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Classroom Research to Measure the Perceived Impact of English Writing Course on EFL Female University Students

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Abstract

This study examines how the writing proficiency of first-year EFL female university students are affected by a genre-based English writing course. Three main topics will be addressed in this study using a quantitative research approach to inquiry and students' self-reported data: (1) how well the course design supports students' effective assignment submission, (2) how beneficial the support mechanisms built into the course, (3) and how skilful students are in writing overall after finishing the course. The study incorporated a sample of 119 first-year female university students selected using a convenience sampling strategy. A survey was used to gather data and measure the perceived impact of teaching writing using a genre-based approach—using genres found in the student's assigned textbooks. The course framework was designed to meet the practical needs of EFL learners, and it provides clear teaching and assistance to master particular writing genres. The results show that the genre-based writing course enhances task submission, offers strong support, and improves writing skills. However, challenges like group dynamics, deadlines, and writing anxiety were highlighted. By demonstrating the value of genre-based teaching strategies and pointing out areas for improvement, the findings of this study would advance the field of EFL instruction.

Keywords: EFL female university students, genre-based, learning English, perceived impact, writing course

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Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world where English is the primary language of communication in academia and beyond, university student's ability to write in English is essential to their academic achievement. While writing is essential to academic success, it can be difficult for non-native students. University students are required to create texts that are academically sound, well-structured, and grammatically accurate, whether they are writing essays, reports, or research papers. However, the necessity for enhancing their writing skills in English is often overlooked, which can hinder their academic progress.

Moreover, previous studies have shown that there is a complex relationship between the attitudes, beliefs, and writing experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and the development of academic writing. Scholars such as Johns (1991), Leki (1995), and others emphasize how important it is for tutors, course designers, and writing instructors to take students' viewpoints into account more carefully when teaching academic writing to second language learners. Writing is an essential ability for both second-language learners and native speakers, particularly in academic settings. Weigle (2002) provides a comprehensive examination of the methods and approaches for the assessment of writing in second language contexts and emphasizes that effective writing has become more and more important in today's globalized society. Similarly, Harmer (2004) emphasizes its significance for foreign language learners. Thus, writing instruction is becoming increasingly important in foreign and second-language contexts.

At the tertiary level, students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds with varying proficiency levels in English which can affect their ability to write effectively. Common challenges include difficulties in grammar, syntax, vocabulary use, and academic style. Additionally, many students struggle with skills that are essential to producing high-quality written work such as structuring arguments, organizing thoughts logically, and avoiding plagiarism. The complexity of these challenges is further amplified when students lack targeted support and resources designed to address individual needs in developing writing proficiency.

Developing effective writing skills is a critical component of language learning, particularly for EFL students navigating academic and professional environments. