

Past Studies on Willingness to Communicate

WTC in second language acquisition (SLA) has been widely recognized as a critical factor in language learning success. The concept of WTC, introduced by McCroskey and Baer (1985), refers to an individual's likelihood of initiating communication in a given context. In the context of EFL classrooms, WTC is often seen as a predictor of active participation, language use, and ultimately, language proficiency (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Over the past decades, numerous studies have explored various factors that influence students' WTC.Psychological and affective factors play a pivotal role in shaping students' WTC. Motivation, anxiety, and self-perceived competence are frequently cited as the most influential variables (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Zarrinabadi et al., 2023). Research has shown that motivated learners are more likely to engage in communication activities, whereas high levels of anxiety often hinder WTC (Basöz & Erten, 2019). Self-confidence, often tied to perceived competence, has also been found to facilitate WTC, as learners who believe in their language abilities are more willing to communicate (Muroya, 2022).

A large body of research has examined the relationship between instructional practices and WTC. Feedback, assessment, task types, and teaching approaches have all been shown to influence students' willingness to engage in communication (Riasati & Rahimi, 2018). For example, a

systematic review by Jelínková et al. (2024) highlighted the important role of feedback on students' WTC. Active learning and project-based learning (PBL) approaches have consistently been linked to increased WTC (Cheng et al., 2023; Azizi et al., 2022). These methods promote collaboration and real-world language use, providing learners with authentic communication opportunities. Besideds, learner-centered approach has been found to facilitate L2 communication too (Fekete, 2022).

While much of the existing research has focused on the direct effects of instructional practices on WTC, there remains a need for a systematic analysis of these instructional practices that explore the complex interplay of affective, cognitive, and contextual factors.

Research Questions

This paper aims to address the following three research questions:

Research Question 1: What instructional practices have been implemented in classroom-based settings to develop the willingness to communicate, and what is their context?

Research Question 2: What are the observed effects of studies investigating the effects of instructional practices on the willingness to communicate?

Research Question 3: Besides willingness to communicate, what other variables have been studied in these WTC research studies, and what are their effects?

Methodology

A systematic literature review is a highly structured form of research that synthesizes existing scholarly papers and studies on a specific topic or question. This methodological approach is designed to minimize bias and provide comprehensive, reliable findings. A systematic search of eight databases including databases, including ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, SpringerLink, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, JSTOR, and Science Direct was conducted in this paper to identify relevant studies on instructional practices aimed to facilitate learners' WTC, reducing the risk of publication bias. The review process and findings are reported systematically and transparently, following the guidelines of PRISMA (Moher et al., 2009), as illustrated in Fig. 1. Four key steps were undertaken in the execution of the review: (1) identification, (2) screening, (3) eligibility, and (4) inclusion.

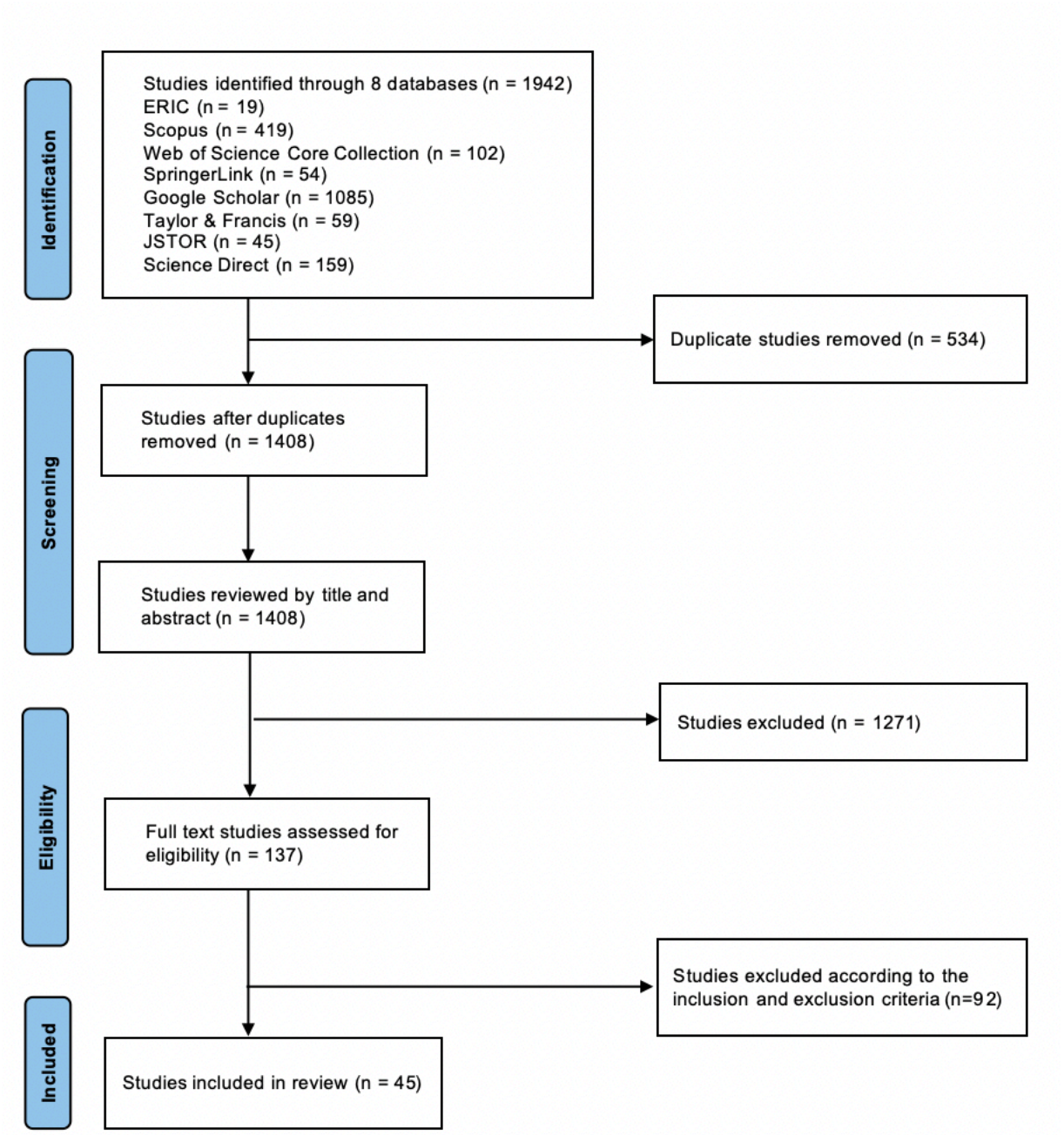


Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart of the instructional practice papers included in the review (Moher et al., 2009)

In this paper, instructional practices are defined as various pedagogical approaches and methods used to facilitate learning. The search began on December 20 and concluded on December 22, 2023, focusing on journal articles published from 2018 to December 22, 2023, as WTC studies increased during this period (Ma et al., 2023). (Quasi-)experimental studies were included for their scientific rigor, data controllability, repeatability, and reliability. Keywords included "willingness to communicate," intervention, treatment, instruction*, lesson*, program*, approach*, strategy*,

technique*, pedagogy*, method*, feedback*, “foreign language,” "second language," and class*. Asterisks and synonyms helped capture relevant studies, while double quotation marks excluded irrelevant ones. Primary search terms were formed using single words and nested clauses with Boolean operators (AND, OR). The first author conducted the initial search, with oversight from the third author. This process identified 1,942 studies, of which 534 were duplicates. A title and abstract screening removed 1,271 articles. Analyzing the remaining 137 studies led to the exclusion of an additional 92 based on the review criteria in Table One.

Table 1. *Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review*

Classification	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1. Publication year	From January 2018 to December 2023	Before 2018 or after December 2023
2. Language	English	Not English
3. Availability	Full text online	Not available
4. Publication type	Journal article	Review, dissertation/thesis, pilot study, book chapter or book, report
5. Research type	Empirical studies	Non-empirical studies
6. Research design	(Quasi-)experimental design	Non-(quasi-)experimental design
7. Main variable	L2 WTC in English	Others (e.g., WTC in other languages other than English, WTC for other language skills other than speaking, willingness to do other behaviors but not speak).
6. Target language	English	Not English

In total, 45 studies met the eligibility criteria (see Figure One). A within-case analysis was conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994), with each article analyzed individually and summarized in a table. The first author extracted data on authors, publication year, study location, participant characteristics, grouping, instructional practices, WTC measurement instruments, additional variables, and major results. The other authors verified the data's accuracy. Instructional practices were categorized into six types based on authors' definitions and similar characteristics for easier analysis.

Results

This section discusses the findings from the review of the 45 included studies.

This systematic review categorizes instructional practices from the 45 included studies into six types (see Appendix A): feedback (n = 8), assessment (n = 2), approach (n = 11), task/activity type (n = 11), technology and tools (n = 2), and other instructions (n = 11). Among these, approach and task/activity type were the most frequently studied. Regarding educational settings, most feedback and task/activity studies were conducted in language institutes or universities, while a smaller number included secondary and high schools. Only one study targeted elementary school learners, focusing on technology/tools. Studies examining approaches encompassed the widest range of participants with diverse academic backgrounds.

The geographical distribution of these studies spanned fifteen countries and regions (Figure

Two), with the majority conducted in Iran (n = 28), followed by Japan (n = 3), and mainland China (n = 2). The prevalence of research in Iran highlights the country's academic interest and institutional support for English learning.

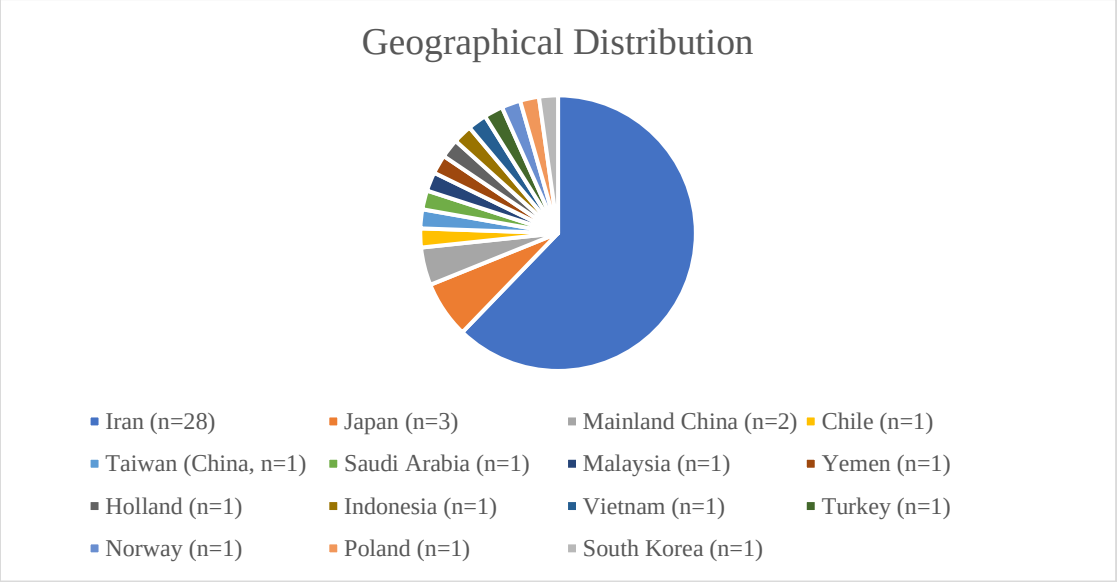


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of the studies

As shown in Figure Three, the majority of studies were conducted in universities or colleges (n = 14) and language institutes (n = 20), while fewer were carried out in high schools (n = 4), junior high or secondary schools (n = 4), and one in a primary school. Two studies were set in unique contexts: one in a company and another spanning various educational levels, including secondary school, high school, and language institute settings.

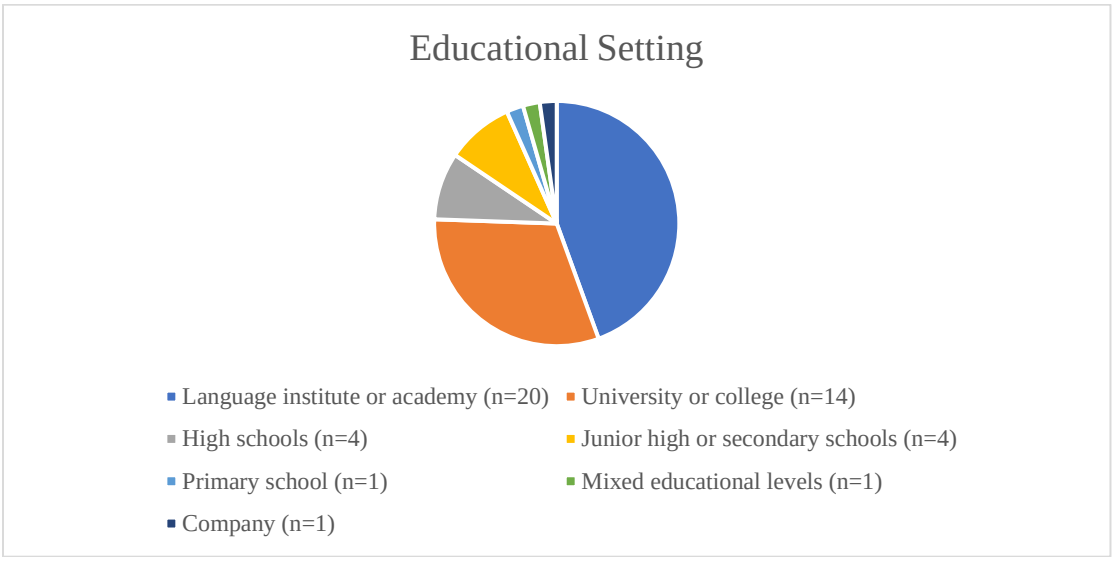


Figure 3. Educational settings of the studies

Figure Four illustrates the sample sizes of the studies. Most studies (n = 24) involved 50 to 100 participants, while 12 had smaller samples of 14 to 50 participants, with the smallest study comprising just 14 participants. Five studies included 100 to 200 participants, and three exceeded 200 participants, with the largest involving 360 participants. Gender representation was inconsistent: 11 studies included only females, 3 only males, 16 had mixed-gender groups, and 14 did not report gender. This review synthesizes findings across diverse participant demographics and educational settings to explore the effectiveness of instructional strategies in enhancing students' WTC in classroom-based contexts.

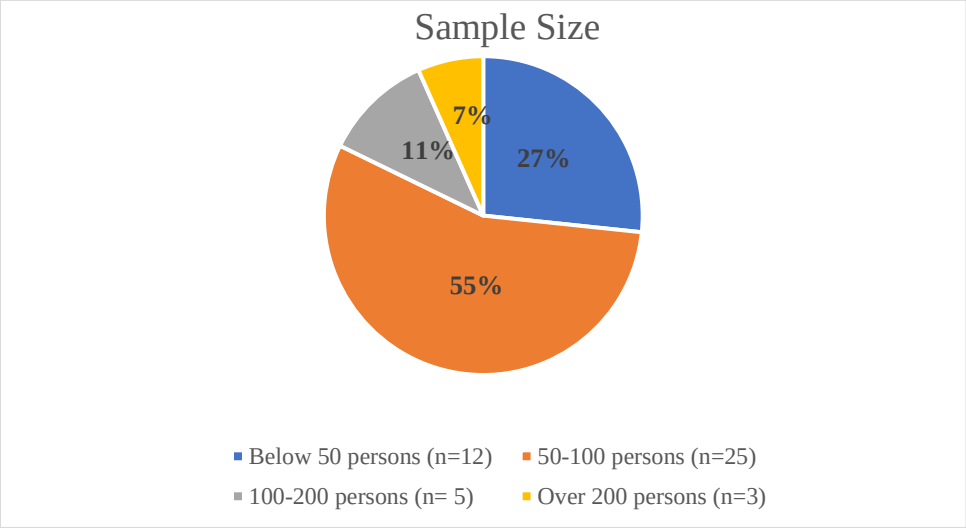


Figure 4. Sample sizes of the studies

Moreover, intervention durations varied widely, ranging from 90 minutes to 23 bi-weekly sessions over two semesters. However, four studies did not specify their durations.

The results indicate that various instructional practices have differing impacts on learners' WTC, with most showing positive effects, while a few yielded mixed or negative outcomes. The results are summarized in Appendix B and will be further discussed in discussion section. While the six categories of instructional practices displayed varied effects on WTC, the majority of methods effectively enhanced learners' communication willingness. These findings underscore the complexity of influencing WTC and highlight the need for context-sensitive, nuanced instructional approaches to maximize positive outcomes.

The analysis of 45 instructional studies reveals a variety of variables studied alongside WTC, categorized into psychological and affective factors, communication skills and behaviors, language skills, metacognitive strategies, and academic outcomes (see Appendix C). A total of 22 variables were identified, with psychological and affective factors being the most frequently explored, followed by metacognitive strategies, language skills, and academic outcomes.

Discussion

In this section, we present the discussions based on the stated research questions.

Research Question 1: What instructional practices have been implemented in classroom-based settings to develop the willingness to communicate, and what is their context?

The findings from this review provide valuable insights into the instructional practices implemented in classroom-based settings to enhance L2 WTC, as well as their contextual applications. The categorization of instructional practices into six types—feedback, assessment, approach, task/activity type, technology and tools, and other instructions—highlights the diverse strategies employed to foster WTC. Among these, the predominance of approaches and task/activity types underscores the importance of interactional and task-based methodologies in promoting communication. These practices align with prior research emphasizing learner-centered strategies as effective tools for encouraging active language use (Fekete, 2022).

The geographical distribution of studies, with the majority conducted in Iran, reflects the country's robust interest in English education and institutional support for language learning research. This concentration may also indicate cultural or systemic factors that prioritize English communication skills. However, the relatively limited representation of studies from other regions, such as East Asia, suggests an area for further exploration, particularly given the distinct educational contexts and pedagogical practices in these regions. Expanding research into underrepresented areas could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural and institutional factors shape WTC development.

The dominance of university and language institute settings, as well as the focus on teenagers and young adults, suggests that much of the research is concentrated in environments where learners are actively engaged in formal English study. These contexts provide controlled settings for testing instructional practices but may overlook younger learners or informal learning environments. The lack of studies targeting elementary school learners and the limited research in secondary schools highlight a potential gap in understanding how WTC can be cultivated across different developmental stages.

Furthermore, the variation in sample sizes and intervention durations suggests that the scalability and sustainability of certain practices require further investigation. Long-term studies could help determine whether practices with short-term effectiveness also lead to lasting improvements in WTC.

Research Question 2: What are the observed effects of studies investigating the effects of instructional practices on willingness to communicate?

The results demonstrate that various instructional practices have differing impacts on learners' WTC, with most showing positive effects but a few yielding mixed or negative outcomes. The findings highlight the complexity of influencing WTC and underscore the importance of tailoring instructional strategies to the specific needs and contexts of learners.

Feedback emerged as a pivotal factor, with its effectiveness heavily influenced by its type and delivery method. Prompt-based feedback, such as elicitation and metalinguistic feedback, was preferred by learners and consistently enhanced WTC. In contrast, explicit correction often

decreased WTC, particularly for beginners, reflecting its potential to raise anxiety or undermine confidence. However, the incorporation of emotional scaffolding into feedback practices proved beneficial, particularly for learners with lower confidence levels, by reducing anxiety and fostering a supportive environment. The contrasting effects of promotion-focused feedback (e.g., praising effort) and prevention-focused feedback (e.g., focusing on avoiding errors) further emphasize the need for positive, constructive feedback that aligns with learners' psychological needs.

The results for assessment practices were mixed. Group-dynamic assessment (G-DA) was notably effective in fostering WTC by promoting peer interaction and collaborative learning. However, the inconsistent outcomes of dynamic assessment suggest that its implementation may require greater refinement and alignment with learners' communicative goals.

Instructional approaches such as project-based learning and active learning consistently demonstrated strong effectiveness in enhancing WTC. These approaches create opportunities for collaborative, real-world language use, which aligns with communicative language teaching principles. However, Dogme ELT, which minimizes reliance on textbooks, was only effective for advanced learners, highlighting the importance of matching instructional approaches to learners' proficiency levels.

Task and activity types were among the most effective instructional practices for enhancing WTC. Interactive tasks, such as group discussions and role-playing, promoted authentic peer interaction and provided meaningful contexts for communication. Visualization and goal-setting activities also proved successful, helping learners articulate and achieve communication objectives. However, some instructional programs led to decreased WTC over time (Van Batenburg et al., 2019), suggesting that task designs need to incorporate sustained engagement strategies to maintain long-term effectiveness.

The integration of technology and tools into classrooms demonstrated promising outcomes for WTC enhancement. Tools such as AI chatbots and virtual reality platforms (e.g., Google Expeditions) provided immersive, interactive learning environments that encouraged learners to engage in authentic communication. These technologies also reduced anxiety by offering low-pressure settings for practice, particularly benefiting learners who are less confident in face-to-face communication. However, the effectiveness of technology depends on its integration into broader pedagogical frameworks and its alignment with classroom goals.

Several unique instructional strategies also showed potential in boosting WTC. Spiritual interventions, which incorporated reflective practices, and mapping techniques, which visualized learners' communication goals, were effective in increasing engagement and fostering WTC. Additionally, small but impactful strategies, such as increasing wait time during interactions and using English as the primary language of instruction, were found to positively influence WTC. These approaches highlight the importance of fine-tuning instructional details to create supportive and communicative learning environments.

The findings align with prior research emphasizing the role of interactive and learner-centered methodologies in fostering WTC. Studies by Cheng et al. (2023) and Azizi et al. (2022) similarly highlight the positive effects of project-based tasks and active learning on learners'

willingness to engage in communication. The mixed results for feedback and assessment practices are consistent with earlier studies, which confirms that feedback can have both positive and negative effects, depending on how they are delivered (Jelínková et al., 2024).

This systematic review highlights the instructional practices that effectively foster L2 WTC in classroom-based settings. Among the 45 studies analyzed, interactive approaches such as group discussions, collaborative tasks, and role-playing emerged as particularly impactful in enhancing L2 WTC. These practices leverage peer interaction and authentic communication, which have been shown to reduce anxiety and build students' confidence in using the target language. Additionally, task-specific feedback and personalized strategies were found to significantly improve learners' motivation and perceived competence, further promoting WTC.

Research Question 3: Besides willingness to communicate, what other variables have been studied in these WTC research studies, and what is their significance?

The findings reveal a rich diversity of variables studied alongside WTC, encompassing psychological and affective factors, communication skills and behaviors, language skills, metacognitive strategies, and academic outcomes. Among these, psychological and affective factors were the most frequently explored, with variables like motivation and anxiety showing consistent relevance to learners' communication behaviors. The results underscore the complexity of fostering WTC in educational settings, as multiple interconnected factors contribute to learners' willingness and ability to communicate.

Motivation emerged as a key facilitator, with instructional practices such as mind-mapping techniques and group-dynamic assessment (G-DA) significantly enhancing learners' drive to engage in communication. Conversely, anxiety frequently acted as a barrier, though strategies like emotional scaffolding and mindfulness training were effective in reducing its negative impact. Interestingly, certain feedback types, such as prevention-focused feedback, were found to increase anxiety, highlighting the critical role of tailoring feedback to learners' emotional and psychological needs.

In the domain of communication skills and behaviors, variables like competence and use of communication strategies were positively influenced by instructional practices. For instance, project-based learning (PBL) and dialogic inquiry enhanced learners' perceived competence, reinforcing their ability to navigate communication tasks confidently. Similarly, metacognitive instruction improved learners' metacognitive knowledge of oral communication, equipping them with tools to self-monitor and regulate their communicative behaviors effectively.

The analysis of language skills showed that instructional practices such as AI chatbots and virtual reality platforms were particularly effective in enhancing learners' proficiency and speaking skills, while also providing immersive, low-stress environments for practice. However, mixed results in approaches like Dogme ELT for intermediate learners underscore the need to adapt instructional practices to proficiency levels.

The findings align with previous research emphasizing the interplay between psychological factors and WTC. For instance, MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic pyramid model highlights the critical role of motivation and anxiety in shaping learners' communicative intentions.

Limitations and Future Studies

Despite these valuable insights, the review highlights several limitations. First, the focus on psychological and affective factors overshadows other important variables, such as academic outcomes, which were studied less frequently. Future research should investigate the broader impacts of instructional practices on learners' overall academic success.

Second, while many studies demonstrated immediate effects, there is a lack of longitudinal research exploring the sustainability of these effects over time. Investigating the long-term impacts of practices like emotional scaffolding and mindfulness training could provide deeper insights into their effectiveness.

Third, the limited focus on younger learners and diverse cultural contexts restricts the generalizability of findings. Future studies should explore how these variables interact in primary and secondary school settings and across different cultural backgrounds to better inform instructional practices.

In conclusion, while this review offers important insights into effective instructional practices, future research should address these gaps and refine our understanding of how to best promote WTC in L2 learning.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review aimed to explore the various instructional practices that influence students' WTC in EFL/ESL contexts. By examining studies conducted between 2018 and 2023, 45 studies focusing on six categories were included: feedback, assessment, approaches, task and activity types, technology and tools and other instructions, that either promote or hinder students' WTC.

However, the review also underscores the complexity of influencing WTC, as not all instructional practices yielded uniformly positive outcomes. In some cases, certain approaches, like prevention-focused feedback or dynamic assessment, showed inconsistent effects. This variability suggests that the impact of instructional practices is contingent on various factors, including learner proficiency, context, and the specific nature of the intervention.

Furthermore, the interaction of psychological, affective, and cognitive factors—such as motivation, anxiety, and self-perceived competence—was found to play a central role in shaping WTC. As such, it is crucial for educators to design language learning environments that address these factors holistically, using context-sensitive and adaptable instructional methods.

Given the rapid evolution of technology in education, future research should explore how emerging tools and platforms can be better integrated into language teaching to maximize their potential in enhancing WTC.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Overview of different types of instructional practices being investigated by the included studies

Types of instructional practices (numbers of studies focusing on each type)	Instructional practice examples in each study (author, publication year)	Settings
➓ Feedback (n=8)	➓ Metalinguistic corrective feedback (Montazeri & Salimi, 2019) ➓ Oral corrective feedback (Zare et al., 2020) ➓ Praise for intelligence and praise for effort (Zarrinabadi et al., 2023) ➓ Recast (Zakian, 2021) ➓ Reference of comparison (self-referential vs. normative) and regulatory focus (promotion-focused vs. prevention-focused) feedback (Zarrinabadi & Saberi Dehkordi, 2021) ➓ Regulatory focus orientations (i.e., prevention and promotion, Sarani & Kord, 2023)	➓ Language institutes (n=6)
	➓ Focused and unfocused prompts (Fadilah, 2018) ➓ Emotional scaffolding provided by recast (Alavi & Esmaeilifard, 2021)	➓ University (n=2)
Assessment (n=2)	➓ Group-dynamic assessment (Azizi & Farid Khafaga, 2023)	➓ High school (n=1)
	➓ Interventionist and interactionist dynamic assessment (Rahmaty & Zarei, 2021)	➓ Mixed educational institutions (n=1)
Approach (n=11)	➓ Active Learning (Azizi et al., 2022) ➓ Dogme language teaching (Sarani & Malmir, 2019)	➓ Language institute (n=2)
	➓ Project-based learning approach (Cheng et al., 2023) ➓ Task-based language teaching approach (Cutrone & Beh, 2018) ➓ Communication strategy training (Park & Yang, 2021) ➓ Mindfulness training (Ersanlı & Ünal, 2022)	➓ University or college (n=4)
	➓ Communication strategy training (Vafadar et al., 2019)	➓ High school (n=1)
	➓ Task-based language teaching approach (Toyoda et al., 2021) ➓ Content and language integrated learning (Lialikhova, 2018) ➓ Content and language integrated learning (Plichta et al., 2023)	➓ Junior high school or secondary school (n=3)
	➓ Communication strategy training (Sarab & Sani, 2022)	➓ Company (n=1)

Task or activity type (n=11)	➓ Meaning-focused input and meaning-focused output activities (Dehqan et al., 2022) ➓ Rehearsal and strategic task planning (Jamalifar & Salehi, 2020) ➓ Sequencing strategies for video modeling examples and inquiry tasks (Zarrinabadi & Alipour, 2020) ➓ Games (Liu et al., 2021) ➓ 'Information-gap' and 'opinion-exchange' tasks (Soleimani & Vahid Dastjerdi, 2021) ➓ I-TALK (movie session, Sedghinasab & Akbarnozari, 2019)	➓ Language institute or academy (n=6)
	➓ Interactive tasks (Abkhoo et al., 2023) ➓ Interactive tasks (Abkhoo et al., 2022) ➓ Physical movement (Thu-Nguyet & Long, 2021)	➓ University (n=3)
	➓ Visualization and Goal-Setting Activities (Al-Murtadha, 2019)	➓ High school (n=1)
	➓ Form-focused interaction, Language-directed interaction, and Strategies-directed interaction (Van Batenburg et al., 2019)	➓ Secondary school (n=1)
Technology and tools (n=2)	➓ Google Expeditions virtual reality (Ebadi & Ebadijalal, 2022)	➓ University (n=1)
	➓ AI chatbots (Yuan, 2023)	➓ Primary school (n=1)
Others (n=11)	➓ Spiritual intervention (Abdolrezapour & Alipour, 2021) ➓ Mind-mapping technique (Feng et al., 2023) ➓ The symbiosis of the model of contingent teaching and the contingent shift framework (Jafarigohar et al., 2022) ➓ Extended Wait-Time (Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019) ➓ Mind-mapping and concept-mapping techniques (Namaziandost et at., 2023) ➓ Metacognitive instruction (Sato & Dussuel Lam, 2021)	➓ Language institute or school (n=6)
	➓ Using a tracker chart in a philosophical inquiry classroom (Ismail et al., 2020) ➓ Instructional languages (KOGA et al., 2021) ➓ Dialogic inquiry (Musa, 2023) ➓ Whole-class interaction and dyadic and group interaction, and initiation–response–feedback pattern interaction strategies (Peng, 2020)	➓ University (n=4)
	➓ A person-centered future time perspective intervention (Zarrinabadi et al., 2019)	➓ High school (n=1)

Appendix B
Summary of the instructional practices that have different effects on WTC in English

Types of instructional practices	Instructional practices	Positive effect	Negative effect	Neutral effect
Feedback	Recast (Zare et al., 2020; Zakian, 2021)	✓		
	Emotional scaffolding provided by recast (Alavi & Esmaeilifard, 2021)	✓		
	Prompts (Zare et al., 2020; Fadilah, 2018)	✓		
	Explicit correction for pre-inter and intermediate learners (Zare et al., 2020)	✓		
	Explicit correction for starter and elementary learners (Zare et al., 2020)		✓	
	Metalinguistic corrective feedback (Montazeri & Salimi, 2019)	✓		
	Promotion-focused (Sarani & Kord, 2023; Zarrinabadi & Saberi Dehkordi, 2021)	✓		
	Prevention-focused feedback (Sarani & Kord, 2023; Zarrinabadi & Saberi Dehkordi, 2021)		✓	
	Praise for effort (Zarrinabadi et al., 2023)	✓		
	Praise for intelligence (Zarrinabadi et al., 2023)		✓	
	Self-referential (Zarrinabadi & Saberi Dehkordi, 2021)	✓		
	Normative (Zarrinabadi & Saberi Dehkordi, 2021)	✓		
Assessment	Group-dynamic assessment (Azizi & Farid Khafaga, 2023)	✓		
	Interventionist Dynamic Assessment (Rahmaty & Zarei, 2021)			✓
	Interactionist Dynamic Assessment (Rahmaty & Zarei, 2021)			✓
Approach	PBL approach (Cheng et al., 2023)	✓		
	TBL approach (Cutrone & Beh, 2018; Toyoda et al., 2021)	✓		
	Active Learning (Azizi et al., 2022)	✓		
	CLIL (Lialikhova, 2018; Plichta et al., 2023)	✓		
	Communication strategy training (Park & Yang, 2021; Sarab & Sani, 2022; Vafadar et al., 2019)	✓		
	Mindfulness training (Ersanlı & Ünal, 2022)	✓		
	Dogme ELT for advanced learners (Sarani & Malmir, 2019)	✓		
	Dogme ELT for intermediate and upper-intermediate learners (Sarani & Malmir, 2019)			✓
	Interactive tasks (Abkhoo et al., 2023; Abkhoo et al., 2022)	✓		

Task or activity type	Visualization and Goal-Setting Activities (Al-Murtadha, 2019)	✓		
	Meaning-focused output activities (Dehqan et al., 2022)	✓		
	Rehearsal task planning (Jamalifar & Salehi, 2020)	✓		
	Strategic task planning (Jamalifar & Salehi, 2020)			✓
	Form-focused instruction (Van Batenburg et al., 2019)		✓	
	Language-directed Interaction (Van Batenburg et al., 2019)		✓	
	Strategies-directed Interaction (Van Batenburg et al., 2019)		✓	
	Video-task, task-video and video-video sequences (Zarrinabadi & Alipour, 2020)	✓		
	Games (Liu et al., 2021)	✓		
	'Information-gap' and 'opinion-exchange' tasks (Soleimani & Vahid Dastjerdi, 2021)	✓		
	Physical movement (Thu-Nguyet & Long)	✓		
	I-TALK (Sedghinasab & Akbarnozari, 2019)	✓		
	Task-task sequence (Zarrinabadi & Alipour, 2020)		✓	
Technology and tools	AI chatbots (Yuan, 2023)	✓		
	Google Expeditions virtual reality (Ebadi & Ebadijalal, 2022)	✓		
Other instructions	Spiritual intervention (Abdolrezapour & Alipour, 2021)	✓		
	Mind-mapping technique (Feng et al., 2023; Namaziandost et at., 2023)	✓		
	Concept-mapping technique (Namaziandost et at., 2023)	✓		
	Using a tracker chart in a philosophical inquiry classroom discussion (Ismail et al., 2020)	✓		
	The symbiosis of the model of contingent teaching and the contingent shift framework (Jafarigohar et al., 2022)	✓		
	Extended wait-time (Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019)	✓		
	Teaching in English (KOGA et al., 2021)	✓		
	Dialogic inquiry (Musa, 2023)	✓		
	A person-centered future time perspective intervention (Zarrinabadi et al., 2019)	✓		
	Metacognitive instruction (Sato & Dussuel Lam, 2021)			✓

Appendix C
Summary of the instructional studies focusing on other variables besides WTC

Types of instructional practices	Instructional practices	Other focus variables besides WTC				
		Psychological and affective factors	Communication skills and behaviors	Language skills	Metacognitive strategies	Academic outcomes
Feedback	Metalinguistic corrective feedback (Montazeri & Salimi, 2019)	Motivation↗				
	Praise for intelligence (Zarrinabadi et al., 2023)	Anxiety↗ Mindset↘	Competence↘			
	Praise for efforts (Zarrinabadi et al., 2023)	Anxiety↘ Mindset↗	Competence↗			
	Prompts (Fadilah, 2018)			Accuracy↗		
	Recast (Zakian, 2021)			Accuracy↗		
	Promotion-focused feedback (Sarani & Kord, 2023)			Fluency↗		
	Prevention-focused feedback (Sarani & Kord, 2023)			Fluency—		
	Emotional scaffolding provided by recast (Alavi & Esmaeilifard, 2021)					Achievement↗
Assessment	Group-dynamic assessment (G-DA) (Azizi & Farid Khafaga, 2023)	Motivation↗ Anxiety↘				
	Interventionist and Interactionist Dynamic Assessment (Rahmaty & Zarei, 2021)	Anxiety↘ Perfectionism↗				
Approach	PBL approach (Cheng et al., 2023)	Anxiety↗	Competence↗ Intercultural willingness to communicate↗			

	Mindfulness training (Ersanlı & Ünal, 2022)	Anxiety↘				
	Mindfulness training (Ersanlı & Ünal, 2022)	Mindfulness-awareness↗				
	Communication strategy training (Park & Yang, 2021)		Use of communication strategies↗			
	Active Learning (Azizi et al., 2022)			Speaking skills↗		
	Dogme ELT for advanced EFL levels (Sarani & Malmir, 2019)			Speaking skills↗		
	Dogme ELT for intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL levels compared to CLT (Sarani & Malmir, 2019)			Speaking skills↘		
	Video-task, task-video and video-video sequences (Zarrinabadi & Alipour, 2020)	Anxiety↘	Competence↗			
	Information gap tasks combined with strategies instruction (Van Batenburg et al., 2019)	Self-confidence↗				
Task or activity type	Physical movement (Thu-Nguyet & Long, 2021)	Self-confidence↗				
	Form-focused instruction (Van Batenburg et al., 2019)	Self-confidence— Enjoyment—				
	Language-directed Interaction and Strategies-directed	Enjoyment—				

	Interaction (Van Batenburg et al., 2019)					
	Interactive tasks (Abkhoo et al., 2023; Abkhoo et al., 2022)				Self-regulation↗ Self-monitoring↗	
Technology and tools	AI chatbots (Yuan, 2023)			Proficiency↗		
	Google Expeditions virtual reality (Ebadi & Ebadijalal, 2022)			Proficiency↗		
Other instructions	Mind-mapping technique (Feng et al., 2023)	Motivation↗		Comprehension↗ Vocabulary acquisition↗		
	Mind-mapping technique (Namaziandost et at., 2023)	Motivation↗		Comprehension↗		
	Concept-mapping techniques (Namaziandost et at., 2023)	Motivation↗		Comprehension↗		
	Spiritual intervention (Abdolrezapour & Alipour, 2021)	Spiritual intelligence↗				
	Dialogic Inquiry (Musa, 2023)		Competence↗			
	Metacognitive instruction (Sato & Dussuel Lam, 2021)		Communication behaviors↗ Metacognitive knowledge of oral communication↗			
	The symbiosis of the model of contingent teaching and the contingent shift framework (Jafarigohar et al., 2022)				Self-regulation↗	
Other variables	/	❿ Motivation (n=4)	❿ Competence (n=4)	❿ Speaking skills (n=2) ❿ Accuracy (n=2)	❿ Self-regulation (n=3)	❿ Achievemen (n=1)

besides WTC (Frequency)		➓ Anxiety (n=6) ➓ Self-confidence (n=2) ➓ Enjoyment (n=1) ➓ Mindset (n=1) ➓ Perfectionism (n=1) ➓ Spiritual intelligence (n=1) ➓ Mindfulness-awareness (n=1)	➓ Communication behaviors (n=1) ➓ Use of communication strategies (n=1) ➓ Intercultural willingness to communicate (n=1) ➓ Metacognitive knowledge of oral communication (n=1)	➓ Fluency (n=1) ➓ Proficiency (n=2) ➓ Comprehension (n=1) ➓ Vocabulary acquisition (n=1)	➓ Self-monitoring (n=2)	
Total number of the variables in each aspect	22	8	5	6	2	1

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Female Saudi Students' Attitudes Towards Speaking English with Native Speakers vs Non-Native Speakers of English

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Abstract

Second-language learners of English try to master and improve their English-speaking skills. This study investigated female Saudi university students' attitudes towards the following: a) speaking English in general; and b) speaking English with native speakers vs. non-native speakers. It can be vital to understand students' attitudes to help them improve their ability to communicate effectively and express their thoughts clearly and easily. Data was collected from 112 female Saudi students at Taif University, using a closed-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The participants were asked about (a) their attitudes towards English speaking skills in general; (b) their attitudes to speaking English with native speakers; (c) their attitudes to speaking English with non-native speakers; and (d) how they felt about improving their English-speaking skills. Data collected by the questionnaire indicated that they were optimistic about the importance of English-speaking skills; b) had positive attitudes towards speaking with native speakers, which was not the case when they considered speaking with non-native speakers; c) felt nervous towards speaking with non-native speakers, who tended to be critical of their language skills; and d) preferred English activities to be with native rather than non-native speakers.

Keywords: attitudes, difficulties, English speaking, female Saudi students, native speakers, non-native speakers

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Introduction

The English language is considered international and is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world (Sinaga & Sinaga, 2021). It can be taught as a Second Language (L2) or as a foreign language, depending on the country. English is taught as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia (Al-khresheh, 2020). One of the main goals of teaching English, according to the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education (Ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013), is to help students master the four skills in English (writing, reading, speaking and listening). However, speaking skills, which are the focus of this study, can be seen as among the most challenging skills to master for learners of both English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) (Ilmiah, et al., 2024; Soomro & Farooq, 2018; Zhang, 2009). It is also the most important of the four skills (Ali et al., 2019; Khamkhien, 2010; Makarim, 2024). As Alhmadi (2014) suggests, female Saudi students struggle with speaking English. This study therefore investigates whether conversation with either native or non-native speakers of English can play a role in improving their speaking skills.

This study addressed several questions related to female Saudi university students' attitudes towards English speaking skills:

a. How do female Saudi university students think about English-speaking skills in general?

b. What do female Saudi university students think about speaking English with native English speakers?

c. What do female Saudi university students think about speaking English with non-native English speakers?

d. How do female Saudi university students feel about improving their speaking skills?

The answers to the above research questions could provide curriculum designers in Saudi schools and universities in Saudi Arabia with data to help them improve Saudi students' English-speaking skills.

Literature Review

Speaking is a communication process that conveys ideas and feelings verbally (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023; Said et al., 2021). This skill can be improved by oral communication. However, the ability to speak English as an L2 is among the most complex of all English language teaching activities (Al-Sibai, 2004). Its main aim is to enable students to speak the language correctly in different social contexts (Richards, 2008). However, to achieve this aim, it may be essential to know whether students have speaking difficulties. If so, we can begin to identify the issues and the reasons they occur (Inayah & Lisdawati, 2017).

In her attempt to discover factors that affect students' speaking competence and their reasons for preferring to remain silent, Alhmadi (2014) investigated speaking skills issues among ten classes of female foundation-year EFL university students at Taibah University in Saudi Arabia. Each class contained thirty students. She found a number of factors that affected students' English language speaking: a) anxiety, b) lack of motivation, and c) lack of communication.

Bani Younes and Albalawi (2016) studied the English language speaking problems encountered by 350 female Saudi EFL preparatory year students at Tabuk University. The researchers collected their data utilizing a questionnaire and observation. The results showed that there were a number of barriers that affected students' speaking performance. For example, 90%

feared making mistakes and 85% felt shy about speaking. Other students reported issues related to anxiety and lack of motivation and confidence.

Inayah and Lisdawati (2017) did a study on speaking skill barriers at a college in Indonesia. The participants were observed and given a questionnaire. The results showed that students were not interested or motivated to perform speaking activities. They also lacked confidence, which made it hard for them to speak English, even though 70% held positive attitudes toward the need to speak English fluently.

Drawing on a sample of 184 male and female EFL students at Taif University in Saudi Arabia, Soomro and Farooq (2018) conducted a study of attitudes to difficulties in speaking English. The results showed that the participants suffered from a lack of motivation and confidence, fear of making mistakes and insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, which in turn prevented them from constructing error-free sentences. All this made it challenging for them to master speaking English.

Ali et al. (2019) conducted a similar study with 100 Saudi male and female university students, enrolled on an intensive programme at the University of Bisha in Saudi Arabia, which also investigated barriers to speaking English. The data, which was collected with a questionnaire, showed that men and women had the same perceptions of learning to speak English; the study's overall results were similar to those of the studies outlined above regarding EFL students' speaking difficulties and included peer criticism, lack of motivation and confidence, the absence of language laboratories, lack of a supportive environment and no guidance from teachers.

In general, all the above studies indicated that EFL students who wanted to acquire English-speaking skills frequently encountered difficulties. However, their attitudes to speaking English to native and non-native speakers have been overlooked, as have questions about whether they find it difficult and what issues they experience, leaving a gap in the literature. Investigating these issues may provide us with insights regarding the sensitivity of L2 learners to native versus non-native interlocutors. This study represents an effort to overcome this lacuna.

Methodology

The study collected data from 112 randomly selected participants using an online closed-ended questionnaire. This was followed up with a number of in-person semi-structured interviews for which participants were selected randomly. The data was subsequently analysed statistically using a series of Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks tests to examine differences in participants' attitudes to speaking English with native versus non-native English speakers.

Participants

The participants were 112 female Saudi university students aged 18-20 who were freshmen at Taif University and had studied English at school for almost 9 years. They were recruited randomly and were studying different majors. To improve the homogeneity of the sample, the participants were asked whether they had studied in English-speaking countries. Those who had studied abroad were screened out as they may have had different perceptions.

Research Instruments

The study's instruments were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Data was collected with an online attitudinal questionnaire containing 22 items regarding the female Saudi university students' attitudes towards English language speaking skills, designed to address the

following four constructs: students' attitudes towards English speaking skills in general; their attitudes to speaking English to native speakers; their attitudes to speaking English to non-native speakers; and their attitudes towards improving their English-speaking skills. Participants were asked to respond by selecting one from a range of options on a five-point Likert scale. They were asked to choose whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, had no opinion, agreed or strongly agreed with each item in a series of statements. This scale has been used in the vast majority of research studies that use questionnaires because it is considered to be highly reliable (Taherdoost, 2019).

The semi-structured interview was conducted to get the participants' attitudes to speaking English in general and speaking English with native vs. non-native speakers. Interviews were carried out in Arabic to enable participants to communicate easily; statements relevant to the present study were then translated into English by the researcher.

Research Procedures

This study addressed ethical considerations by providing participants with information about the purpose of the questionnaire, asking for their consent, and informing them that they could withdraw from the study if they wished. All the students who agreed to participate in the study were then asked to respond to the questionnaire. Nine were subsequently chosen at random to take part in an interview.

Results

This section discusses participants' responses to the four constructs tested by the questionnaire: a) English speaking skills; b) speaking with native speakers; c) speaking with non-native speakers; and d) speaking skills activities. The tables in Appendix A show the number of responses under each point of the five Likert-scale options and percentage scores (the number of responses divided by 112).

The results in Table One shows that most of the participants perceive speaking skills to be the most essential skills to learn, even though they are challenging. They are also the most widely used skills.

Table Two shows that the majority of the participants had positive attitudes towards speaking with native English speakers but most also found them difficult to understand. Fewer than 35% of the participants said that they felt nervous about speaking to native speakers. The vast majority of them said they enjoyed talking to native English speakers.

Table Three reveals that the participants expressed negative attitudes towards speaking English with non-native speakers even though the vast majority also claimed that they were able to understand their English. Most of them also said that they felt nervous about speaking to non-native speakers.

The participants' responses to the statements in construct two and three were statistically compared. Multiple Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks tests were conducted as the data was not normally distributed. The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks tests reported in Table Four shows that the differences in the participants' views about speaking with native vs. non-native speakers were statistically significant.

Table Five indicates that most participants felt that they benefitted from speaking activities but they seemed to be divided on whether they felt nervous about speaking activities. Many of them wanted to concentrate on improving their speaking skills all the time. The vast majority of

the participants thought that their English skills would only improve if they spoke with native English speakers. A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test was run to compare statements 5 and 6. The results showed a significant difference ($Z = -7.256$, $P < .001$).

Discussion

In this section, the results of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews are discussed. The questionnaire responses for each construct are discussed separately.

Concerning the researcher's four questions, the data showed that: a) the participants agreed that English-speaking skills are essential; b) the participants preferred to speak English with native rather than non-native speakers; and c) the participants had positive attitudes towards speaking activities which they believe improve their speaking skills. The findings are discussed in detail below.

About construct one, most participants agreed with statement 1 (around 92%) that English speaking skills are the most important to master. Yet, most (around 64%) also agreed with statement 2 that they are the most difficult skills to learn and disagreed (around 76%) with statement 3, that they are the easiest skills to acquire. For statement 4, about 80% of the participants thought that speaking skills are the most-used of all the English language skills. These findings were supported by several answers to one of the interview questions, which asked what they thought about speaking skills:

> 'Speaking English is the most important skill to me in English.'
>
> 'If I am good at speaking English, that will be enough for me.'
>
> 'Speaking English is more difficult than all other skills.'
>
> 'I am still struggling with speaking English as it is difficult.'
>
> 'One is forced to speak English in different contexts and situations. You have to master it so you do not embarrass yourself.'

These findings confirm that most of the participants believed that although it is difficult, speaking English is an important skill that they need to master. This is in line with the findings of Inayah and Lisdawati (2017).

For construct two, which was about speaking to native speakers, about 83% felt optimistic about wanting to talk with native speakers (statement 5) and around 60% thought that although speaking with native speakers was challenging it did not make them nervous (statements 6, 7 and 8). Although speaking with native speakers comes with some drawbacks, about 75% responded that they would enjoy speaking with native speakers (statement 9). In comparison, about 67% thought it was difficult to understand them. It is apparent from the responses to the statements designed to test this construct that Saudi students have positive attitudes towards speaking with native speakers.

Concerning construct three, although around 65% expressed negative attitudes towards the desire to speak with non-native speakers (statement 11), approximately the same proportion (about 66%) did not feel not challenged by the prospect of speaking with non-native speakers (statement

12). About 75% felt it would be easy talking to non-native English speakers (statement 13) but also that they would feel nervous (statement 14). Around 72% disagreed with statement 15, concerning their enjoyment of speaking with non-native speakers, even though around 78% thought they would be easy to understand (statement 16).

Participants' attitudes to speaking with native and non-native speakers were statistically significant; that is, participants preferred to talk with native rather than non-native English speakers. However, most also said it was challenging to understand native speakers, which was not the case with non-native speakers. This suggests that ease of comprehension does not hinder their desire to speak. On the other hand, nervousness indicated their preference about who to speak to. They were nervous about speaking with non-native speakers, which spoiled their enjoyment. The opposite was true for native speakers. The questionnaire did not reveal any other information about the participants' choices but several quotes from their interviews may provide further insight:

> 'I always think that my speaking will not improve as long as I speak to my Saudi friends.'
>
> 'I do not like to speak with my Saudi friends as they always try to find my mistakes.'
>
> 'Native speakers make me feel more comfortable as they do not look for my mistakes and they complement my language although it is not good.'
>
> 'I once spoke with a native speaker, which was a great experience, although they spoke too fast.'
>
> 'Non-native speakers tend to correct my mistakes to show that they are better than me.'

It can be noted from the quotes above that the participants had positive attitudes towards speaking with native speakers even though many had not spoken to native speakers for quite some time. Those who had spoken to native speakers said that, unlike non-native speakers, they tended not to criticize their speaking competence. The participants were complimentary about the experience and said that it was very beneficial.

Concerning construct four, about 54% expressed positive attitudes towards speaking activities (statement 17). However, about a third of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed with statements 17 and 18, both of which were related to whether speaking activities improve their English. Approximately the same number expressed neither agreement nor disagreement with statement 19, which was about whether speaking activities make them nervous. It is possible that some of them were uncertain and did not know whether the speaking activities in question were with native or non-native speakers of English. Their views were clearer concerning earlier statements that contained the words 'native and non-native speakers'. This did not prevent the participants (around 72%) from agreeing with statement 20 regarding the need to concentrate on improving their speaking skills. About 75% agreed with statement 21, that speaking with native speakers is more beneficial than speaking with non-native speakers. This was further confirmed by the approximately 72% who disagreed with statement 22 that speaking to non-native speakers is more beneficial than speaking with native speakers. These strong views about statements 21 and

22 were confirmed by statistical analyses which showed that the participants preferred speaking with native English speakers. A number of quotes from the interviews support these findings, as can be seen below:

> 'I hope that there will be a way to do my speaking activities with native speakers.'
>
> 'I believe that if speaking activities involve native speakers, it will be much better.'
>
> 'I think that schools should hire native speakers to speak with students.'

This study produced results similar to those produced by other studies and reinforced the finding that EFL students find it difficult to master English speaking skills (e.g., Alhmadi, 2014; Ali et al., 2019; Bani Younes & Albalawi, 2016; Inayah & Lisdawati, 2017; Soomro & Farooq, 2018). Alhmadi (2014) found that her participants suffered from anxiety and a lack of motivation to speak in English. However, she did not illustrate whether these views related to native or non-native English speakers. In the present study, few of the participants showed an interest in speaking with non-native English speakers. They also had different views about speaking activities for which they had not been provided with details. Their relative lack of motivation to engage in speaking activities supports the findings of researchers such as Inayah and Lisdawati (2017) and Soomro and Farooq (2018). The finding that participants were uncomfortable speaking to non-native English speakers, who corrected their mistakes, also aligned with those of other studies (e.g., Ali et al., 2019; Bani Younes & Albalawi, 2016; Soomro & Farooq, 2018) which found that a fear of making mistakes led to a lack of motivation. The studies mentioned above were carried out in EFL contexts with only non-native speakers. Different results may have been achieved if they had been asked to express their attitudes towards speaking with native speakers. The present study found that participants' views differed according to whether speaking took place with native or non-native English speakers. Schools should consider providing students in EFL contexts with opportunities to interact with native speakers, and then investigate whether their speaking skills improved because of this. It should be noted that the present study was conducted with female participants. Future studies should compare male and female participants' views to find out whether there are differences in their attitudes towards speaking English with native versus non-native speakers.

Conclusion

The main aim of the present study was to investigate female Saudi students' attitudes towards: a) English speaking skills; b) speaking with native speakers; c) speaking with non-native speakers; and d) speaking skills activities. The present study recruited 112 female Saudi students and used a 22-item closed-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. This is the first study that addresses L2 learners' perception of talking with native versus non-native speakers. The results showed that female Saudi students: a) had positive attitudes towards L2 English speaking; b) preferred speaking to native speakers over non-native speakers; c) considered speaking to native speakers beneficial; and d) preferred to engage in speaking activities with native over non-native speakers.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table 1. *English speaking skills construct*

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
1.English speaking skills are the most important skills to learn.	1/112 1%	4/112 3.6%	4/112 3.6%	15/112 13.4%	88/112 78.6%	4.65	.79
2.English speaking skills are the most difficult to learn.	18/112 16.1%	16/112 14.3%	6/112 5.4%	15/112 13.4%	57/112 50.9%	3.69	1.58
3.English speaking skills are the easiest to learn.	76/112 67.9%	9/112 8%	8/112 7.1%	8/112 7.1%	11/112 9.8%	4.17	1.38
4.English speaking skills are the most used skills.	2/112 1.8%	10/112 8.9%	10/112 8.9%	12/112 10.7%	78/112 69.6%	4.38	1.08

Table 2. *Speaking with native speakers construct*

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
5.I like to speak English with native English speakers.	3/112 2.7%	5/112 4.5%	11/112 9.8%	21/112 18.8%	72/112 64.3%	4.38	1.02
6.I find it difficult to understand native English speakers' spoken language.	25/112 22.3%	10/112 8.9%	9/112 8%	25/112 22.3%	43/112 38.4%	2.54	1.60
7.Understanding native speakers' spoken English is easy.	30/112 26.8%	33/112 29.5%	10/112 8.9%	6/112 5.4%	33/112 29.5%	2.81	1.61
8.I feel nervous when speaking to a native English speaker.	30/112 26.8%	37/112 33%	6/112 5.4%	10/112 8.9%	29/112 25.9%	2.74	1.58
9.I enjoy speaking to native English speakers.	11/112 9.8%	15/112 13.4%	2/112 1.8%	32/112 28.6%	52/112 46.4%	3.88	1.38
	24/112	51/112	5/112	12/112	20/112	2.58	1.41

10.It is easier to understand spoken English when the speaker is a native English speaker.	21.4 %	45.5 %	4.5%	10.7 %	17.9 %		

Table 3. *Speaking with non-native speakers construct*

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
11.I like to speak English with non-native English speakers.	41/112	32/112	15/112	13/112	11/112	2.29	1.33
	36.6%	28.6%	13.4%	11.6%	9.8%		
12.I find it difficult to understand non-native English speakers' spoken language.	27/112	48/112	6/112	11/112	20/112	3.46	1.42
	24.1%	42.9%	5.4%	9.8%	17.9%		
13.Understanding non-native speakers' spoken English is easy.	8/112	11/112	9/112	44/112	40/112	3.87	1.21
	7.1%	9.8%	8%	39.3%	35.7%		
14.I feel nervous when speaking to a non-native English speaker.	15/112	8/112	4/112	43/112	42/112	3.79	1.37
	13.4%	7.1%	3.6%	38.4%	37.5%		
15.I enjoy speaking to non-native English speakers.	52/112	29/112	10/112	16/112	5/112	2.04	1.24
	46.4%	25.9%	8.9%	14.3%	4.5%		
16.It is easier to understand spoken English when the speaker is a non-native speaker of English.	4/112	6/112	15/112	22/112	65/112	4.23	1.10
	3.6%	5.4%	13.4 %	19.6 %	58%		

Table 4. *Comparisons between speaking with native and non-native speakers*

Speaking with native speakers	Speaking with non-native speakers	Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks results
5. I like to speak English with native English speakers.	11. I like to speak English with non-native English speakers.	Z = -8.080 *P* < .001
6. I find it difficult to understand native English speakers' spoken language.	12. I find it difficult to understand non-native English speakers' spoken language.	Z = -4.296 *P* < .001
7. Understanding native speakers' spoken English is easy.	13. Understanding non-native speakers' spoken English is easy.	Z = -4.871 *P* < .001

8. I feel nervous when speaking to a native English speaker.	14. I feel nervous when speaking to a non-native English speaker.	Z = -4.739 *P* < .001
9. I enjoy speaking to native English speakers.	15. I enjoy speaking to non-native English speakers.	Z = -7.147 *P* < .001
10. It is easier to understand spoken English when the speaker is a native English speaker.	16. It is easier to understand spoken English when the speaker is a non-native speaker of English.	Z = -7.098 *P* < .001

Table 5. *Speaking skills activities construct*

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
17.English-speaking activities improve my English.	6/112 5.4%	7/112 6.3%	38/112 33.9%	25/112 22.3%	36/112 32.1%	3.70	1.15
18.English-speaking activities do not improve my English.	29/112 25.9%	20/112 17.9%	40/112 35.7%	9/112 8%	14/112 12.5%	3.37	1.29
19.Doing a speaking activity makes me nervous.	18/112 16.1%	15/112 13.4%	36/112 32.1%	22/112 19.6%	21/112 18.8%	3.12	1.31
20.I want to focus on speaking skills all the time.	4/112 3.6%	20/112 17.9%	7/112 6.3%	46/112 41.1%	35/112 31.3%	3.79	1.17
21.Speaking with native speakers of English improves my English-speaking skills more than when I speak with non-native speakers of English.	7/112 6.3%	16/112 14.3%	6/112 5.4%	28/112 25%	55/112 49.1%	3.96	1.30
22.Speaking with non-native speakers of English improves my English-speaking skills more than when I speak with native speakers of English.	25/112 22.3%	56/112 50%	17/112 15.2%	3/112 2.7%	11/112 9.8%	2.28	1.14

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WhatsApp-Mediated Vocabulary Learning: A Study of Kurdish EFL Learners

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Abstract
Mobile-assisted language learning technologies, such as WhatsApp, have gained scholarly attention for their capacity to facilitate language acquisition through flexible and interactive digital platforms. This study investigates the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a medium for vocabulary instruction among Kurdish EFL learners, focusing on its impact on vocabulary development, learner attitudes, and potential differences in outcomes based on gender. The research design involved a sample of 60 Kurdish EFL learners divided into two equal groups: an experimental group that used WhatsApp to receive vocabulary instruction and a control group that received traditional classroom instruction. The study results indicate that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on vocabulary tests, suggesting that WhatsApp can be an effective tool for teaching vocabulary to Kurdish EFL learners. Additionally, the results showed that using WhatsApp improved the learners' motivation and engagement in vocabulary learning. This research underscores WhatsApp's potential to enhance vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts, highlighting its functionality and learner appeal.

Keywords: Kurdish EFL learners, mobile-assisted language learning, vocabulary learning, WhatsApp

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Introduction

Education is critical to achieving success in almost all spheres of life. There has been a significant transition in education over the past few decades, one that is reflected in a focus on students and the learning process rather than on instructors and instructional strategies (Hanif & Sajid, 2019). With the advancement of technology, teaching, and learning, in general, and particularly language education, is taking new pedagogical forms (Solanki & Shaylee, 2012; Pourhossein, 2017; Aslam, 2021; Crescent & Lee, 2011; & Ahmed & Meena 2022). However, this does not imply that these new advancements might be completely advantageous and ease the process. In this line, mobile phones have become more efficient, user-friendly, and adaptable to various uses as technology has advanced. Basically, due to mobile devices' portability and, more importantly, the potential to erase the spatial and temporal boundaries of the classroom, mobile learning is particularly well suited for studying anytime and everywhere, both for formal and informal learning. As a matter of fact, the prevalence of mobile devices has increased, so have mobile applications and social networking sites aimed at helping educators and students capitalize on this development (A lamer, 2015; Shadiev, Liu, & Hwang, 2020; & Loewen, et al., 2019). To a good extent, literature has depicted that these apps improve vocabulary knowledge and encourage user collaboration, increasing motivation and learning. Motivation is essential when determining a student's readiness and excitement to communicate in the target language (Al-dalawi, et al., 2023). As a result, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) as a field of inquiry emerged to investigate how different tools might be used in the classroom and how it impacts students' desire to learn a new language. Mobile-assisted language learning is a type of language education that uses mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, to aid learning. This approach to language learning allows learners to access learning materials and resources on their mobile devices, which they can use to study and practice their language skills at their own pace and in their own time.

According to Kumar, Lian, and Vasudevan (2016), with the proliferation of mobile devices and social media platforms like WeChat, Twitter, WhatsApp, Line, Facebook, etc., students now have more opportunities to expand their education beyond the classroom. In this regard, WhatsApp is one of the most popular mobile apps, making it easy to send and receive messages, including audio, video, and text files (Ahmadi, 2017). Due to its visible multiple functions and user-friendly, this app has been increasingly integrated into the teaching context, especially for vocabulary teaching. Numerous second language (L2) educators have proclaimed the important function of vocabulary acquisition in the field of language learning for all four skills (Taylor, 2005). According to Lessard-Clouston (1996, p. 27), "vocabulary, phrases, idioms, etc.-is at the center of all language usage in the skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as culture." Moreover, as McCarthy (1990) suggests expressing various meanings, it is necessary to know a wide range of vocabularies. Likewise, Wilkins (1974) states that without grammar, just a small amount of meaning can be communicated, but nothing can be said without vocabulary. Therefore, good lexical knowledge is immensely important to mastering a second language. Thus, implementing

various tools and using different materials and methods is becoming imperative for language educators to enhance the vocabulary teaching process, and technology (MALL) is at the center of the process.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Both Uses and Gratifications Theory and Social Constructivist Learning Theory are prominent examples of theories developed to explain the role of social media in language learning and teaching. Uses and Gratifications theory is a communication theory that suggests that people use media to fulfill certain needs or gratifications (Herzog, 1944). This theory suggests that people are active in their media consumption and seek out media that will satisfy their specific needs or desires. According to this theory, people use the media to escape from reality, pass time, reduce boredom, feel connected to others, or stay informed about current events (Abaido, & El-Messiry, 2016). Additionally, constructivist learning theory is a cognitive learning concept that is based on the idea that learning occurs through the construction of new knowledge based on the learner's previous experiences (Bruner, 1966). This theory emphasizes the importance of the learner's active role in constructing their own understanding of the world and suggests that learning is an interactive process that involves the learner actively constructing meaning from their experiences. According to constructivist theory, learners are not passive receivers of information but rather are actively involved in the process of constructing their own understanding of the world through the construction of mental models and frameworks. This theory has been influential in developing educational approaches such as problem-based learning and inquiry-based learning, which seek to engage learners in active, experiential learning. In this regard, the principles of the constructivist theory of learning underpin the current study in which a learning environment on the WhatsApp platform is established for the learners where the instructor acts only as a facilitator. This is based on what Vygotsky (1978) suggests: educators should create a setting where students feel comfortable asking questions and gaining feedback from their peers and the teacher.

WhatsApp as a Mobile-assisted Language Learning

WhatsApp is a popular messaging app that has become a common tool for teaching English (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). This is because it offers several benefits for both teachers and students (Lauricella & Kay, 2013). One of the main benefits of using WhatsApp for English language teaching is that it allows for real-time communication between teachers and students. This means that teachers can provide immediate feedback and support to students, which can be particularly useful for language learners who need extra help or clarification on a particular point.

Another advantage of using WhatsApp in English language teaching is that it is easily accessible and user-friendly. Most people are already familiar with the app, which means that there is no need for students to learn new software or platforms in order to use it for language learning (Doering, Lewis, Veletsianos, & Nichols Besel, 2008; & Sweeny, 2010). In addition, WhatsApp

is available on a wide range of devices, including smartphones, tablets, and computers, which means that students can access it from anywhere and at any time.

WhatsApp also allows teachers to create group chats with their students, which can be a great way to foster a sense of community and collaboration among learners (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). This can be especially useful for language learners, who often benefit from their peers' support and encouragement. Group chats can also be a useful tool for teachers, as they can use them to share resources and materials with their students, as well as to facilitate group discussions and activities.

In conclusion, WhatsApp is a valuable tool for English language teaching, as it allows for real-time communication, is easily accessible and user-friendly, and facilitates collaboration among learners. While it may have some limitations, they can be addressed using it with other language-learning tools and platforms.

WhatsApp and Vocabulary Learning

In the last decade and after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing digitization and virtualization have impacted every aspect of human experience. This includes education, learning, and development (Barzani & Jamil, 2021; Aslam, 2021; & Rasool, et al. 2022). As a result, the world of education has undergone a drastic change. To this end, mobile devices and various applications have grown ubiquitous in contemporary society, and their applicability has been expanded to educational settings (Nazari & Xodabande, 2020). Mobile aided language learning (MALL) is a type of teaching and learning methodology that operates on smartphones and other handheld devices with varying wireless connectivity (Arancon, 2013). Recent studies reveal that MALL plays a key role in language teaching at multiple levels (Hsu, 2016). In this way, Nazari and Xodabande (2020, p.25) articulate that the personalization, portability, and flexibility of mobile technologies paved the way for theory and research. Thus, they have concluded that "if teachers choose to employ mobile phones, both they and their learners can benefit from the outcomes." In this regard, integrating mobile devices into educational settings has been researched from various angles. Earlier, the use of SMS in vocabulary teaching and idiomatic expressions attained attention, and the bulk of research indicated positive results (e.g., Alemi & Lari, 2012; Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009; Lu, 2008; Song, 2008; Thornton & Houser, 2001; Zhang, et al., 2011). Nevertheless, there was concern regarding the expense of SMS, which could end up being pricey. Therefore, as a most preferred platform for education, WhatsApp already has so many practical applications that it is now hard to imagine the world of knowledge without it and eased the expense issue too (Barhoumi, 2015). This platform has been used for teaching various language skills, especially vocabulary teaching, which is the focus of current study as well. In this line, one of the first studies was conducted by Fageeh (2013), who through an experimental study looked at how ESL students at a Saudi university used WhatsApp to learn new vocabularies. The findings unveiled that the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups differed significantly in which the WhatsApp group scored higher on vocabulary tests. Similarly, Lawrence (2014) also

utilized WhatsApp to present vocabulary items to a group of five undergraduate Afrikaans learners before they read texts. The findings demonstrated that WhatsApp is a valuable tool for extending students' opportunities to gain experience and vocabulary outside of the classroom, particularly those students who struggle the most. In addition to that, Basal, Yilmaz, Tanrverdi, and Sari (2016) investigated the effectiveness of WhatsApp and traditional classroom activities for Turkish university students learning English idioms. The study concluded that WhatsApp facilitates the acquisition of idioms in which the post-test results were in favor of the experimental group. Following that, Jafari and Chalak (2016) examined how Iranian EFL students in middle school used WhatsApp to increase their vocabulary knowledge and to investigate if there is any significant difference between male and female learners. The findings demonstrated that students' vocabulary learning was aided significantly by using WhatsApp. The findings also revealed that there was no significant variation in vocabulary knowledge between male and female students after using WhatsApp. To investigate the practicality of WhatsApp in vocabulary learning and the perceptions of the learners regarding the use of the application in teaching, Bensalem (2018) conducted a study. The results of the study demonstrated that the use of WhatsApp has a visible positive impact on vocabulary acquisition and that learners' perceptions are highly positive. Furthermore, Hashemifardnia et al. (2018) via an experimental study investigated the impacts of WhatsApp on students' vocabulary learning. Likewise earlier studies, the findings indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group. This also supports the effectiveness of the application in vocabulary learning. In the same line, using a quasi-experimental study, Sivabalan and Ali (2022) assessed the benefits of WhatsApp in teaching vocabulary among Malaysian students. The results indicated that WhatsApp had a significant effect on assisting students to learn and improve vocabulary. Ultimately, using an experimental design, Raba, Qadous, and Itmeizeh (2023) investigated the impact of WhatsApp messaging on vocabulary acquisition among Palestinian sixth-grade students. Results indicated a significant improvement in vocabulary knowledge, with males benefiting more than females. The study further suggests WhatsApp as an effective tool to support vocabulary learning and promote learner autonomy in diverse educational settings.

Though a number of studies have examined the impact of WhatsApp on vocabulary learning, since it is an almost recent field, the findings could not be considered solid and conclusive Hashemifardnia et al. (2018). WhatsApp has not been well explored, particularly among Kurdish EFL students who are part of an educational system where the role of reading to enhance vocabulary knowledge is undervalued. In other words, more research is needed to have better and valid generalizations. From a different perspective, there are other pertinent and important elements to be investigated as well, namely the perceptions of the learners regarding the effectiveness of this application and more to be investigated regarding gender differences. Thus, this study aims to make a further contribution to those relevant issues. In this line, this study endeavors to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of utilizing WhatsApp on the vocabulary development of Kurdish EFL learners?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of Kurdish EFL learners towards using WhatsApp for vocabulary learning?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference in vocabulary learning outcomes between male and female Kurdish EFL learners when using WhatsApp?

Methodology

Participants

A total of 60 students (26 male and 34 female) comprised the participants of the present study. The participants were Kurdish EFL university students learning English as a foreign language at the English Language Teaching department in a private university in the Iraqi-Kurdistan region. The English proficiency of participants was intermediate according to the results of the Oxford Quick Placement Test. A random sampling method was used for the selection of the participants from 86 students. The selected sample was randomly allocated into two equal groups of one experimental (12 male & 18 female) and one control group (14 male & 16 female).

Instruments

Three instruments were employed in this study to address the research questions. First, to assess the participants' proficiency levels (i.e., elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate), the Oxford Quick Placement Test was administered. The results indicated that the students were at an intermediate proficiency level. Second, to explore participants' attitudes toward the use of WhatsApp for vocabulary learning, the researcher developed an attitude questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To enhance the reliability and validity of the instrument, it was pilot tested on a group of 20 students, and necessary revisions were made accordingly. Lastly, a vocabulary pre-test and post-test were designed to measure the participants' initial vocabulary knowledge and the impact of the intervention. The test comprised 70 items, including 30 multiple-choice questions, 30 fill-in-the-blank items, and 10 word-completion tasks. The items were derived from the students' coursebook. The content validity of the test was confirmed by a panel of English language specialists, and its reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.78. The test was also piloted with 20 students to ensure clarity, timing, accuracy, and objectivity, and appropriate adjustments were made. The pre-test was then reordered and used as the post-test.

Treatment

Prior to the treatment, the participants were instructed regarding the aim of the study, and they were randomly divided into two equal groups of one experimental and one control group. A list of 120 vocabularies was selected from the course book. The selection of content words included verbs, nouns, adverbs, and adjectives. The pre-test was administered to both groups. The experiment took six weeks each week for two hours; on an average of 20 words per week.

WhatsApp was used by the experimental group to receive the list of the words; on the other hand, the control group was instructed the traditional way following the printed list and course book in the class. Weekly class periods determined vocabulary list delivery. Assignments, based on the given list, were given to the participants and they had to submit them at the end of each week. The experimental group participants were discussing the words, and the words were sometimes visualized. Likewise, the control group participants were also contextualizing the words and discussing them. At the end of the six-week treatment, the post-test was administered to unveil the effect of the treatment.

Data Collection and Analysis

The collected data are participants' attitudes from the attitude questionnaire and results of pre-test and post-test. SPSS was used to examine the data collected. To do this, frequency measures were applied to explore the attitudes of the participants, and a t-test on independent samples was utilized to compare the pre- and post-test as well as the gender difference outcomes of the experimental and control groups.

Results

An independent t-test was conducted to examine if there is any notable significant difference in the pre-test performance of the two groups (traditional and WhatsApp). Table 1 depicts the findings of the descriptive statistics and clearly suggests that both the traditional group and WhatsApp group performed similarly on the pre-test, with almost similar mean score and standard deviation (M=20.30, SD=8.879; M=19.13, SD=9.239, respectively). Concluding that, by conventional criteria, this difference is not statistically significant.

Table 1. *Results of the independent sample t-test of pre-test of both groups*

	Group	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pre-test	Traditional	30	10	42	20.30	8.879	1.621
	WhatsApp	30	8	41	19.13	9.239	1.687

Additionally, an independent t-test was performed to address the post-test of both groups. This is to determine the influence, if any, of WhatsApp in vocabulary learning. As Table 2 shows, the WhatsApp group (M=33.03, SD=8.747) outperformed the traditional group (M=26.77, SD=9.406). That is, by conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be very statistically significant in which WhatsApp plays an effective role in vocabulary development.

Table 2. *Results of the independent sample t-test of post-test of both groups*

	Group	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Post-test	Traditional	30	12	45	26.77	9.402	1.717
	WhatsApp	30	17	55	33.03	8.747	1.597

Furthermore, Table 3 illustrates the results of the male and female learners in the WhatsApp group. This is to investigate if there is any significant difference in the use of WhatsApp between male and female learners regarding vocabulary development. As results show, there is a slight difference in the performance of both groups (male and female) learners (M=32.25, SD=9.536 & M=32.89, SD=8.464, respectively). However, by conventional criteria, this difference is not statistically significant.

Table 3. *Independent sample t-test of males and females in WhatsApp group*

Gender	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Male	12	11	45	33.25	9.536	2.753
Female	18	15	48	32.89	8.464	1.995

Finally, the administered questionnaire explored the attitudes of learners from the experimental group after using WhatsApp for a period of six weeks. The questionnaire specifically endowered to attain learners' attitudes in three different domains, namely perceptions about WhatsApp experience (items 1-4), attitudes towards usefulness of WhatsApp in vocabulary learning (items 5-11), and behavioral intention towards the usage of WhatsApp in future (items 12-15).

As figure 1 illustrates, a vast majority of learners (85%) responded positively (strongly agree & agree) to the items addressing experience perceptions. The majority of the participants reported that they find it fun and engaging to practice their vocabulary on WhatsApp. This vividly indicates that the learners' experience of the interactive six-week use of WhatsApp is of high importance.

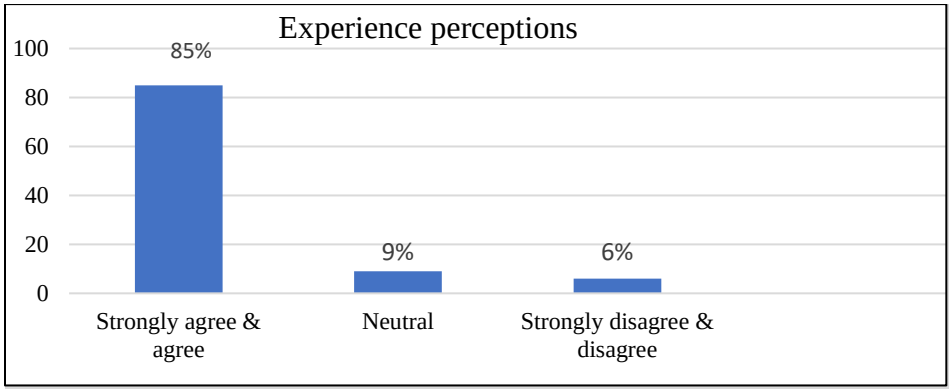


Figure 1. Learners experience perceptions of WhatsApp

Following that, as figure 2 shows, the use of WhatsApp in vocabulary learning was perceived positively as an effective tool to enhance vocabulary acquisition. The overwhelming majority of learners (90%) indicated that WhatsApp integration in vocabulary learning is highly effective. This is mostly due to the platform's interactive features such as group chats, voice and video calls, and instant messaging which allows for a dynamic and engaging way to practice their vocabulary. The

convenience of being able to use WhatsApp on mobile devices with learners noting that it allows them to practice their vocabulary anytime and anywhere is another contributor.

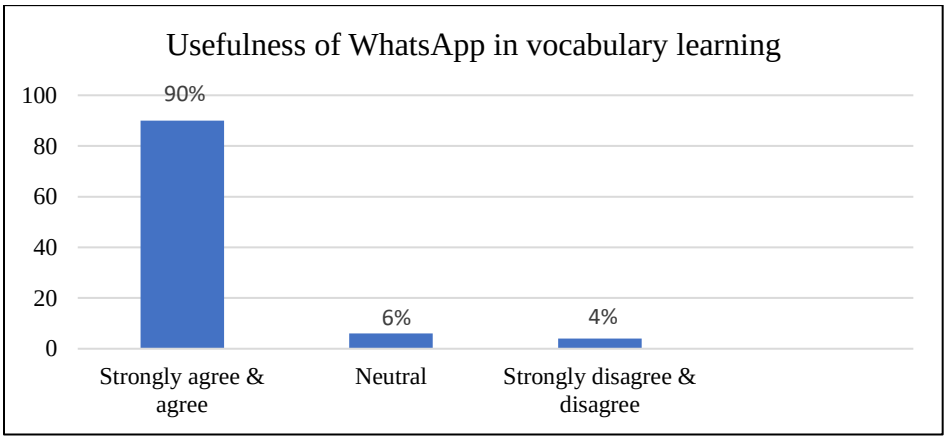


Figure 2. Learners' perceptions regarding the usefulness of WhatsApp

Lastly, figure 3 indicates that vast majority of the respondents (84%) strongly agree that they will continue using the app in vocabulary learning. This also indicates and supports the idea of the effectiveness of WhatsApp in vocabulary learning. Additionally, these positive perceptions might be also due to the social aspect of the app, with the ability to connect with their peers and native speakers which provide authentic language exposure and feedback on their language use.

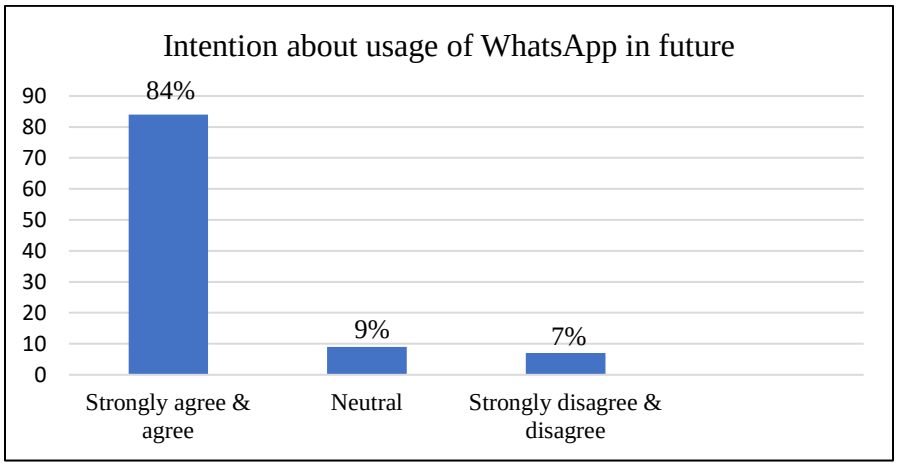


Figure 3. Learners' perceptions regarding future use of WhatsApp

Discussions

Mobile applications like WhatsApp have become popular in language learning due to their accessibility, convenience, and user-friendliness. This study examined the impact of WhatsApp on vocabulary acquisition among Kurdish EFL learners and revealed several positive outcomes. Similar to findings by Fageeh (2013) and Lawrence (2014), Kurdish EFL learners showed significant improvements in vocabulary knowledge through WhatsApp-mediated learning

activities, demonstrating the app's effectiveness in extending vocabulary learning beyond the classroom.

WhatsApp also fostered enhanced interaction and collaboration, leading to greater engagement and motivation among learners—consistent with Bensalem's (2018) observations of WhatsApp promoting positive perceptions and vocabulary acquisition. By providing a platform for continuous communication and feedback, WhatsApp created a more comprehensive environment for vocabulary practice, aligning with Barhoumi's (2015) insights into WhatsApp's multifaceted educational applications. Participants in this study, as in prior studies, preferred WhatsApp over traditional classroom methods, citing the benefits of multimedia resources and connectivity with both peers and instructors (e.g., Basal et al., 2016; Jafari & Chalak, 2016).

This study highlights WhatsApp's potential as a viable alternative to conventional classroom learning, especially in contexts where classroom access may be limited. However, similar to findings by Hashemifardnia et al. (2018), which emphasize the need for further research in varied learner groups and contexts, this study's focus on Kurdish EFL learners suggests that additional research is needed to generalize these findings more widely.

Future studies could build on this research by examining WhatsApp's influence on other language skills, such as grammar and writing, and by assessing its effectiveness in different educational contexts. Furthermore, challenges related to privacy, security, and technology access, identified in other studies, also need attention to maximize WhatsApp's potential as a language-learning tool across diverse settings. Addressing these factors may further enhance the viability of mobile-assisted language learning applications like WhatsApp for a broad range of language learners.

Conclusions

This study supports the notion that WhatsApp serves as a valuable tool for vocabulary acquisition among Kurdish EFL learners. By fostering enhanced interaction, collaboration, and multimedia engagement, WhatsApp provides an enriched environment for vocabulary practice, allowing learners to develop vocabulary knowledge more effectively. The findings align with broader research indicating that mobile-assisted language learning tools, such as WhatsApp, offer distinct advantages in promoting learner engagement and motivation, particularly by extending learning opportunities beyond the classroom. This makes WhatsApp an especially beneficial resource for language learning in contexts with limited access to traditional classroom resources, where flexibility and accessibility are crucial.

Additionally, the preference expressed by Kurdish EFL learners for WhatsApp over conventional methods highlights its potential as a supplemental or alternative approach to classroom-based language learning. However, while this study adds to the expanding field of technology-driven language learning, it remains context-specific; further research is needed to explore the tool's effectiveness across varied language-learning environments and to confirm its generalizability.

Pedagogical Implications

This study, based on the findings, has several implications for language teachers and educational institutions. First, it highlights the importance of providing students with meaningful and authentic language input. This can be achieved using WhatsApp, which allows teachers to provide students with real-time language input in a personalized and interactive manner. Second, it suggests that teachers can use WhatsApp to provide students with opportunities for interaction and collaboration. This will help students develop their language skills and enhance their vocabulary acquisition process. Finally, the study highlights the importance of providing students with regular opportunities for vocabulary acquisition and practice.

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Empirical Study of L2 Motivation and Motivational Learning Behaviors among College Students in English for Medicine Class

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Abstract:

This study examines the relationship between L2 motivation and motivational learning behaviors among college students enrolled in an English for Medicine course at a university in Zhejiang, China. It aims to help language teachers gain a deeper understanding of the relationship among constructs in the L2 Motivational Self System and how constructs like the Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and Second Language Learning Experience influence students' motivational learning behaviors using the L2 Motivational Self System framework. Eighty medical students were included as a sample, and a structured questionnaire was used to gather the quantitative data. Through a quantitative analysis, it is found that the students' motivational learning behaviors are significantly predicted by both L2 motivation and Second Language Learning Experience, with a moderate influence from the Ideal L2 Self. Additionally, the Ought-to L2 Self had less impact on the students' learning behaviors. The findings show that fostering intrinsic motivation and providing a supportive learning environment is necessary to improve students' engagement and effort in English for medicine courses.

Keywords: English for medicine, ideal second language self, second language learning experience, motivation, motivational learning behavior, ought-to second language self
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Introduction

English has become the lingua franca globally across various professional fields, including medicine. The demand for proficiency in English, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), such as English for medicine, has heightened, especially in non-native English-speaking countries. In China, the drive for educational reforms has strongly emphasized enhancing English language proficiency among college students, particularly those in specialized fields like medicine (Yu & Liu, 2018; Chen, 2024). The emphasis on English for medicine reflects academic needs and responds to the increasing requirements for medical professionals to engage with international research, clinical practices, and communication (Li & Wang, 2024; Zhang, 2024).

In the medical field, English is growing in importance, and students often face challenges in achieving proficiency, which may be influenced by their motivation and motivational behaviors to learn the language. The L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), proposed by Dörnyei (2005, 2009), provides a comprehensive framework to understand the motivational dynamics of second language acquisition. This model, which includes components such as the Ideal L2 Self (IL2S), the Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S), and the Second Language Learning Experience (SLLE), has been widely studied across various contexts.

When examining the predictors of success in medical English courses, it is essential to consider how these motivational factors interact with traditional measures of language proficiency, such as college entrance English scores. The present study explores the relationship between L2 motivation and motivational learning behaviors among college students enrolled in an English for medicine course at a university in Zhejiang, China. Specifically, it aims to examine how different components of the L2MSS--namely, the Ideal L2 Self (IL2S), the Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S), and the Second Language Learning Experience (SLLE) relate to students' Motivational Learning Behaviors (MLB). The study also investigates the influence of college entrance English scores as a potential predictor of these behaviors. The significance of this study lies in two aspects: it contributes to the theoretical understanding of L2MSS by exploring its components within the English for medicine classroom in China, extending the application of L2MSS to a specific educational and cultural setting. Pedagogically, this study offers guidelines for the teachers to make the best use of the specific motivational factors related to learners' performance to arouse, enhance, and maintain students' motivation in learning English by creating teaching activities to foster intrinsic motivation and a positive learning environment. Therefore, the research objectives of this study are:

(1) To investigate the relationships between college entrance English scores, L2 motivation, IL2S, OL2S, SLLE, and MLB of medical students in the medical English course.

(2) To determine how IL2S, OL2S and SLLE influences the motivational learning behaviors of these students respectively.

(3) To identify the strongest predictors of MLB among medical students in medical English courses, considering college English entrance scores, L2 motivation, IL2S, OL2S, and SLLE.

To achieve these research objectives, the study poses five research questions:

(1) What is the relationship between college entrance English scores, L2 motivation, IL2S, OL2S, SLLE, and MLB of students in the medical English course?

(2) How does the Ideal L2 Self impact motivational learning behavior among these students?

(3) How does the Ought-to L2 Self impact their motivational learning behavior?

(4) How does the Second Language Learning Experience influence their motivational learning

behavior?

(5) What are the strongest predictors of motivational learning behavior in medical English courses among medical students, considering college English entrance scores, L2 motivation, IL2S, OL2S, and SLLE?

This paper first reviews studies on language motivation, motivational learning behaviors, and motivational learning behaviors in English for Medicine Classrooms. Next, it elaborates on the research methodology employed in the study. The research results, discussion, and conclusion are presented in later sections.

Literature Review

Language Motivation

The study of L2 motivation, particularly within English for Specific Purposes (ESP), has been extensively studied in recent years, with the focus mainly on understanding how different motivational components would impact language learning outcomes. One of the central frameworks used in this area is Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System, which includes the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the Second Language Learning Experience as key elements influencing language learning behavior and language achievements. The Ideal L2 Self represents the learner's aspirations and desires to become proficient in the target language, which strongly predicts motivated learning behaviors in western and Chinese contexts (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Liu, 2013; Liu & Zhang, 2013; Papi &Teimouri, 2012, 2014; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2011; Papi et al., 2018; Takahashi & Im, 2020). Dogomeo (2023) illustrated that learners who maintain a clear vision of their Ideal L2 Self are more likely to sustain their motivation throughout their language-learning journey. This element is particularly relevant in medical English as students often link language proficiency to their future profession, motivating them to succeed.

On the other hand, the Ought-to Self, which represents the perceived external pressures and expectations from society or significant others, also plays a critical role in shaping one's motivation. Although the Ought-to Self can motivate learners, its impact on learning behaviors is often distinct from that of the Ideal L2 Self. Research suggests that while the Ideal L2 Self tends to foster positive and proactive learning behaviors, the Ought-to Self may result in a more avoidance-oriented motivation, where learners engage in tasks primarily to avoid failure rather than to achieve success (Taguchi et al., 2009; Yue et al., 2022; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Kamaruddin et al., 2017).

Besides personal factors, the Second Language Learning Experience (SLLE) also plays a vital role in influencing motivation. This SLLE encompasses the social, academic, and institutional settings where language learning occurs. "Motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it." This quote by Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) emphasized the critical role of motivation in language learning, indicating that a positive SLLE can significantly enhance learners' commitment and effort in mastering a second language. Studies have shown that when learners view that they were in a supportive and favorable environment for learning, they are more willing to display motivated learning behaviors and achieve better language outcomes (Henry, 2014). Similarly, the classroom setting is vital in molding students' motivation. Research emphasizes that fostering a positive and interactive classroom atmosphere can significantly boost students' participation and motivation (Yang, S, 2023; Vibulphol, 2016).

Recent developments in the study of second language motivation in China reflect an

increasing focus on the complex dynamics that influence learners' motivation across different educational contexts. A significant trend is the exploration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with studies indicating that intrinsic motivation, characterized by self-directed learning and engagement, leads to higher proficiency levels than extrinsic motivation, which is often linked to external rewards or pressures (Manipol, 2024). This aligns with findings highlighting the importance of fostering a supportive learning environment that enhances Chinese students' intrinsic motivation, thereby improving their language acquisition outcomes (Jiao et al., 2022; Erniyati &Putra, 2015; Li, 2023; Zhu, 2023). Moreover, the role of the classroom environment has emerged as a critical factor in motivating learners. Research suggests that interactive teaching methods and a positive classroom atmosphere can significantly enhance students' motivation to learn a second language (Yang, 2023).

Motivational Learning Behaviors

Motivational learning behaviors in English classrooms, mainly through the lens of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) theory, emphasize the interplay between learners' self-perceptions, goals, and the learning environment. L2MSS posits that the ideal self, the ought-to self, and the learning experience influence motivation, collectively shaping learners' engagement and persistence in language learning.

The psychosocial environment of the classroom significantly impacts students' motivation and commitment to learning English. Gelete (2023), Nottingham and Henning (2014), and Iraj et al. (2021) all highlighted that a supportive classroom atmosphere and favorable feedback enhance students' motivation because the learning process predominantly occurs within this context. Integrating enjoyable and engaging teaching methods, such as flipped classrooms and communicative teaching activities, has further enhanced learners' motivation and academic performance in the Chinese context (Ying & Ayub, 2022).

Moreover, teachers' application of motivational strategies plays a vital role in shaping students' learning behaviors. Zhang (2023), as well as Yang and Wyatt (2021), emphasized that motivational techniques not only make the classroom more engaging but also facilitate effective teaching and learning. Similarly, using transformational leadership in classrooms, as noted by Ying and Ayub (2022), can stimulate students' interest and set motivational goals, thereby enhancing their engagement.

In addition to the classroom environment and teaching strategies, the role of learner autonomy and external factors cannot be overlooked. Soviyah's (2022) study indicated that while students may exhibit a high level of autonomy in their learning, their engagement in outside-classroom activities remains moderate. This study suggests that fostering a sense of responsibility in learners is essential for enhancing their motivation.

Motivational Learning Behaviors in English for Medicine Classroom

Motivational learning behaviors are crucial in the medical English classroom. Alzabidi and Khadawardi (2022) and Sak (2020) found that the IL2S significantly affects students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in speaking classes, indicating that when students visualize themselves as competent speakers in their specific fields. Studies in China have shown that students who possess a strong Ideal L2 Self are more likely to engage in proactive learning behaviors and demonstrate higher levels of motivation (Wang, 2023). This study also aligns with findings that highlight the instrumental motivations of Chinese medical students, who often regard good English proficiency

as an important indicator of their career development and international collaboration (Wisnuwardhani, 2022). As for OL2S, in the context of medical education in China, these pressures often derive from academic requirements, social expectations, and the competitive nature of the medical field (Mayers, 2023). Research indicates that students who perceive strong external expectations are motivated to learn English, although this motivation may not be as robust as that driven by intrinsic aspirations (Metakides, 2023; Ahmadishokouh, 2024).

Additionally, the quality of the Second Language Learning Experience (SLLE) plays a critical role; positive and engaging learning experiences significantly enhance students' commitment to learning (Dewaele, 2020; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Effective teaching methodologies, such as interactive and student-centered approaches, have been shown to enhance students' motivation by creating engaging and supportive learning environments (Dai, 2023; Wang & Liu, 2023).

In summary, although the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) has been widely studied in general English and ESP contexts, research specifically addressing its application in medical English classrooms is rare. There remains a significant gap in the literature regarding how these motivational factors influence students' learning behaviors in ESP contexts, particularly in English for medicine courses in China (Xu et al., 2024; Hotak et al., 2024). Besides, though motivational factors such as L2 motivation, IL2S, OL2S, and SLLE are recognized as significant, their relative predictive power in explaining motivational learning behaviors among medical students has not been adequately explored. A quantitative analysis is needed to identify the strongest predictors within these students in English for medicine class.

Method

In order to answer the research questions above, the present study adopted a quantitative approach. The setting was a local university in Zhejiang province of China, which has implemented English for medicine classes for first-year and second-year medical students. This course is conclusory for medical students, and it is a bridge course connecting general college English to academic medical English. In this class, the instructor mainly adopted a communication-oriented teaching approach and motivational strategies to ensure the students are highly involved in the classroom. Meanwhile, students have a wide range of English exposure opportunities, such as talks, seminars, TV shows, video clips, and radio.

Participants

A purposeful sampling technique was employed to select the participants in this study. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to select participants most likely to provide rich, relevant, and diverse data regarding the research questions under investigation (Patton, 2015). This sampling method enabled us to specifically target students enrolled in the English for Medicine course, ensuring that the participants had direct experience with the specific language learning context under investigation. Given that our research aims to delve deeply into the motivational dynamics within this unique group, it was crucial to select participants who could provide insights that are directly relevant to the study's objectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

In total, 80 students attending medical English classes in the 2023 fall and 2024 spring were included. The majority are female (67, 83.75%), with 13 (16.25%) being male. Most participants are in their second year (59, 73.75%), while 26.25% (21) are in their first year. They all ranged between 18 and 20 years of age, majoring in medicine, nursery, and pharmaceutics in

medical school. They were given classes by the same lecturers using the same teaching materials and aids. Everyone has finished the prerequisite general college English course and met the entrance level of English for medicine class.

Research Instruments

The instrument used in this study is Questionnaire of L2M and Motivational Learning Behaviors (Appendix A). It consists of two parts: the first part is the personal information of participants, including gender, college entrance English score, academic levels or majors, or language proficiency. Part II is the Likert items to identify (1) L2 Motivation(L2M), (2) Ideal L2 Self (IL2S), (3) Ought to L2 Self (OL2S), (4) Second Language Learning Experience (SLLE), which were adapted from items made by Taguchi et al. (2009) and also from questionnaires made by other researchers, including Ryan (2009), Yashima (2009), and Qin and Wen (2002). Moreover, some items are to identify (5) L2 Motivational Learning Behaviors, which were adapted from Papi's (2010) and Al-Shehri's (2009) studies to measure L2 learners' motivational learning behaviors. All items were measured using a six-point Likert scale, ranging from disagree strongly (1) to agree strongly (6). The six-point Likert scale did not include the response uncertain to prevent neutral results.

In total, there are 43 items in this questionnaire, as shown in Table One.

Table One. *Subscales of questionnaire*

No.	Subscale	Number of Items
1	L2M	6
2	IL2S	7
3	OL2S	6
4	SLLE	5
5	Motivational Learning Behavior (MLB)	19
Total		43

The reliability of the whole questionnaire was tested and is shown in Table Two. Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.943 indicates a high level of internal consistency for the 43 items included in the scale. The results confirm the reliability of the data, supporting the robustness of the subsequent analysis in exploring the constructs related to L2 motivation and learning behaviors among the participants.

Table Two. *Reliability statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.943	.945	43

Research Procedures

Questionnaires about students' L2 motivation and L2 motivational learning behaviors were distributed to 80 students through the online platform *Wenjuanxing.com*. In total, the data of 74

respondents were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS 23.0, with six excluded. Some statistical analysis methods were adopted here: 1) descriptive statistical analysis to describe the general situation of students' L2 motivational self-system; 2) Pearson's correlation analysis to figure out whether there is a correlation relationship between L2M and the components of L2MSS, motivational learning behavior; 3) the liner regression analysis to examine the how significant the influence of IL2S, OL2S, and SLLE on learning behaviors in medical English class. 4) The multiple regression analysis examines which component best predicts students' motivational learning behavior. Finally, the interpretation of the results was conducted.

Results

The results of the data analysis concern five parts:

Correlation among Correlation Matrix

The correlation between college entrance English score, L2M (L2 Motivation), IL2S (Ideal L2 Self), OL2S (Ought-to L2 Self), SLLE (Second Language Learning Experience), and MLB (Motivational Learning Behavior) was analyzed using SPSS 23.0. Table Three presents a correlation matrix among them:

Table Three. *Correlation between college entrance English score, L2M, IL2S, OL2S, SLLE, and MLB*

		College Entrance English Score	L2M	IL2S	OL2S	SLLE	MLB
College Entrance English Score	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig.(two-tailed)						
	N	74					
L2M	Pearson Correlation	.281*	1				
	Sig.(two-tailed)	.015					
	N	74	74				
IL2S	Pearson Correlation	.255*	.569**	1			
	Sig.(two-tailed)	.028	.000				
	N	74	74	74			
OL2S	Pearson Correlation	.150	.327**	.359**	1		
	Sig.(two-tailed)	.203	.004	.002			
	N	74	74	74	74		
SLLE	Pearson Correlation	.085	.663**	.457**	.372**	1	
	Sig.(two-tailed)	.473	.000	.000	.001		
	N	74	74	74	74	74	
MLB	Pearson Correlation	.224	.738**	.552**	.210	.666**	1
	Sig.(two-tailed)	.055	.000	.000	.072	.000	
	N	74	74	74	74	74	74

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

College Entrance College Entrance English Score has a positive correlation with L2M (r = 0.281, p < 0.05) and IL2S (r = 0.255, p < 0.05). This indicates that students who scored higher on their college entrance English exam tend to have higher motivation to learn English and are more likely to have a strong Ideal L2 Self. There is no significant correlation with OL2S, SLLE, and MLB, showing that the college entrance English score does not show a significant relationship with these variables, indicating that prior academic achievement in English does not strongly predict motivational learning behaviors or other motivational constructs.

For the L2M and IL2S, the correlation coefficient is r =0.569, p < 0.01, indicating a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between L2M and IL2S. The correlation coefficient is 0.327, with a significance level of 0.004. A moderate positive and statistically significant relationship exists between L2M and OL2S (r= 0.327, p<0.01). There is a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between L2M and SLLE (r= 0.663, p<0.01). The correlation coefficient between L2M and MLB is 0.738, with a significance level of 0.000, indicating a very strong positive and statistically significant relationship between L2M and MLB.

Concerning IL2S, the correlation coefficient between IL2S and OL2S is 0.359, with a significance level of 0.002, indicating a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between IL2S and OL2S. The correlation coefficient between IL2S, SLLE, and MLB is 0.457 and 0.552, respectively, with a significance level of 0.000, indicating a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between IL2S, SLLE, and MLB.

The correlation coefficient between OL2S and SLLE is 0.372, with a significance level of 0.001, indicating a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between OL2S and SLLE. The correlation coefficient between OL2S and MLB is 0.210, with a significance level of 0.072, indicating a weak positive relationship between OL2S and MLB, but it is not statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Finally, the correlation coefficient between SLLE and MLB is 0.666, with a significance level of 0.000, indicating a very strong positive and statistically significant relationship between them.

Significant Impact of Idel L2 Self on Motivational Learning Behavior

Table Four. *Regression model summary of IL2S and MLB*

		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.636	.282		9.359	.000		
	IL2S	.370	.066	.552	5.622	.000	1.000	1.000
Dependent Variable: MLB R=.552 , R^2 =0.305, Adjusted R^2 =0.295, F（1，72）=31.605, Sig.=.000, Durbin-Watson= 1.707								

Table Four shows that the simple linear regression analysis further substantiated the relationship between IL2S and MLB. The regression model is statistically significant (F (1, 72) = 31.605, p < 0.001), explaining 30.5% of the variance in MLB (R^2 = 0.305). The adjusted R^2 value of 0.295 suggests that the model remains robust even after accounting for the sample size and number of predictors.

In Table Four, the unstandardized regression coefficient for IL2S was 0.370 (β= 0.552, t = 5.622, p < 0.001), indicating that for every one-unit increase in IL2S, there is a corresponding

0.370-unit increase in MLB. This significant positive relationship highlights the critical role of the Ideal L2 Self in motivating students to engage in both in-class and out-of-class learning activities. The constant term in the regression model (B = 2.636, $p < 0.001$) represents the baseline level of MLB when IL2S is absent, providing further context for understanding the magnitude of IL2S's impact.

The absence of multicollinearity, as indicated by the Tolerance and VIF values (equal to 1.000), reinforces the reliability of the regression model. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson statistic (1.707) suggests that the model's residuals are free from significant autocorrelation, ensuring the validity of the results. The results indicate that IL2S significantly positively impacts students' motivational learning behaviors in English for medicine class.

Significant Impact of Ought-to L2 Self on Motivational Learning Behavior

Table Five. *Regression model summary of OL2S and MLB*

		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.612	.321		11.248	.000		
	OL2S	.163	.089	.210	1.825	.072	1.000	1.000
Dependent Variable: MLB R= .210 , R^2 =0.044, Adjusted R^2 =0.031, F（1，72）=3.332, Sig.=.072, Durbin-Watson= 1.928								

As indicated above in Table Three, the relationship between OL2S and MLB is modest but statistically significant. However, the magnitude of the relationship is relatively weak, indicating that OL2S might not be the primary driver of motivational learning behavior in this context.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted further to assess the predictive power of OL2S on MLB. The model summary (Table Five) indicates that OL2S accounts for only 4.4% of the variance in MLB ($R^2 = 0.044$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.031. This suggests that while OL2S has a statistically detectable impact on MLB, the effect is relatively small, and the majority of the variance in MLB is explained by factors other than OL2S.

Table Five shows that the regression model was not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level (F (1, 72) = 3.332, p = 0.072), though it approached significance. The standardized regression coefficient (β = 0.210) indicates that OL2S has a positive, albeit weak, effect on MLB. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.163) suggests that for every one-unit increase in OL2S, there is an associated 0.163-unit increase in MLB. However, given the p-value of 0.072, this effect is marginal and warrants cautious interpretation. The findings suggest that the Ought-to L2 Self, which reflects the perceived external expectations or obligations to learn English, is limited in influencing students' commitment to learning English for medical purposes.

Significant Impact of the Second Language Learning Experience on Motivational Learning Behavior

Table Six. *Regression model summary of SLLE and MLB*

		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.091	.281		7.438	.000		
	SLLE	.486	.064	.666	7.581	.000	1.000	1.000

Dependent Variable: MLB R= .666 , R^2 =0.444, Adjusted R^2 =0.436, F（1，72）=57.468, Sig.=.000, Durbin-Watson= 1.901

As indicated in Table Three above, a correlation analysis demonstrated a significant positive relationship between SLLE and MLB (r = 0.666, p < 0.001). This strong correlation suggests that students who report more positive second language learning experiences are also more likely to exhibit higher levels of motivational learning behavior.

The simple linear regression analysis further explored the predictive power of SLLE on MLB. The model summary (Table Six) shows that SLLE explains 44.4% of the variance in MLB (R^2 = 0.444), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.436, indicating that a substantial proportion of the variance in MLB is attributable to SLLE. The model was statistically significant (F (1, 72) = 57.468, p < 0.001), confirming that SLLE is a significant predictor of MLB.

As shown in Table Six, the unstandardized regression coefficient for SLLE was 0.486 (β =0.666, t = 7.581, p < 0.001), indicating that for every one-unit increase in SLLE, there is a corresponding 0.486-unit increase in MLB. The positive coefficient reinforces that favorable second language learning experiences are strongly linked with the improvement of motivational learning behavior. The constant term (B = 2.091, p < 0.001) represents the baseline level of MLB when SLLE is zero, providing context for understanding the magnitude of SLLE's impact.

The absence of multicollinearity, as evidenced by the Tolerance and VIF values (equal to 1.000), further confirms the reliability of the regression model. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson statistic (1.901) suggests that the model's residuals are free from significant autocorrelation, supporting the validity of the findings.

The Predication Power of Various Constructs

Table Seven. *Regression model summary of various constructs*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
	(Constant)	1.303	.509		2.558	.013		
	L2M	.350	.087	.443	4.035	.000	.446	2.240
	IL2S	.123	.062	.184	1.985	.051	.629	1.591
	OL2S	-.102	.063	-.131	-1.611	.112	.812	1.232
	SLLE	.244	.075	.334	3.258	.002	.514	1.945
	College Entrance English Score	.002	.004	.044	.564	.575	.880	1.137
Dependent Variable: MLB R=.796 , R^2 =0.633, Adjusted R^2 =0.607, F=23.504***,								
*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)								

Based on the multiple regression analysis provided, here is an interpretation of the results. As shown in Table Seven, the R-squared value is 0.633, indicating that approximately 63.3% of the variance in MLB is explained by the independent variables (L2M, IL2S, OL2S, SLLE, and College Entrance English Score). The adjusted R^2 is 0.607, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model showing a good fit. The F-statistic is 23.504 with a significance level of 0.000, indicating that the model is statistically significant as a whole.

As for the regression coefficients, as shown in Table Seven, L2M (β = 0.443, p < 0.001) has a significant positive effect on MLB. This suggests that an increase in L2 Motivation is

strongly associated with an increase in Motivational Learning Behavior. As for IL2S (β = 0.184, p = .051), it has a marginally significant positive effect on MLB. This indicates that the Ideal L2 Self might positively impact Motivational Learning Behavior, although it is close to the threshold for significance. OL2S (β = -0.131, p = 0.112) does not statistically affect MLB. It has a negative coefficient, suggesting that Ought-to L2 Self may not be a strong predictor of Motivational Learning Behavior in this context. SLLE (β = 0.334, p = 0.002) significantly affects MLB, indicating that a positive Second Language Learning Experience significantly boosts Motivational Learning Behavior. The effect of College Entrance English Score (β = 0.044, p = 0.575) on MLB is insignificant, suggesting that past English performance does not significantly influence current motivational learning behavior.

Moreover, the predictors' VIF values are all below 10, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern in this model. In all, the regression equation is:

*Motivational Learning Behavior (MLB)=1.303+0.350*L2M+0.123*IL2S-0.102*OL2S+0.244*SLLE+0.002*College Entrance English Score*

To summarize, L2M and SLLE are the most significant predictors of Motivational Learning Behavior. This suggests that students with a strong L2 motivational self and positive learning experiences are more likely to engage in behaviors that support their learning goals. IL2S, while not as strong, still has a marginally significant favorable influence on MLB, implying that having a clear and motivating ideal self-concept in language learning might contribute to motivated behavior. OL2S does not significantly predict MLB, suggesting that external obligations or expectations might not be a strong motivator for learning behavior among these students. College Entrance English Score does not significantly influence current Motivational Learning Behavior, indicating that past performance/success/failure in English is not necessarily a determining factor of current motivation.

Discussion

The relationship between L2M, IL2S, OL2S, SLLE, and motivational learning behaviors was presented using a survey and data analysis of the research data. This section will present further discussions by referring to relevant studies based on the five research questions.

RQ1: What is the relationship between college entrance English scores, L2 motivation, IL2S, OL2S, SLLE, and motivational learning behavior of students in the medical English course?

The results indicate the strong correlations of L2M and SLLE with MLB, suggesting that both a robust L2 Motivational Self System and positive language learning experiences are critical drivers of motivational learning behaviors in this context. The IL2S is moderately correlated with motivational behavior, indicating its importance but suggesting that it may not be as critical as L2M and SLLE in this sample. Moreover, the limited impact of OL2S can be noted. The weaker and non-significant correlation of OL2S with MLB suggests that external pressures or obligations play a less significant role in motivating students than internal motivations and experiences.

The findings regarding the strong correlations between the L2M and SLLE with MLB highlight the importance of intrinsic factors in language learning. The L2MSS framework, in particular, suggests that learners' motivation is deeply related to their self-perceptions and experiences in language learning. This highlights the need for educational surroundings to foster students' intrinsic curiosity and interests, as doing so can significantly enhance their motivation to learn English (Jiao et al., 2022). This perspective aligns with Erniyati and Putra's assertion that

personal goals, interests, and self-efficacy are key drivers of student motivation. Their work reinforces that internal motivations are more powerful than external pressures in promoting effective language learning (Erniyati & Putra, 2022).

Moreover, the moderate correlation of the IL2S with motivational behavior indicates its relevance but also suggests that it may not be as critical as L2M and SLLE. Papi and Teimouri (2012) highlight that strong attitudes to the IL2S can significantly predict motivation. However, they also note that this self-image must be supplemented by positive learning experiences to engage learners fully. Thus, in this study, it could be found that while the Ideal L2 Self plays a role in medical English class, the combination of self-perception and experiential factors drives motivation more robustly.

The limited impact of the OL2S is particularly significant. The weaker and non-significant correlation of OL2S with MLB suggests that external pressures or obligations are less effective in motivating students than intrinsic motivations and positive experiences. This finding echoes the work of Dörnyei and Chan (2013), who argued that motivation is more effectively fostered through personal relevance and internalized goals rather than external expectations. This perspective is also echoed by Kamaruddin et al. (2017), who identified intrinsic motivation as a significant factor influencing language learning, further supporting the notion that internal drives are more influential than external obligations.

These findings highlight the importance of developing strong internal motivation and cultivating supportive learning settings to increase students' effort and participation in medical English classes.

RQ2: How does the Ideal L2 Self impact motivational learning behavior among these students?

The substantial variance IL2S accounts for in MLB indicates that students' visions of themselves as proficient English-speaking professionals significantly influence their motivation to learn. This aligns with the research by Papi et al. (2018), which emphasizes that the IL2S serves as a powerful motivator, driving learners to engage in behaviors that align with their aspirations. Furthermore, Kamaruddin et al. (2017) found that learners often prioritize their IL2S over external expectations, suggesting that intrinsic motivations rooted in personal aspirations are more impactful than social pressures.

To effectively cultivate this Ideal L2 Self, educators and curriculum designers should implement targeted strategies that encourage students to visualize their future professional identities. Techniques such as goal-setting activities, which have been shown to enhance motivation and academic performance (Orzechowska & Polok, 2019), can be particularly beneficial. Goal-setting helps students clarify their aspirations and fosters a sense of ownership over their learning process. The results of Takahashi and Im (2020) supported this statement, who observed a positive correlation between recognized regulation (connected to the IL2S) and language competency. They argued that when students set clear personal objectives, their motivation and subsequent language learning achievement improve.

Moreover, incorporating visualizations of future professional scenarios can further strengthen students' Ideal L2 Self. The results from this study echoed Dogomeo's (2023) study, which claimed that maintaining a clear vision of their Ideal L2 Self is more likely to sustain their motivation throughout their language-learning journey. This approach can be complemented by reflective practices that encourage students to consider the role of English in their medical careers.

Their comprehension of the value of language proficiency for their future careers may grow due to these reflections, increasing their incentive to participate in worthwhile learning activities.

In summary, by focusing on strategies that enhance the Ideal L2 Self, educators can significantly impact students' motivation and engagement in English language learning. This aligns with the broader literature on L2 motivation, consistently highlighting the importance of intrinsic factors and self-perception in driving successful language acquisition (Papi & Teimouri, 2012, 2014; Papi et al., 2018). Strengthening the Ideal L2 Self not only fosters motivation within the classroom but also equips students with the necessary skills and mindset to continue their language learning beyond formal education settings.

RQ3: How does the Ought-to L2 Self impact their motivational learning behavior?

The Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S) exerts a modest influence on motivational learning behavior among medical students studying English, as evidenced by various studies that explore the dynamics of language learning motivation. While external expectations associated with the OL2S can contribute to students' commitment to learning, the effect is limited compared to other motivational constructs, particularly the Ideal L2 Self (IL2S). This distinction is crucial, as it highlights the varying degrees of influence that different components of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) have on learners' engagement and persistence in language learning. Research indicates that while the OL2S, which encompasses the pressures and expectations from others (such as family, teachers, or society), can motivate students to some extent, it often lacks the depth and sustainability of motivation derived from the IL2S. For instance, Takahashi and Im (2020) found that the relationship between OL2S and motivated learning behavior is weaker than that of IL2S, which is more closely linked to intrinsic motivation and personal aspirations.

Moreover, studies have shown that the IL2S is a stronger predictor of language learning outcomes than the OL2S, echoing this study's findings. For example, Alzabidi and Khadawardi (2022) emphasized that the IL2S not only arouses interest but also sustains it as students invest time and effort to achieve their language learning goals. This aligns with the findings of Bóbkina et al. (2021), who reported that higher levels of motivation associated with the IL2S corresponded to more excellent proficiency in the language, while the OL2S was more prevalent among students with lower proficiency and limited learning experiences. Such evidence suggests that while external pressures can motivate students, they do not foster the same level of commitment and engagement as the internalized aspirations represented by the IL2S.

Furthermore, the modest influence of the OL2S can be attributed to its nature, which often focuses on avoiding negative outcomes rather than pursuing positive goals, which has the same results as the study of Wisnuwardhani(2022). Dörnyei and Chan (2013) highlighted that the OL2S is primarily concerned with fulfilling obligations and meeting expectations, which may not inspire the same enthusiasm and dedication as pursuing an Ideal L2 Self.

In this study, medical and professional programs often have rigorous language requirements. Students might be motivated to learn English simply to pass exams or meet these requirements (OL2S) in the Chinese context, but not explicitly demonstrated as intended efforts and commitment in language learning behaviors.

RQ4: How does the Second Language Learning Experience influence their motivational learning behavior?

The findings from the analysis above stress the critical role that positive second language

learning experiences play in shaping students' motivational learning behavior. The substantial impact of SLLE on MLB suggests that creating and maintaining a positive learning environment is essential for fostering student motivation in medical English courses.

The influence of positive Second Language Learning Experiences (SLLE) on students' Motivational Learning Behavior (MLB) is particularly pronounced in specialized contexts such as medical English courses in this research setting, which echoed the previous researches. Research indicates that a supportive and engaging learning environment is crucial for enhancing student motivation, which is essential for effective language acquisition in specialized fields. For instance, Iraj et al. (2021) highlight the importance of personalized and actionable feedback in fostering student engagement, suggesting that timely feedback can significantly impact students' learning outcomes and motivation levels. This aligns with findings from Nottingham and Henning (2014), who emphasized that constructive feedback confirms correct behaviors and enhances communication skills and professional competencies, which are vital in medical education. This is further supported by Carless and Boud (2018), who argued that student feedback literacy is essential for effective learning, as it encourages students to engage with feedback collaboratively, thereby enhancing their learning experience.

Moreover, the integration of interactive activities, such as role-playing medical scenarios and collaborative problem-solving tasks, has been shown to promote active student engagement and enhance motivation, which echoed the researches of Zhang (2023), and Ying and Ayub (2022). Yeager et al. (2014) also discussed how wise interventions can transform teacher-student interactions, thereby unlocking students' potential and fostering a more trusting educational environment. This is particularly relevant in the context of China's educational landscape, where traditional teaching methods may not adequately address students' motivational needs. By adopting student-centered approaches, educators can better engage learners and cater to their individual motivational profiles, which is essential for effective second language acquisition (Li, 2023; Zhu, 2023; Dai,2023; Zhang, 2024).

Additionally, it is critical to give constructive criticism that is individualized and supportive of each student's development to increase students' self-assurance and strengthen their dedication to learning. Giving comments to students while considering their emotional states is also essential because encouraging words can significantly improve the learning process as a whole (Rozental et al., 2020).

RQ5: What are the strongest predictors of motivational learning behavior in medical English courses among medical students, considering college English entrance scores, L2 motivation, IL2S, OL2S, and SLLE?

Firstly, L2 motivation was found to be a significant positive predictor of Motivational Learning Behavior, indicating that students with a strong motivational self-system are more likely to engage in behaviors supporting their language learning. This aligns with previous research that highlights the central role of L2M in motivating students to put forth effort in language learning contexts (Dörnyei, 2005). Moreover, it aligns with Dörnyei's foundational work, which emphasizes the central role of the L2M in motivating students to exert effort in language learning contexts (Papi & Teimouri, 2012; 2014), and English for medicine is no exception.

Secondly, the Second Language Learning Experience (SLLE) also emerged as a significant positive predictor, suggesting that students with positive experiences learning a second language are more likely to engage in motivated learning behaviors. Educational psychology literature has

supported the importance of positive learning experiences in enhancing motivation and learning outcomes (Ushioda, 2008). Moreover, the interplay between teacher motivational practices and student motivation has been shown to enhance the effectiveness of the L2M framework. Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2011) demonstrated that teachers' motivational strategies significantly influenced students' motivated behavior, reinforcing the idea that a supportive educational environment can amplify the effects of the L2M on student engagement. This is further supported by findings from (Wang et al., 2023), which suggested that the L2M framework can be effectively applied to understand the motivations of learners in various contexts, including the influence of self-perception on language learning.

This relationship is particularly important in ESP contexts, where students often have specific professional goals tied to their language learning. The findings of Yang and Wyatt (2021) highlighted that teachers' beliefs about their motivational practices directly impact student motivation in ESP settings. Their study emphasized the need for teachers to adopt motivational strategies that resonate with their students' specific needs and aspirations, thereby enhancing their engagement and learning outcomes. This aligns with the notion that teacher support can play a pivotal role in sustaining motivation in specialized fields like medicine, where students may feel pressure to achieve proficiency. For example, by addressing students' anxiety and fostering a supportive classroom environment, teachers can help students develop a clearer vision of their ideal L2 self, which is essential for motivation in ESP contexts.

Thirdly, the Ideal L2 Self (IL2S) showed a marginally significant favorable influence on Motivational Learning Behavior in this study. This finding suggests that students with a clear and motivating vision of their future L2 self are more likely to exhibit motivated learning behaviors. However, this effect was just above the conventional threshold for statistical significance. The role of the ideal self in motivation has been extensively discussed in L2 motivation theory (Dörnyei, 2009). This finding suggests that students' visions of their future selves as proficient language users can enhance their motivation to engage in language learning activities. However, the degree of this influence may vary depending on contextual factors and the specific nature of the ESP environment.

In the context of ESP, particularly in fields such as medicine, the IL2S can be a powerful motivator. As indicated in Alzabidi and Khadawardi's (2022) study, when students visualize themselves as competent speakers in their specific fields, they are more likely to participate actively in language learning. This aligns with the notion that motivation is a crucial factor in language acquisition, especially in specialized contexts where students may feel the pressure to achieve proficiency for professional purposes.

Moreover, Sak (2020) explored the relationship between the IL2S and WTC (Willing ness To Communicate), noting that the construct does not uniformly correlate with communication settings inside and outside the classroom. This suggests that while the IL2S can motivate students to engage in language learning, its effectiveness may be influenced by the specific classroom dynamics and the opportunities for the practical application of language skills. In medical English education, students may be more motivated to communicate in scenarios that closely resemble their future professional interactions, enhancing their learning experiences' relevance. The reason why IL2S was a weak predictor in this study may lie in the lack of authentic communicative activities related to their professions.

Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S) did not significantly predict Motivational Learning Behavior, suggesting that external obligations or expectations, such as perceived duties or responsibilities,

do not powerfully drive motivated learning behavior among these students. This finding is consistent with some studies that found the ought-to self to be less influential in language learning motivation than the ideal self (Papi, 2010).

Finally, the College Entrance English Score also did not significantly impact Motivational Learning Behavior, showing that past academic performance in English does not necessarily predict current motivation to engage in language learning behaviors. This finding may suggest that students' self-concepts and learning experiences more influence motivation in the current learning context than past achievements.

In conclusion, the L2M, SLLE, and IL2S are significant predictors of Motivational Learning Behavior, and their effectiveness can be enhanced through targeted pedagogical strategies and communicative teaching approaches that align with the specific needs and aspirations of students in ESP classrooms, such as English for Medicine. In ESP contexts, where students often have specific professional goals, fostering a strong IL2S can be particularly beneficial. By helping students develop a clear vision of their future selves as competent language users, educators can significantly enhance the motivation and engagement of students in language learning.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how different components of the L2MSS--namely, the Ideal L2 Self (IL2S), the Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S), and the Second Language Learning Experience (SLLE) relate to students' Motivational Learning Behaviors (MLB). The study also investigated the influence of college entrance English scores as a potential predictor of these behaviors. It is found that there are strong correlations of L2M and SLLE with MLB, suggesting that both a robust L2 Motivational Self System and positive language learning experiences are critical drivers of motivational learning behaviors in this context. The IL2S is moderately correlated with motivational behavior, indicating its importance but suggesting that it may not be as critical as L2M and SLLE in this sample. Moreover, the limited impact of OL2S on MLB suggests that external pressures or obligations play a less significant role in motivating students than internal motivations and experiences.

Moreover, the L2 Motivational Self System is an important factor in predicting motivational learning behavior. The results showed that the components of the L2 Motivational Self System play an important role in improving medical students' classroom engagement and learning effort in medical English courses, emphasizing the importance of L2 motivation, positive L2 learning experience, and the Ideal L2 self in promoting students' motivational learning behavior. The results also showed that the L2 learning experience significantly impacts medical learning behavior, indicating that improving students' language learning experience can effectively enhance their motivation and participation. Additionally, while the Ideal L2 Self showed potential as a motivator, enhancing students' vision of the future as proficient English speakers through interventions may significantly increase their engagement and effort in language learning. Last but not least, it is found that although external expectations (OL2S) can promote students' learning engagement to a certain extent, but their effect is limited. Finally, the College Entrance English Score did not significantly impact Motivational Learning Behavior, showing that past academic performance in English does not necessarily predict current motivation to engage in language learning behaviors.

Implications

This empirical study contributes to the broader understanding of language learning motivation, particularly in specialized educational contexts such as medical English classrooms. These findings provide valuable insights into the factors that influence motivational learning behavior among students, particularly emphasizing the roles of internal motivation and positive learning experiences. Medical English educators and policymakers should focus on fostering strong motivational self-systems and creating positive learning environments to enhance student engagement in language learning.

Additionally, given the relatively weak influence of OL2S on MLB, educators and program designers might focus on strengthening students' IL2S, which could be more effective in fostering long-term commitment and motivation in English language learning. Interventions that help students align their personal goals with their professional aspirations in the medical field, rather than merely responding to external pressures, may yield better motivational outcomes.

Future research could explore the potential mediating effects of other motivational factors, such as the teaching approaches and activities, to further elucidate the mechanisms through which IL2S influences MLB. Also, the current study was conducted with a relatively small sample of 80 students in a single university in Zhejiang, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Further research could extend the geographical scope to represent the broader population of medical students in different regions or countries.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire of L2M and Motivational Learning Behaviors

L2 Learning Motivation

1. I think that I am doing my best to learn English.
2. I usually spend lots of time studying English.
3. I can overcome the difficulties and remove interferences when I learn English.
4. No matter my teacher is strict with us or not, I will study English consciously.
5. Compared to most of my classmates, I think I study English relatively hard.
6. I have my own after-class English learning plan.

Ideal L2 self

7. I often imagine myself living abroad and communicating with local residents in English.
8. I imagine myself as someone who is able to communicate in English.
9. The things I want to do in the future require me to use English.
10. I often imagine myself speaking English as if I were a native speaker of English.
11. I often imagine myself speaking English with international friends or colleagues.
12. Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English.
13. I often imagine that if I acquired good English scores or skills, I would attract more admiration.

Ought-to L2 self

14. I study English because close friends of mine think it is important.
15. I consider learning English important because the people I respect think that I should do it.
16. Learning English is necessary because people surrounding me expect me to do so.
17. I study English in order to gain the approval of my peers/teachers/family/boss.
18. It will have a negative impact on my life if I don't learn English.
19. Studying English is important to me in order to achieve a special goal (e.g., to get a degree or get a scholarship).

Second Language Learning Experience

20. I like the atmosphere of my English classes.
21. I find learning English really interesting.
22. I always look forward to English classes.
23. I really enjoy learning English.
24. English learning is one of the most important aspects in my life.

Motivational Learning Behaviors

25. When I encounter something, I don't understand in English class, I will ask the teacher.
26. I set short-term and long-term goals for my English learning.
27. I have my own English learning plan and time line.

28. I often reflect on whether my English learning methods are effective.
29. I spend more time studying English outside of class than on other courses.
30. I preview the text before taking English class.
31. I am able to use different learning strategies according to different learning tasks.
32. I am very aware of my strengths and weaknesses in English learning.
33. I often use self-assessment tools and other methods to check my English learning.
34. I attend English classes on time.
35. I completed the English homework assigned by the teacher on time.
36. I will correct the mistakes in my English homework based on the teacher's comments.
37. For English class, I just dealt with it casually. (rc)
38. I rarely watch English programs on TV. (rc)
39. After I finish my English class, I review what I have learned.
40. I rarely participate in English extracurricular activities, such as English corners, speech or composition competitions. (rc)
41. I rarely listen to English programs on the radio. (rc)
42. I never take the initiative to answer questions in English class. (rc)
43. I often read English newspapers and magazines.

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EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Reflective Teaching as a Means for Professional Development

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Abstract

This study investigated English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' perceptions and practices of reflective teaching in the Mekong Delta context. It was a mixed methods study using a descriptive research design with two instruments: a questionnaire and interviews. Eighty-one EFL teachers from different provinces in the Mekong Delta were invited to participate in the study. The findings indicated that EFL teachers' perceptions of the role of reflective teaching were quite high, and there was no significant difference between males and females in their perceptions. The group of senior teachers (with 21 years plus teaching experience) perceived the roles of reflective teaching at the highest level. In contrast, the contrary was seen for the group of less senior teachers. Among the five dimensions of reflective teaching, *affective reflection* and *metacognitive reflection* were the two most commonly practiced, while *critical reflection* was at the lowest level of reflective teaching in practice. Finally, gender and teaching experience were found not to affect the practices of reflectivity among EFL teachers. The study outlined important challenges that EFL teachers generally confronted in reality and suggested relevant strategies to improve reflective teaching practice as a means of professional development in Vietnam and similar contexts worldwide.

Keywords: EFL teachers, perceptions, practices, professional development, reflective teaching, Vietnam context

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Introduction

English has been an integral part of modern education and society in Vietnam and worldwide (Phuong, 2017), and learning English has turned into an inevitable trend if one wishes to be more competitive. Growing schools and English centers have increased the demand for highly qualified Vietnamese EFL teachers in the Mekong Delta. Additionally, Bennell (2014) argues that lacking professional development (PD) can demotivate most teachers. Therefore, to satisfy social and educational requirements, teachers are expected to make professional development their new concern and life-long pursuit (Mesa, 2018).

However, finding practical but effective PD activities in EFL settings has challenged most teachers (Liston & Zeichner, 2014). To achieve this goal, the Applied Science model was first recommended; however, it was rapidly critiqued because it failed to deal with the complexity of educational practice (Schon, 1983; 1987). Therefore, reflective teaching (RT) appeared to be complementary to the applied science model, and there was a growing need for teachers at all levels to reflect on their teaching performance (Pratt, 2002). As a new approach, RT emerged and rapidly captured practitioners' attention. It gained popularity in teacher education for decades because its knowledge primarily stemmed from the voices and insights of the teachers themselves (Liston & Zeichner, 2014). Additionally, its popularity is rooted in its added value to teaching practice and its ability to clarify teachers' thinking (Conford, 2006). RT reflects teachers' teaching performance, aiming to enhance their personal, educational, and career development. In other words, RT is considered a tool for better understanding students' learning process, self-assessing teaching practices, developing responsive curricula, and bridging the gap between teaching and learning (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Schön, 1987).

As mentioned above, RT has been favored for teacher professional practice over the years. However, there is a need for more empirical evidence of RT in practice (Conford, 2006). He argued that studies did not sufficiently provide solid evidence about teachers' perceptions and practices of RT in PD (Conford, 2006). Some researchers claim RT has certain problems, for example, being a somehow redundant practice (Liston & Zeichner, 2014). The superior influence of RT on education has not been proven empirically so the practice is somewhat hindered from being widely disseminated (Conford, 2006). Hence, this study focused on teachers' perceptions and practices of RT in a Vietnamese EFL context, considering the mediating roles of gender and teaching seniority.

Literature Review

Overview of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice has received much attention from scholars in second language instruction in recent years (Qing, 2009). Etymologically, reflection was rooted in the Latin *reflectere*, meaning to *bend back* (Valli, 1997). Classroom problems are often reiterated, termed "routine", and they are believed to be predictable and manageable (Hartman, 2010). However, each problem in the classroom is unique and certainly requires suitable actions or responses from teachers. Similarly, Schon (1987) affirmed two distinct roles of teachers in language classrooms: solving problems and comprehending their instructional contexts. Richards and Lockhart (2007) shared a similar view, regarding a teacher as a person who reflects upon institutional factors, teaching approach or method, personal belief in teaching, and cultural values. In short, overgeneralization of classroom problems is no longer accepted in modern educational theories

(Hartman, 2010). RT emerged, and its core tenet is that each classroom shortcoming cannot be treated similarly but needs the teacher's timely intervention (Schon, 1987).

RT practices can be significantly promoted with the help of teaching journals, lesson reports, teaching portfolios, conducting classroom observations, audio and video recording of lessons, forming reflective inquiry groups, and undertaking action research and case studies (Amobi, 2003; Qing, 2009). Richards and Farrell (2005) view these activities as teaching strategies to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses, facilitate teachers' self-esteem and self-awareness of their teaching performance, and examine problems that seem neglected in the classroom. These activities eventually highlight what aspects of teaching performance require improvement (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Reflective Teaching as a Means for Teacher PD

RT represents systemic self-assessment of teaching performance through action research and critical reflection on experience (Schon, 1987). It gives teachers great chances to raise their voices, interpret classroom problems under sound theoretical frameworks, and improve their future teaching performance (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990). It is teachers' preparation (Cruikshank & Metcalf, 1990) and a conscious attempt to give thoughtful instruction (Richard & Lockhart, 2007). Alternatively, RT as an individual cognitive process includes personal beliefs, subjectivity (Webb, 2000), and emotion (Alison, 2007). Consequently, RT expectedly fosters professional autonomy (Lisbon & Zeichner, 2014) and insights into teaching experience (Hartman, 2010). There is no consensus on the definitions of RT but for the objectives of the current study, RT is viewed as a teacher's conscious considerations, and approach to professional autonomy.

There is extensive literature on different levels of reflection (Kheirzadeh & Sistani, 2018; Larrivee & Cooper, 2006)**.** Reflection can be classified into technical, practical, and critical reflection (Van Manen, 1977), pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection **(**Larrivee, 2008). In common with Van Manen (1977) and Larrivee (2008), Akbari et al. (2010) categorized reflective practices into five subscales, namely practical reflection, cognitive reflection, affective reflection, metacognitive reflection, and critical reflection. The practical dimension concerns the tools teachers apply for their reflective practices. Examples include portfolios, journals, audio and video recordings, and observation. The second dimension centers cognitive aspect of reflective practices, involving reading books or articles on language teaching, participating in workshops and conferences, carrying out research activities, and so on. Affective reflection is devoted to teachers considering students' beliefs, cognitions, personal learning styles, and social living backgrounds, which may affect the teaching method and its outcomes. Metacognitive reflection refers to the philosophy and significance of teaching practices and finding out the strengths and weaknesses of teachers by themselves. In contrast, critical reflection is devoted to discussing social injustice in class, students' surrounding environments, students' fighting against discrimination viewpoints, and the effects of teaching on students' political views.

Viewing RT as a process where educators critically examine their teaching practices to enhance their effectiveness and improve student learning outcomes, Schon (1997) proposed a practical typology. Three main types of RT are reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action. Reflection-in-action occurs during the teaching process itself, where teachers observe and assess their methods and student responses in real time, making immediate adjustments as needed. Reflection-on-action happens after the teaching session, allowing teachers

to review and analyze their performance, identifying what worked well and what could be improved for future lessons. Lastly, reflection-for-action is a forward-looking approach where teachers use insights gained from past experiences to plan and implement strategies for future teaching, aiming to enhance their overall effectiveness and student engagement. In essence, the three types are not necessarily distinct or separated. However, they can be integral parts of a continuous cycle of reflection that helps educators grow professionally and fosters a more dynamic and responsive learning environment.

Reflection thus has potential benefits for teachers' professionalism (Yassaei, 2011). Initially, RT characterizes an effective teacher as it offers teachers useful insights for performance, setting understanding, and critical thinking (Bean & Stevens, 2002). It significantly supports teachers' PD in formulating rationale for classroom actions, fostering decision-making skills, and facilitating constructive alignment (Alger, 2006). Moreover, RT results in acute skills in observing, analyzing, making decisions, reconstructing, and predicting (Alger, 2006). It also ameliorates the theory-practice link and teachers' self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (Vazir, 2006) and gradually forms objective, critical, and constructive thinking when evaluating teaching performance (Pollard et al., 2008). RT is a tool to examine teachers' beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and values (Larrivee, 2008). As another benefit, RT embraces its ability to face repetitive instructions, and problems regarding discipline knowledge, pedagogical practices, self-confidence, creativity, self-esteem (Núñez & Téllez, 2015), and classroom management (Qing, 2009; Hartman, 2010). Given many potential benefits, RT must be introduced and facilitated in teacher training programs and in-service practices (Nurfaidah, 2016).

Previous Studies

Several studies in various contexts have focused on different aspects of RT. Ashraf and Zolfaghari (2018), for example, studied the interaction between teachers' assessment ability and their reflective practice. The study involved 120 Iranian EFL teachers from different institutes in Mashhad. For data, the researchers exploited two distinct questionnaires: an assessment literacy questionnaire (Zolfaghari & Ashraf, 2015) and a reflective teaching questionnaire (Behzadpour, 2007). Findings indicated that teachers' assessment literacy correlated with reflective practice. In other words, teachers' reflective practice could be predicted through their assessment competence. This study suggested the involvement of a wider range of assessment skills and methods in teacher education programs for bettering teachers' reflective teaching and facilitating professional development.

Another study by Gheith and Aljaberi (2018) investigated the variance of teachers' reflective practice and their perspectives regarding gender, number of workshops attended, and teaching experience. One hundred sixty-two male and female teachers working at 10 private schools in Amman, Jordan, were involved in this study. The tool used was a questionnaire centering on the teachers' practice and their attitudes toward RT developed This questionnaire covered a range of RT's functions: (1) creating a student-centered environment; (2) creating a reflective classroom environment; (3) appreciating criticism; (4) self-evaluation; (5) decision making; and (6) openness to professional development. Findings revealed that Jordanian teachers applied reflective teaching at an "acceptable" level, regardless of their gender, the number of workshops they attended, and their teaching experience. However, exceptions could be seen in a low "appreciating criticism". It was inferred that Jordanian teachers were inclined to apply

a learner-centered teaching approach, but they found it difficult to accept feedback from their students and their colleagues.

The study by Gungor (2016) explored the effects of reflective tools on teachers' professional development, self and peer reflection, and their action plans for teaching young learners. Participants are 20 third-year undergraduates (17 females, 3 males, aged between 20-23), who were randomly chosen from the course "Teaching English to Young Learners". The instruments include peer checklist forms for peer evaluation, video-recorded microteaching sessions, reflective diaries, and lesson plans. Findings indicated that reflective practice, nurtured through reflective diaries and video-recorded microteaching sessions, enhances teachers' self-awareness, and willingness to teach young learners. Pre-service teachers showed their need and preference for receiving constructive, detailed feedback on their microteaching performance. Additionally, this study underlined that reflectivity fostered teachers' self-understandings about their strengths and weaknesses in managing the classroom, using target language, instructing, designing materials, and planning lessons. Furthermore, thanks to the reflective process, pre-service teachers' critical thinking, open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and tolerance seemed to be substantially nurtured.

The literature review above suggests that more in-depth, empirical, and contextualized understandings of teachers' reflective practice are needed. Despite being widely accepted in the field of education and teacher development, RT in practice is still in need of further negotiation because of its limitations. Critiques of RT embrace its inability to confront objectivity, rationality (Webb, 2000), cultural, racial, and gender issues (Webb, 2000; Yassaei, 2011), and teachers' lack of open-mindedness and accountability when receiving feedback (Mesa, 2018). It is suggested that RT should be associated with cultural beliefs, cultural values (Webb, 2000; Yassaei, 2011), instructional context, and local characteristics (Halbach, 2002). More importantly, RT should be performed in dialogue among researchers and teachers (Hartman, 2010; Webb, 2000).

Thus, this study aims to identify EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of RT as a means for teacher PD in the context of the Mekong Delta. To achieve these objectives, the researchers attempted to answer the two following questions:

RQ1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of reflective teaching as a means of professional development?

RQ2. How do EFL teachers practice reflective teaching for their professional development?

Research Methodology

Research Design and Participants

This study was a cross-sectional descriptive research following a mixed methods approach. Participants included 81 EFL teachers from different provinces in the Mekong Delta. Their age ranges between 24 and 55. They have been teaching English for one to more than twenty-one years. Their teaching experience helped categorize the participants into five groups for contrastive analyses: from one to five years, from six to ten years, from eleven to fifteen years, from sixteen to twenty years, and from twenty-one years or more. Table 1 below provides demographic summaries of the teacher participants.

Table 1. *Participants' demographies*

	Group	*Number*	*Percentage*
Gender	Male	18	22,22 %
	Female	63	77,78 %
Degree	BA	68	83,95 %
	MA	13	16,05 %
Teaching experience	1-5 years	51	62,96 %
	6-10 years	13	16,05 %
	11-15 years	06	07,41 %
	16-20 years	09	11,11 %
	21 years and over	02	02, 47 %

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted from Akbari et al. (2010) and Larrivee (2008). The questionnaire was a five-point Likert scale with 44 bilingual statements against which the participants chose "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree", or "strongly agree" as applicable to them. The questionnaire was piloted with fifteen teachers for content clarity and language accuracy. A minor revision was done to increase the validity and reliability of the final version. The Cronbach's Alpha of the official questionnaire was .849, indicating a high internal consistency.

Part 1 centered on background information with eight items from 1 to 8. Part 2 embraces teachers' perceptions of RT, consisting of 12 statements in four clusters: *RT as a tool for providing information, developing teachers' thinking, developing teachers' skills,* and *addressing classroom problems*. Part 3 encompasses teachers' practices of RT, involving three types of RT (in action, on action, and for action) and five dimensions: practical, cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and critical.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were administered to nine target participants, including five males and four females, three with the highest mean scores, three with average mean scores, and three with the lowest mean scores from the questionnaires. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to help participants understand the questions and express their responses clearly. Interview questions were divided into two main parts. The first part was devoted to participants' background information. The second part included seven open-ended questions concerning teachers' perceptions and practices of reflective teaching. Before the interviews, the researchers explained the purpose of the interviews. Each interview lasted for approximately 30 minutes. All of the responses were recorded and transcribed with the participants' permission.

Results

Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Teaching

The results from the descriptive statistics test indicated that the general mean score of teacher perceptions of the roles of RT was fairly high (*M=3.79, SD=.33*). Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of the roles of RT seen in the four clusters: information providing, thinking developing, skills developing, and issue addressing.

Table 2. *The roles of reflective teaching*

Clusters	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Reflective teaching as a tool for providing information	81	2.67	5.00	4.10	.42
Reflective teaching as a tool for developing teachers' thinking	81	2.00	5.00	3.97	.61
Reflective teaching as a tool for developing teachers' skills	81	2.67	5.00	4.00	.45
Reflective teaching as a tool for addressing classroom problems	81	2.00	5.00	3.94	.59

Then, a one-sample t-test was run to check whether the general mean score was different from the test value of 4.0. The result was that the general mean score (*M=3.79, SD=.33*) was different from the test value 4 *(t=-5.62, df=80, p=.00).* The finding indicated that the teachers' perceptions of the roles of RT were quite high. This finding was somewhat supported by the results from interviews with nine teachers. It was found that two out of the nine teachers highly perceived the roles of reflective teaching. For example, Teacher 9 said,

"I find them very useful because when we teach in class, we cannot realize whether our teaching is good or not. We must depend on such sources of information and reflective activities; they will help us find good, effective, and weak points in our teaching. Thus, we can change."

Besides, three out of nine interviewed teachers highly appreciated the role of RT in developing teachers' objective and critical thinking. For instance, Teacher 2 said,

"Thanks to my review of my teaching, students' comments, and colleagues' feedback, I have an enhancement in thinking ability, and my critical thinking becomes better."

In addition, three of the nine interviewees claimed that RT helped them find solutions for classroom problems and avoid repeating teaching routines. As an evidence, Teacher 3 explained her points,

"I can solve my problems and I can do my job smoothly. We can have experience teaching other classes in the coming years."

Teacher 9 added,

"We will avoid teaching in the same ways for all courses. I mean we avoid repetition of our teaching practices."

Exceptionally, two teachers mentioned the roles of RT in enhancing students' excitement in learning, teachers' motivation to teach, and teachers' communication with their colleagues. Teacher 3 said,

"For the students, if we can improve, they will feel more excited and learn more effectively, and they will want to learn my subject."

Teacher 4 furthered this point,

"My teaching practice will improve, and I feel inspired to teach. I am motivated to teach, rather than teach and have no chance to improve. I feel I fall into oblivion"

An independent samples t-test was also conducted to verify whether there was a significant difference between males and females in their perception of the roles of reflective teaching. The results (Table 3) indicated that there was no significant difference between males *(M=3.98, SD=.34)* and females *(M=4.01, SD=.45)* in their perception of the roles of RT *(t=-.34, df=35.71, p=.73).* In other words, males and females perceived the roles of RT similarly.

Table 3. *Comparison of perceptions between two genders*

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	p
Perceptions	Male	18	3.98	.34	.08051	-.34	35.71	.73
	Female	63	4.01	.45	.05681			

After that, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to see whether there were significant differences among the five groups of various teaching experiences in their perceptions of the roles of reflective teaching. The results of the one-way ANOVA test showed that there were significant differences among the five groups *(F=2.57, df=4, p=.04)*. Specifically, the group of 21 years or more experience perceived the roles of RT with the highest level *(M=4.17, SD=.00)*. The second rank came with the group of 01-05 years *(M=4.06, SD=.41)*, followed closely by the group of 06-10 years *(M=4.03, SD=.47)*. The fourth rank was the group of 16-20 years *(M=3.96, SD=.32)*, leaving the group of 11-15 years with the lowest level *(M=3.50, SD=.47)*. Detailed results are displayed in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. *Descriptive statistics of perceptions in 5 groups*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
G1: 01-05 years	51	4.0572	.40671	.05695	3.9428	4.1716	3.08	4.83
G2: 06-10 years	13	4.0256	.47188	.13087	3.7405	4.3108	3.00	4.75
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.5000	.47140	.19245	3.0053	3.9947	2.83	4.25
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.9630	.31763	.10588	3.7188	4.2071	3.50	4.42
G5: 21+ years	2	4.1667	.00000	.00000	4.1667	4.1667	4.17	4.17
Total	81	4.0031	.42725	.04747	3.9086	4.0976	2.83	4.83

Table 5. *ANOVA of perceptions across experience groups*

	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig. (*p*-value)
Between groups	1.742	4	.436	2.574	.044
Within groups	12.861	76	.169		
Total	14.603	80			

Teachers' Practices of Reflective Teaching

Teachers' Practices of Three Kinds of RT

A descriptive statistics test was conducted to indicate the total mean score, maximum, minimum, and standard derivation of each category perceived by participants. The results of the descriptive test are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. *Teachers' practices of the three kinds of reflective teaching*

Kinds of reflective teaching	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Reflection in action	81	1.00	5.00	3.79	.89
Reflection on action	81	3.00	5.00	4.23	.55
Reflection for action	81	2.00	5.00	4.00	.63

Then, a one-sample t-test was run to check whether the mean scores of the three types of reflection were different from the test value of 4.0. Reflection in action *(M=3.79)* was found to be significantly different from the test value 4.0 *(t=-2.12, df=80, p=.04)*. Therefore, the teachers' practices of reflection in action were quite high. Besides, for reflection on action *(M=4.23)*, it was found to be significantly different from the test value 4.0 *(t=3.81, df=80, p=.00)*. This suggested that the teachers' practices of reflection on action were just over the high level. Strikingly, the mean score of reflection for action *(M=4.00)* was similar to the test value of 4.0. This meant that the teachers' practices of reflection for action were high. In short, analysis of the questionnaire's results revealed that the participants' practices in all three types of reflection ranged from quite high to high levels.

From the interviews, details were revealed regarding their specific practices. For reflection on action, for example, seven out of the nine interviewees admitted that retrospect self-reflecting after a class, a course, or a unit in the textbook became their routine. Teacher 8 said,

"At present, after each unit in the textbook, it is about 6 periods, or at the end of the semester, I reconsider my teaching."

More strikingly, two teachers arranged specific times for reflection. Teacher 2 confessed,

"Once a week, I reflected on my teaching practices. At the weekend, Saturday or Sunday. It is often on Sunday afternoon."

As for reflection for action, two participants said they reflected when problems in class arose and they could not solve them or when they were self-aware of their weak points in teaching, and they thought they could improve in some way. As an example, Teacher 7 said,

"I do it frequently when my teaching practices are not good. I reflect on my teaching performance or when I think I can do something different to help my future teaching better."

Only one teacher, who was working in a university environment and belonged to the group with 06-10 years of experience, reported that he reflected during the lesson to survey learners' opinions about the lesson. He shared,

"During the lesson, for example, I ask students whether an activity is suitable or not, or whether they have any comments for the lesson."

Teachers' Practices of Five Dimensions of RT

Firstly, a descriptive statistics test was conducted to determine the general mean score of the participants' reflective teaching practices. The test provided the minimum score, maximum score, mean, and standard derivation of teachers' practices grouped into five dimensions of reflective teaching. Details are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7. *Teachers' practices of the five dimensions of RT*

Five dimensions of reflective teaching	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Practical reflection	81	2.17	4.83	3.73	.52
Cognitive reflection	81	2.17	4.67	3.60	.47
Affective reflection	81	2.67	5.00	3.96	.52
Metacognitive reflection	81	2.71	5.00	3.85	.37
Critical reflection	81	1.57	4.43	3.43	.54

The results indicated that the general mean score of the participants' RT practices was 3.72 (M=3.72, SD=.35). Then, a one-sample t-test was run to check whether the mean score of participants' practices was different from the test value of 4.0. The results showed that the general mean differed from the test value 4 (t=-7.33, df=80, p=.00). The findings indicated that the teachers' RT practices were quite high.

Analyzing interview transcriptions led to similar findings. All of the interviewees have reflected on their teaching practices. Two-thirds of them reflected weekly or when they finished a class or a course, whereas a third of them did it daily, after each unit in the textbook or at the end of the semester. One teacher, who came from a university, admitted that he sometimes reflected, but it was not often. Other teachers reported similar reflection practices, for example, Teacher 6 shared,

"I do it weekly because it is an important task in my career, especially for English teachers."

It was found that *affective reflection* and *metacognitive reflection* are the two most common dimensions of teachers' practices. For example, talking about a speaking lesson on *giving and replying to a compliment* (Unit 3, English 12), Teacher 5, who has been teaching English for 20

years at a high school, considered his students' cultural backgrounds as a factor affecting teaching method as well as its outcomes.

"Most students replied to the compliment in a way that they did not accept the compliment. This was probably because of the Vietnamese culture. So, I asked them to freely reply to their friends' compliments. This made the atmosphere more comfortable."

When reflecting as a language teacher, this shared about his strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

"My strength in teaching is my enthusiasm, my weakness is my language knowledge relating to the English I am teaching at high school and the ways I deal with my students. They are young and live in modern society."

Similarly, Teacher 2, who has been teaching at an English center for more than four years, also paid attention to her students' learning styles when she reflected on her lesson about weather. She said,

"My students were happy and willing to engage themselves in the activities. The idea of using PowerPoint slides and videos instead of just pictures has helped me a lot to keep students' attention and interest in the lesson."

Additionally, an independent samples t-test was also conducted to verify whether there was a significant difference between males and females in their practices of reflective teaching. The results (presented in Table 8) indicated that there was no significant difference between males *(M=3.66, SD=.38)* and females *(M=3.73, SD=.34)* in their reflective practices *(t=-.65, df=25.38, p=.52).* In other words, males and females practiced five dimensions of RT similarly.

Table 8. *Comparison of practices between two genders*

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	df	p
Practices	Male	18	3.6649	.38075	.08974	-.650	25.379	.521
	Female	63	3.7297	.34215	.04311			

After that, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether there were significant differences among the five groups of teaching experience in their practices of the five dimensions of reflective teaching. The results are presented in the Appendix.

Table 9. *ANOVA results of experience groups in 5 reflective dimensions*

Between groups	F	df	p
Practical reflection	.83	4	.51
Cognitive reflection	3.12	4	.02
Affective reflection	1.31	4	.28
Metacognitive reflection	.98	4	.43
Critical reflection	.85	4	.50

The results (displayed in Table 9) showed that there were no significant differences among the five groups of teaching experience in their practices of the four dimensions of reflective teaching. To be specific, there were no significant differences among practical reflection *(F=.83, df=4, p=.51),* affective reflection *(F=1.31, df=4, p=.28),* metacognitive reflection *(F=.98, df=4, p=.43),* and critical reflection *(F=.85, df=4, p=.50).* However, the exceptions can be seen in cognitive reflection *(F=3.12, df=4, p=.02).* More specifically, the group of 21 years or more teaching experience practiced cognitive reflection with the highest level *(M=3.92, SD=.12). In contrast, the* group of 11-15 years experience performed cognitive reflection with the lowest level *(M=3.11, SD=.68).* The second rank came with the group of 16-20 years *(M=3.87, SD=.26),*

followed closely by the group of 06-10 years *(M=3.71, SD=.55)*. The fourth rank regarding cognitive RT went to the group of 01-05 years *(M=3.58, SD=.41)*.
An analysis of the data from the interviews showed similar findings. There were almost no significant differences among the five groups having different teaching experiences in practicing the five dimensions of reflection. However, the 11-15-year-olds frequently practiced affective and metacognitive reflection, whereas the 01-05-year-olds performed cognitive reflection more frequently than other groups.

Challenges and Suggestions

Furthermore, responses from the interviews revealed some difficulties facing the teachers. The challenges were related to external objective sources, such as a shortage of time due to a heavy workload and other responsibilities in life. Some teachers reported a lack of support from the management board when needed.
"… to reflect, the difficulty is the time. Maybe we schedule the time for review, but we have some parties, guests, or other affairs at that time. So, we will lose the time for reviewing and cannot compensate for another time" (Teacher 2).
"Because when we have just graduated from school, we have much time, but when we have a job or when we get married, the time will be limited…" (Teacher 4).
" … when we reflect, I realize some students learn slower than others and we need to meet and talk with the school manager. However, meeting managers is a difficult job…" (Teacher 5).

Perhaps the biggest problems were rooted in the teachers themselves since many of them share their reluctance, low motivation and willingness to reflect, and inability to realize class issues to solve them.
"If I reflect on my own, it will be difficult. Sometimes, I have problems that I do not know how to solve. Of course, at that time, I think of asking other teachers, but the difficulty is that other teachers can rarely realize the problems and the ways to solve them for me" (Teacher 7).
"Sometimes, I am psychologically affected like this. I do not always have a reflecting section after each lesson. I find that the lesson is not perfect, but I feel tired and I do not reflect anymore" (Teacher 3).
"I do not want to spend time learning something new. I am almost fossilized with the ways of teaching and remain unchanged" (Teacher 8).

Other challenges were associated with collaboration and support from peers. While the interviewed teachers recognized the importance of corporative learning through mutual observation, in their realities, this was not carried out effectively due to conservative minds, a lack of constructive and sincere feedback from colleagues, and avoidance due to fears of negative judgment.
"… in observing classes, there are some ideas that I share with my colleagues. But it is difficult because some people are very conservative. When I discuss something new, they do not accept it. They think their actions are the best and never try to change their minds" (Teacher 8).
"Teachers are not willing to be observed. Some teachers give comments for form's sake, but they do not give me sincere feedback. I mean they do not give their true comments" (Teacher 9).
"Normally, teachers think that their peers who observe their classes always take a serious look at their weak points, and they will be very fearful" (Teacher 2).

Together with these obstacles, the teachers recommended some suggestions for bettering the practice of reflective teaching. Firstly, students' comments about the lesson should be taken into consideration. For example, Teacher 5 said,

"My suggestion is that we should create favorable conditions for students to raise their voice, their feedback about contents and activities after each lesson."

Teacher 3 shared similar recommendations,

"We must facilitate students to give their ideas, which we consider valuable. We create a close relationship, and the students will give their opinions. They will reflect on activities and teaching practices in class."

Secondly, RT had to be done more frequently and widely among the English teacher community. To achieve this objective, teachers need support from the school management board and experienced leaders. Collaboration and assistance among fellow teachers are also recommended, specifically through more mutual observing, sharing, and constructive comments regarding their lessons.

"There should be professional meetings among Vietnamese and foreign colleagues, once a month. They should discuss pedagogical issues together" (Teacher 5).

"There should be a person, who is very good at professional knowledge, to organize or lead the groups. If we reflect and we do not have a proficient person to give comments, the group can not develop" (Teacher 8).

In addition, as the effectiveness of RT has mostly resulted from the teachers' efforts to improve their teaching, their endeavors should be encouraged, acknowledged, and rewarded. It was recommended that there should be a specialized department or unit for answering teachers' questions related to RT timely when needed. Lastly, RT should be approached and practiced in an inspiring manner to improve themselves rather than becoming a burden for teachers with worries and pressure.

"I suggest that English teachers apply reflective teaching more thoroughly because it is useful. If the community of English teachers all do reflective teaching, I think the quality of teaching could be enhanced substantially" (Teacher 1).

Discussions and Implications

Teachers' Perceptions of Reflective Teaching

In general, teachers' perceptions of the roles of RT as a means of PD were quite high. Participants' understandings of reflective teaching explained these findings. Most of the researched teachers admitted that they knew about RT thanks to their knowledge from university, self-studying, master programs, and in-service training sessions organized by the local education authorities. In other words, most EFL teachers have already possessed a general understanding of RT from several sources. Additionally, most teachers revealed considerable degrees of reflecting practice in their teaching realities. As evident in the study's results, a third of them reflected weekly and when they finished a course, whereas a minority of them did it daily after each unit in textbooks. After practicing RT frequently, teachers somewhat perceived its role in their PD. However, some of them found RT difficult to practice. The challenges were related to time constraints, little support from managers, and low motivation. Other challenges were seen as conservative minds, a lack of realistic comments from peers, and no corporative community practice. These difficulties partly decreased teachers' perceptions of the roles of reflective teaching.

In addition, there was not much difference among the teachers' perceptions of the roles of reflective teaching. No significant difference was found between males and females regarding their perception of reflective teaching. In other words, males and females perceived the role of RT similarly. The findings of the present study echoed Yassaei (2011), who found that teachers normally perceive a generally similar understanding of RT and its advantages for their teaching performance.

Remarkably, there were significant differences among the five groups of various teaching experiences. Specifically, the group with longer teaching experience perceived the roles of RT at the highest level as opposed to the group of 11-15 years with the lowest level. These differences can be explained by the core of reflective teaching, which centers on teachers' experience of understanding the strengths and weaknesses in their teaching performance (Pollard et al., 2008). Therefore, the more experienced the teacher is, the better the teacher will perceive reflective teaching.

Teachers' Practices of Reflective Teaching

Teachers' practices of reflection in action were found to be quite high. Their practices of reflection on action were just over the high level, whereas their practices of reflection for action were at the high level. At the core of Schon's (1987) and Van Manen's (2016) explanation, teaching experience is of great importance. The impact of teaching experience on reflection in action is more significant in comparison with the two remaining kinds of reflection (Schon, 1987). In this current study, the number of experienced teachers was somewhat limited, with only 17 teachers having more than 10 years of experience teaching English. Therefore, the level of teachers' practices of reflection in action was lower than those of their reflection on action and for action.

In terms of the five dimensions of reflection, the Vietnamese EFL teachers' practices were generally quite high. This finding was in line with Gheith and Aljaberi's (2018) study which revealed that Jordanian teachers applied RT at an "acceptable" level, regardless of their genders, the number of workshops they attended, and their teaching experience. In detail, it was found that *affective reflection* and *metacognitive reflection* were the two most commonly practiced. Additionally, there were no significant differences between males and females in their reflective teaching practices. In other words, males and females practiced five dimensions of RT similarly. Finally, there were almost no significant differences among the five groups of teaching experience in their practices of the five dimensions of reflective teaching. This meant that teaching experience did not affect reflectivity among EFL teachers. These remarks were a confirmation of Khoshsima et al.'s (2016) study in which the results showed no significant difference among 5 experienced groups of teachers in their commitment to reflective practice in language classrooms. Furthermore, this study agreed with Gheith and Aljaberi's (2018) study, which revealed that Jordanian teachers applied RT at an "acceptable" level, regardless of their gender, training, and teaching experience.

Implications

Implications for Teacher Trainers and School Leaders

Findings from the study showed that EFL teachers' perceptions of the role of RT and practices of RT were just lower than the high level. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the RT practices among the English teacher community. Teachers should be given chances to participate in conferences, workshops, training courses, or professional meetings where they can receive many insights related to the roles of RT and how to apply RT effectively. Moreover, authoritarians

should enhance teachers' awareness and willingness to practice RT through regular meetings where experienced teachers, trainers, and scholars in the RT field share about RT's impact on teaching performance and how to practice RT more effectively. In these meetings, educators should help teachers realize that the more reflective they are, the more effective their teaching outcome will be. If possible, there should be a specialized department for RT to support teachers when needed. Additionally, educators or school managers should facilitate RT practices in a stress-free environment where RT practices should inspire teachers to improve themselves rather than burden teachers with worries and pressure.

Implications for In-service Teachers

As mentioned previously, EFL teachers' practices of RT were only quite high. Therefore, they should reflect on their teaching practices more frequently. Both male and female teachers, regardless of teaching experience, can enhance their frequency of practicing reflective teaching. If possible, RT should be done on action, for action, and in action. Teachers should seek support and guidance to plan in their minds when they will reflect, how they reflect, and which tools they can use to reflect in their instructional settings. Then, these steps should be followed strictly; teachers should consider reflection as their daily task and become more autonomous.

EFL teachers' practices of reflection in action were at a lower level. However, this kind of instant reflection could arguably be essential in the classroom for immediately informed feedback and a finely tuned learning flow. Therefore, the practices of reflection in action should be reinforced with the help of students' insightful and critical feedback about the lesson that they received. It is well-studied that students' comments are a reliable and effective source of information for teachers' reflections. Hence, students' comments, either negative comments or positive comments, should be encouraged and welcomed during every lesson. Thanks to students' comments, teachers can realize the weak points of their teaching practice and adjust timely. Teachers should create a stress-free environment for students to raise their voices in classes and highly appreciate students' ideas for the lesson.

Additionally, critical reflection, which was at the lowest level of RT practices, should receive more attention from both teachers and educators. Furthermore, reflection should be considered an interactive task in which one teacher has to cooperate with their colleagues. Nevertheless, each teacher should be open-minded and accountable for receiving feedback from their peers and willing to give constructive and sincere comments to their peers.

Conclusions

Previous studies on RT required more empirical evidence, especially in the domain of English language education. Following this line of reasoning, the present study was conducted as an attempt to systematically explore EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of RT in their PD. The findings from this current study contribute to more nuanced knowledge of RT practice in the Vietnamese and relevant contexts. Firstly, in terms of EFL teachers' perceptions of the roles of reflective teaching, it was found that Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of the roles of RT were quite high. Furthermore, the teachers were aware and well-perceived of the four functions of RT namely as *a tool for informing performance effectiveness, a tool for developing teachers' thinking, a tool for developing teachers' skills,* and *a tool for addressing classroom problems.* In terms of practices, the findings indicated that Vietnamese EFL teachers incorporated reflection into their teaching to a quite high degree. The practices were done across reflection forms and

dimensions. Challenges to the practice tied to the particular teaching context were identified, and the teachers' suggestions were discussed.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although the study has reached its aims, it had some unavoidable limitations. First, the younger versus senior teachers ratio was unstable; most were from primary to high school. This may lose sight of the reflective practice of the equally prominent context of Vietnamese higher education. Also, this study relied almost entirely on self-reported data. Thus, it had limitations in providing honest snapshots of the practice in authentic classrooms. Therefore, future studies can overcome these by integrating classroom observations as their research instruments and expanding the scope to include more heterogeneous participants and educational institutions.

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Appendix. *Descriptive statistics of practices in 5 reflective dimensions*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Practical reflection								
G1: 01-05 years	51	3.7092	.53629	.07510	3.5583	3.8600	2.17	4.50
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.7308	.44378	.12308	3.4626	3.9989	3.00	4.67
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.4722	.59082	.24120	2.8522	4.0923	2.50	4.33
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.9444	.52705	.17568	3.5393	4.3496	3.17	4.83
G5: 21+ years	2	3.9167	.11785	.08333	2.8578	4.9755	3.83	4.00
Total	81	3.7263	.51996	.05777	3. 6114	3.8413	2.17	4.83
Cognitive reflection								
G1: 01-05 years	51	3.5784	.41144	.05761	3.4627	3.6942	2.67	4.83
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.7051	.54922	.15233	3.3732	4.0370	2.33	4.50
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.1111	.68041	.27778	2.3971	3.8252	2.17	3.67
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.8704	.26058	.08686	3.6701	4.0707	3.50	4.17
G5: 21+ years	2	3.9167	.11785	.08333	2.8578	4.9755	3.83	4.00
Total	81	3.6049	.46655	.05184	3.5018	3.7081	2.17	4.67
Affective reflection								
G1: 01-05 years	51	4.0588	.51943	.07273	3.9127	4.2049	2.67	5.00
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.7436	.52974	.14692	3.4235	4.0637	2.67	4.67
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.7778	.58373	.23831	3.1652	4.3904	3.00	4.67
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.8519	.50308	.16769	3.4652	4.2386	3.00	4.67
G5: 21+ years	2	4.0000	.00000	.00000	4.0000	4.0000	4.00	4.00
Total	81	3.9630	.52440	.05827	3.8470	4.0789	2.67	5.00
Metacognitive refl.								
G1: 01-05 years	51	3.8655	.36635	0.5130	3.7625	3.9686	3.29	5.00
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.9011	.37519	.10406	3.6744	4.1278	2.86	4.29
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.5714	.52683	.21508	3.0186	4.1243	2.71	4.29
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.8571	.22588	.07529	3.6835	4.0308	3.57	4.14
G5: 21+ years	2	3.9286	.10102	.07143	3.0210	.48362	3.86	4.00
Total	81	3.8501	.36624	.04069	3.7691	3.9311	2.71	5.00
Critical reflection								
G1: 01-05 years	51	3.4398	.48474	.06788	3.3034	3.5761	2.29	4.43
G2: 06-10 years	13	3.3077	.85882	.23819	2.7887	3.8267	1.57	4.43
G3: 11-15 years	6	3.2619	.37706	.15394	2.8662	3.6576	2.71	3.86
G4: 16-20 years	9	3.6032	.38318	.12773	3.3086	3.8977	2.71	4.14
G5: 21+ years	2	3.8571	.20203	.14286	2.0420	5.6723	3.71	4.00
Total	81	3.4339	.54231	.06026	3.3139	3.5538	1.57	4.43

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Instructors' Views on the Content Validity of English for Medical Purposes Achievement Tests at Universities in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Given the critical role of medical English in preparing students for real-world medical environments, this research is vital for ensuring that assessment tools accurately measure the competencies needed for effective communication in medical settings. The study addresses a significant research gap concerning aligning medical English tests with evolving medical language demands and professional practices. This study investigates instructors' perspectives on the content validity of English for Medical Purposes achievement tests at universities in Saudi Arabia. It seeks answers to how instructors evaluate the alignment, relevance, and validity of English for Medical Purposes achievement test content concerning course objectives, professional language needs, and practical application. The researcher collected data using a structured questionnaire, which he distributed to 32 instructors with significant experience teaching Medical English textbooks. Findings reveal that while most instructors believe medical English tests align well with course objectives and address practical needs, they also identified discrepancies between test content and the required medical English skills . Continuous revisions and updates are necessary to ensure that assessments stay relevant and accurately reflect real-world medical language use, which enhances the effectiveness of training programs.

Keywords: Achievement tests, content validity, English for medical purposes , instructors, language testing, perceptions

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Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (E.S.P) courses form the foundation of English learning across various academic fields. Munoz-Liza and Taillefer (2018) highlight that (E.S.P) courses address the diverse contextual needs of different audiences. Basturkmen (2006) notes that educators implement (E.S.P) in various countries and contexts.

Paltridge and Starfield (2013) describe English for Academic Purposes (E.A.P) as teaching English to learners who use the language for academic responsibilities. Stojkovi (2015) asserts that English has become the primary language of international communication in scientific and medical fields, linking people across various disciplines. Achievement tests in (E.S.P) courses are crucial for assessing course output and students' proficiency. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Hughes (2003) emphasize that (E.S.P) evaluates learners' proficiency and course objectives. According to Bachman (1990), test scores must have content validity to be meaningful, appropriate, and valuable. Kopriva (2008) adds that the clarity of test items influences students' performance. Thus, developing valid (E.M.P) achievement tests is critical for reflecting the proper standards of test takers. This study aims to assess the suitability of (E.M.P) achievement tests, examine if they meet the required criteria, and identify their strengths. The findings will benefit test designers, (E.S.P) and (E.M.P) experts, and applied linguistics professionals.

There are three primary issues the study aims to address .The first issue concerns whether Saudi universities align English for Medical Purposes achievement tests with the skills, knowledge, and competencies required in the medical field.

The second issue is to what extent instructors perceive these tests as accurately reflecting the course content and meeting the needs of students in the medical domain. The third issue is that the potential gap between test content and instructional goals could hinder students' preparedness for real-world medical communication, resulting in suboptimal learning outcomes.

The study aims to:

Determine whether medical English tests adequately reflect the learning objectives of (E.M.P) courses and the specific language needs of medical students. This research is significant because:

1. Understanding content validity can help align tests with curriculum goals, ensuring they measure relevant skills effectively.
2. Accurate assessment can lead to better-targeted teaching strategies, improving students' professional readiness in English for medical contexts.
3. Findings could inform policy and practice in developing (E.M.P) curricula and assessments, particularly in a non-native English-speaking context like Saudi Arabia.
4. It addresses a specific need to evaluate and improve the quality of educational assessments in specialized English for Specific Purposes contexts.

The study is constructed to achieve the following objectives

1. Explore instructors' perceptions of the alignment between (E.M.P) achievement test content and course objectives.
2. To assess whether the tests measure the practical and professional English skills required by medical students.
3. To identify any discrepancies or gaps in the test design from the instructors' perspectives.
4. To provide recommendations for improving the validity and reliability of (E,M.P) achievement tests.

This study endeavors to contribute to the understanding of L2 instructors' perceptions of language testing methodologies. To achieve this goal, the researchers administered a questionnaire to gauge participants' perspectives on the content validity of the English for Medical Purposes (E.M.P) Achievement test at Saudi universities. It delved into four research inquiries:

1. How do instructors perceive the alignment between (E.M.P) achievement test content and the learning objectives of (E.M.P) courses?
2. In what ways do instructors think the (E.M.P) achievement test content reflects the practical language needs of medical professionals?
3. What discrepancies do instructors identify between (E.M.P) test content and medical English skills required in professional settings?
4. What factors do instructors believe impact the content validity of English for Medical Purposes (E.M.P) achievement tests?

Literature Review

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) state that educators design (E.S.P) courses to meet specific learners' needs, focusing on language use relevant to particular disciplines . Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue that (E.S.P) courses should align with learners' needs, while Basturkmen (2006) views (E.S.P) as grounded in language learning and teaching principles. Day and Krzanowski (2011) note that ESP involves teaching the specific skills and language required for particular purposes. Paltridge and Starfield (2013) emphasize that ESP aids students in achieving academic, professional, and occupational goals. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) define a syllabus as a framework that specifies learning objectives and reflects the knowledge learners should acquire by the end of the course . Paltridge and Starfield (2013) differentiate (E.S,P) from English as Second Language (E.S.L) by focusing on workplace vocabulary and communication skills. Hughes (2003) and Harris (1969) suggest that assessments should include tasks reflecting candidates' actual abilities, including oral production samples such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

Definition and Purpose of Achievement Tests

Achievement tests measure students' knowledge and skills in specific subjects, reflecting their academic accomplishments. These tests assess instructional effectiveness and students' learning outcomes, providing valuable feedback for educators (Nitko and Brookhart, 2014).

Reliability and Validity of Achievement Tests

Practical achievement tests must demonstrate reliability and validity. Reliability ensures consistency of test results over time, while validity assesses whether the test measures what it is intended to measure (McMillan, 2014). Content validity, which involves aligning test content with the curriculum and instructional goals, is crucial for accurately reflecting what students have learned (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994) . Experts achieve this alignment through detailed reviews and comprehensive test blueprints (Downing, 2006).

Alignment between Achievement Test Content and Learning Objectives

The alignment between achievement tests and learning objectives is essential for assessing educational program effectiveness (Biggs and Collis, 1982). Tests that closely align with course objectives provide a more accurate measure of students' skills (Linn and Gronlund, 2000).

For EMP courses, this alignment ensures that assessments accurately measure intended medical language skills (Taylor, 2004). Recent studies emphasize the importance of content validity to ensure (E.M.P) tests align with learning objectives, covering specific medical contexts and terminology (Glickman and Arnett, 2022).Practical item analysis helps refine test content to match learning outcomes (Li and Zhao, 2021). Integrating curriculum content into test design ensures alignment with instructional goals (Chen and Wu, 2023). Holistic assessment approaches considering language proficiency and medical content knowledge are increasingly emphasized (Martinez Garcia, 2022). Feedback from stakeholders, including students and instructors, is crucial for ongoing test improvements (Kuo and Wong, 2024).

(E.M.P) Test's Reflection of Practical Language Needs

(E.M.P) assessments must reflect the practical language tasks encountered in medical professionals' daily work (Lu and Liang, 2021). Tests should include real-life scenarios and relevant medical terminology to ensure applicability to professional contexts (Cao et al., 2022).Practical assessments incorporate scenarios and terminology pertinent to medical practice (Hodges, 2008; Hyland, 2004), evaluating technical vocabulary and communication skills essential for patient and colleague interactions (West, 1994).

Discrepancies between Test Content and Real-World Skills

Recent research identifies gaps between EMP test content and the language skills required in medical settings (Chen et al., 2023). These discrepancies highlight areas for improvement in EMP courses and tests to better match professional communication complexities. Identifying these gaps is essential to refining test design and ensuring that EMP courses effectively prepare students for their roles (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bachman, 2004).

Factors Affecting Content Validity

Content validity remains a key concern, with factors such as course content representation, feedback mechanisms, and updates to current practices influencing it (Kane, 2019; Johnson and Brown, 2022). Ensuring that EMP tests adapt to recent changes and receive appropriate reviews is essential for maintaining validity and relevance (Adams and Taylor, 2021). Effective validation processes contribute to the reliability and relevance of EMP achievement tests (Messick, 1989; AERA, APA, and NCME, 2014).

Previous Studies

The researcher reviewed six relevant studies.Siddiek (2010) found deficiencies in content validity in the Sudan School Certificate English Examinations, classifying them as proficiency tests rather than standardized achievement tests. Ibrahim (2016) identified a need for improved English language tests for Public and Environmental Health college students, emphasizing listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Mamaliga (2017) noted improvements in test content with modern approaches and real-life situations. Niu (2020) suggested that corpus-based resources could enhance creativity in ESP learning. Li and Heron (2021) found that medical students faced challenges in listening and speaking and desired to learn ESP through medical textbooks from their first year. Umar and Ameen (2022) reported high satisfaction with the content, layout, and design of the Nursing One textbook, which was deemed suitable for students' academic and professional needs.

In recent years, the design, evaluation, and validation of English language assessments tailored to specific disciplines, such as medicine, have received significant attention, particularly in the Saudi Arabian context.

Jawhar et al. (2021) conducted a validation study of the English Language Entrance Test at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-ET), introducing a comprehensive framework informed by leading validation models such as Messick (1996) and Weir (2005). The study emphasizes the value of creating in-house tests tailored to specific needs rather than relying exclusively on standardized assessments. A well-validated entrance exam ensures reliability and aligns more effectively with institutional goals . However, the authors call for further exploration into incorporating additional selection criteria and gathering broader evidence to strengthen test validation processes. Their findings are critical in illustrating the nuanced relationship between exam validity and its intended purpose.

Similarly, Al-Smadi et al. (2022) employed a linguistic ethnographic approach to explore the identities of an English for Medical Purposes (EMP) teacher. By analyzing classroom interactions, the study revealed the dynamic nature of teacher identities, ranging from expert to storyteller, and highlighted the implications of these shifts for student engagement. While this research provides valuable insights into pedagogical practices and teacher-student dynamics, it indirectly underscores the necessity of assessment tools that reflect the multifaceted nature of teaching and learning within EMP contexts.

In the realm of instructional material evaluation, Umar and Ameen (2022) assessed the suitability of the Nursing One textbook used for premedical students at Umm-Al-Qura University. Their findings indicate that stakeholders view the textbook's content, layout, and organization as satisfactory and aligned with students' academic and professional needs. However, the authors stress the importance of rigorous evaluation processes for all English for Specific Purposes (E.S.P) textbooks to ensure they meet targeted learning outcomes effectively.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate progress in developing and evaluating (E.M.P) tools in the Saudi context . However, a research gap remains in understanding instructors' perspectives on the content validity of (E.M.P) achievement tests. While prior research has primarily focused on validating entrance exams, teacher identities, and instructional materials, researchers have paid little attention to how instructors evaluate these tests' effectiveness in measuring learning outcomes and aligning with curricular goals. Addressing this gap could provide valuable insights for refining EMP assessment practices and enhancing their alignment with pedagogical objectives.

Methods

This study investigates instructors' perspectives on the content validity of English for Medical Purposes (EMP) achievement tests in Saudi universities. A Likert scale questionnaire was employed by the researcher as the primary data collection tool, targeting 32 instructors from relevant academic institutions. The researchers designed the questionnaire to capture participants' evaluations of various aspects of test content validity, including alignment with learning objectives, subject relevance, and comprehensiveness. Data analysis involved statistical methods to quantify the levels of agreement and identify trends in instructors' responses.

Participants

The study systematically selected a sample of 32 instructors from the broader population of English for Medical Purposes (E.M.P) educators at various universities in Saudi Arabia. The researchers used purposive sampling to select participants who met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria included having at least five years of teaching experience, familiarity with the current (E.M.P) textbooks used in Saudi universities, and active involvement in teaching English for Specific Purposes (E.S.P) or (E.M.P) courses during the academic year 2023/2024. The researchers sent participation invitations to instructors from a diverse range of universities across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where EMP courses are an integral part of the curriculum. The final selection ensured a representative sample of educators from public and private institutions, capturing a broad spectrum of teaching experiences and contexts.

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

The researcher administered a structured quantitative questionnaire, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale where strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1, to the participants . The researcher developed, validated, and implemented it to address research questions about participants' perceptions of the English for Medical Purposes (E.M.P) Achievement test's content validity at Saudi universities.This questionnaire comprised four subscales aligned with research questions: alignment with course objectives, reflection of practical language needs, discrepancies with professional skills, and factors impacting content validity.The researcher displays the reliability and validity of the questionnaire in tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. *Reliability statistics of the questionnaire*

No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
32	0.973

Table 2. *Validity statistics of the questionnaire*

No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
32	098

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This research employed a descriptive-analytical quantitative approach.The researcher collected the data using a questionnaire distributed online to the selected (E.M.P) instructors. This method efficiently gathers responses from a geographically dispersed sample. The researcher analyzed the data quantitatively to identify patterns and insights regarding the use of (E.M.P) textbooks and teaching practices.

Results

This study explored instructors' perspectives on the content validity of English for Medical Purposes (E.M.P) achievement tests .The discussion addresses four key research questions: how well the tests align with course objectives, reflect practical language needs, highlight discrepancies with professional skills, and identify factors impacting content validity.

Q.1Alignment with course objectives

The data indicates a generally positive perception regarding the alignment between (E.M.P) test content and course objectives.Most instructors (81.9%) either strongly agreed or agreed that the tests align well with the learning objectives of (E.M.P) courses (Table Three)Appendix B. Instructors generally believe that (E.M.P) achievement tests reflect the intended course outcomes adequately . A small percentage of respondents (14.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting concerns about misalignment. This disparity underscores the importance of regularly reviewing and adjusting test content to align it with changing course objectives and teaching methods.

Q.2 Reflection of practical language needs

When evaluating how well the (E.M.P) test content reflects the practical language needs of medical professionals, responses were more varied. While a majority of instructors (76.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that the tests address practical needs (Table Four)Appendix C, a significant portion (16.9%) expressed concerns by disagreeing or strongly disagreeing . This variability suggests that while the tests meet practical needs, improvements are required to better reflect the specific language demands faced by medical professionals in practice.

Q.3Discrepancies with professional skills

The majority of instructors (88.2%) indicated that there are discrepancies between (E.M.P) test content and the actual medical English skills required in professional settings (Table Five)Appendix D . This finding underscores a significant issue: the tests may not fully capture the complexities and nuances of medical English as used in professional contexts. The absence of intense disagreement among respondents highlights a consensus on this issue, suggesting an urgent need for revisions to better align test content with practical language skills required in the medical field

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Q.4 Factors impacting content validity.

Instructors identified various factors affecting the content validity of EMP tests. The majority agreed that multiple factors contribute to content validity issues (67.0% when combining 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses (Table Six) Appendix E. Commonly cited factors might include the relevance of test content, the adequacy of test design, and the alignment with current medical practices. The relatively high proportion of undecided responses (11.9%) suggests uncertainties or varying opinions about which factors most significantly impact content validity.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide critical insights into instructors' perspectives on the content validity and practical relevance of English for Medical Purposes (E.M.P) achievement tests. These findings support and sometimes extend the conclusions of previous research.

Q.1 Alignment Between (E.M.P) Tests and Course Objectives

The results indicate that most instructors perceive a strong alignment between (E.M.P) achievement test content and the learning objectives of (E.M.P) courses (81.9% agreement). This positive perception supports the view that these tests effectively reflect course goals. However, the concerns raised by a minority of respondents (14.4% disagreement) signal the need for periodic

reviews of test content to ensure sustained alignment with course objectives. These findings parallel those of Jawhar et al. (2021), who emphasized the necessity of context-sensitive and well-validated tests in achieving institutional alignment. However, unlike the focus on entrance exams in Jawhar et al.'s study, the current findings emphasize achievement tests within the (E.M.P) framework, thus addressing a gap in the literature.

Q.2 Reflection of Practical Language Needs

While most instructors (76.9%) agree that (E.M.P) tests address practical language needs, a significant proportion of dissenting views (16.9%) highlight areas for improvement. This variability suggests that while current tests incorporate practical elements, they may not encapsulate the language complexities medical professionals encounter. Similar to the observations of Li and Heron (2021), who noted gaps in students' listening and speaking skills within (E.S.P) frameworks, these findings underscore the need for test content that better aligns with real-world medical communication demands. Incorporating corpus-based resources, as proposed by Niu (2020), could enhance the practicality and relevance of (E.M.P) tests.

Q.3Discrepancies Between EMP Tests and Professional Language Skills

Most instructors (88.2%) recognized gaps between (E.M.P) test content and the medical English skills needed in professional settings.Siddiek's (2010) findings on enhancing content validity in proficiency tests support this conclusion.Respondents in this study emphasized the urgent need to revise tests to better address the nuances and contextual demands of medical English. Mamaliga's (2017) recommendation to incorporate real-life scenarios into test content supports the need for tests that reflect professional language use.

Q.4 Factors Impacting Content Validity

Instructors identified various factors affecting the content validity of (E.M.P) achievement tests, including the relevance of test content, adequacy of design, and alignment with current medical practices. These findings are consistent with Ibrahim's (2016) assertion that comprehensive test frameworks must address all language domains relevant to professional settings. The high proportion of undecided responses (11.9%) may reflect varying levels of instructor expertise in test design or differing perspectives on the most critical factors.Al-Smadi et al. (2022) emphasized the multifaceted nature of teaching and learning in (E.M.P) contexts, arguing that pedagogical strategies and instructors' dynamic roles may also influence content validity.

Implications

The findings emphasize the importance of aligning (E.M.P) tests more closely with course objectives and real-world medical needs. While most instructors perceive a good alignment between tests and goals, the identified misalignments suggest the need for ongoing refinement of test design. Collaboration between test developers and medical practitioners could address discrepancies and enhance the reflection of practical language use in assessments.

Moreover, the variability in responses about the practical language focus highlights the challenge of balancing theoretical knowledge with practical skills in (E.M.P) tests. Addressing this balance is crucial for meeting the evolving needs of medical professionals. Test developers should

also prioritize incorporating comprehensive medical vocabulary and authentic contexts to ensure assessments meet professional demands.

Finally, acknowledging multiple factors affecting content validity calls for continued research into these elements. Addressing instructors' uncertainties about key validity factors may lead to developing more robust and effective(E.M.P) assessment tools.

Limitations

The current study possesses two limitations that need acknowledgment. One significant constraint lies in sample size and diversity. The study's sample was limited to 32(E.M.P) instructors from various universities in Saudi Arabia.More extensive and more diverse sample could provide a broader perspective on the validity of (E.M.P) tests across different contexts. Another limitation pertains to the limited exploration of factors. The study identifies several factors affecting content validity but does not delve into how each factor explicitly impacts the tests. Further research could explore these factors in more detail.

Conclusion

This study aims to evaluate the extent to which Medical English tests align with the learning objectives of (E.M.P) courses and address the specific language needs of medical students. The comparison with previous studies highlights alignment and discrepancies in the current (E.M.P) assessment practices. While there is general agreement that (E.M.P) tests are aligned with course objectives and reflect practical needs to some extent, significant concerns remain about their ability to accurately assess the language skills required in medical settings. Revising and improving (E.M.P) test content and design is necessary to ensure assessments are relevant and accurately reflect real-world medical language use. .

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Appendices

Appendix A

Instructors Questionnaire

Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD
1. The EMP achievement tests align with the learning objectives of the EMP courses.					
2. The content of the EMP achievement tests reflects the key topics covered in the EMP course to a great extent.					
3. The EMP achievement tests adequately cover the learning outcomes specified in the EMP course objectives.					
4. The EMP achievement tests measure the instructional goals of the EMP courses effectively.					
5. I frequently use feedback from EMP achievement tests to adjust or improve the learning objectives of EMP.					

6. The EMP achievement test content reflects the daily language tasks and communication needs of medical professionals.
7. I think the EMP achievement test content includes practical scenarios that medical professionals encounter.
8. I feel that the EMP achievement test content is designed to assess language skills directly applicable to real-life situations.
9. The EMP achievement test content covers essential medical terminology and jargon that medical professionals need regularly.
10. The EMP achievement test content integrates communication skills (e.g., patient interaction, interdisciplinary communication) effectively.
11. The EMP test content aligns with the medical English skills used in real-world professional settings.
12. The EMP test covers the practical language tasks encountered in medical practice to a great extent.
13. The EMP test accurately assesses the ability to use medical English in patient interactions and documentation.
14. The difficulty level of the EMP test reflects the complexity of medical English encountered in professional settings.
15. There are aspects of medical English that are significantly more challenging in practice compared to what is tested.
16. The test questions adequately represent the range of content that was covered in the course.
17. Instructors review and provide feedback on the test content to ensure its validity frequently.
18. Feedback from students influences the content validity of the EMP achievement tests to a greater extent.
19. The test design and question types measure the specific skills and knowledge required by the course.
20. The EMP achievement test adapts to recent changes in the medical field or course content very well.

Appendix B

Table 3: Results of alignment between EMP test contents and course objectives

Statement	SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	UND (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)
1. The EMP achievement tests align with the learning objectives of the EMP courses.	18 (56.3%)	13 (40.6%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)
2. The content of the EMP achievement tests reflects the key topics covered in the EMP course to a great extent.	15 (46.9%)	14 (43.8%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.2%)	1 (3.1%)

Statement	SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	UND (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)
3. The EMP achievement tests adequately cover the learning outcomes specified in the EMP course objectives.	14 (43.8%)	15 (46.9%)	2 (6.2%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)
4. The EMP achievement tests measure the instructional goals of the EMP courses effectively.	18 (56.3%)	12 (37.5%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)
5. I frequently use feedback from EMP achievement tests to adjust or improve the learning objectives of my EMP courses.	4 (12.5%)	8 (25.0%)	3 (9.4%)	7 (21.8%)	10 (31.3%)
Total	**69 (43.1%)**	**62 (38.8%)**	**6 (3.8%)**	**12 (7.5%)**	**11 (6.9%)**

Appendix C

Table 4: Results of EMP test content reflection of practical language needs of medical professionals

Statement	SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	UND (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)
6. The EMP test content reflects daily language tasks and communication needs of medical professionals very well.	11 (34.4%)	18 (56.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (9.4%)	0 (0.0%)
7. The EMP test content includes practical scenarios encountered in work environments effectively.	10 (31.3%)	17 (53.1%)	1 (3.1%)	4 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)
8. The EMP test content assesses language skills applicable to real-life situations.	7 (21.8%)	19 (59.4%)	6 (18.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
9. The EMP test covers essential medical terminology and jargon.	13 (40.6%)	17 (53.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.2%)	0 (0.0%)
10. The EMP test integrates crucial communication skills for medical professionals.	1 (3.1%)	10 (31.3%)	3 (9.4%)	7 (21.8%)	11 (34.4%)
Total	**42 (26.3%)**	**81 (50.6%)**	**10 (6.3%)**	**16 (10.0%)**	**11 (6.9%)**

Appendix D

Table 5: Results of discrepancies between EMP test content and actual medical English skills required

Statement	SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	UND (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)
11. The EMP test aligns with medical English skills used in professional settings.	15 (46.9%)	15 (46.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.2%)	0 (0.0%)
12. The EMP test covers practical language tasks encountered in medical practice.	15 (46.9%)	13 (40.6%)	3 (9.4%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)
13. The EMP test assesses ability to use medical English in real-world tasks.	10 (31.3%)	15 (46.9%)	6 (18.8%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)
14. The test difficulty reflects the complexity of medical English in professional settings.	14 (43.8%)	16 (50.0%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)
15. Some medical English skills are more challenging in practice than what is tested.	13 (40.6%)	15 (46.9%)	2 (6.2%)	2 (6.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	**67 (41.9%)**	**74 (46.3%)**	**12 (7.5%)**	**7 (4.4%)**	**0 (0.0%)**

Appendix E

Table 6: Results of factors impacting content validity of EMP tests

Statement	SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	UND (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)
16. EMP test questions represent the course content range.	12 (37.5%)	14 (43.8%)	1 (3.1%)	5 (15.6%)	0 (0.0%)
17. Instructors review and provide feedback to ensure validity.	9 (28.1%)	14 (43.8%)	3 (9.4%)	5 (15.6%)	1 (3.1%)
18. Student feedback influences EMP content validity significantly.	5 (15.6%)	21 (65.6%)	6 (18.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
19. The test measures course-required skills and knowledge effectively.	7 (21.8%)	19 (59.4%)	3 (9.4%)	3 (9.4%)	0 (0.0%)
20. The EMP test adapts to recent changes in the medical field.	1 (3.1%)	5 (15.6%)	6 (18.8%)	7 (21.8%)	13 (40.6%)
Total	**34 (21.3%)**	**73 (45.6%)**	**19 (11.9%)**	**20 (12.5%)**	**14 (8.8%)**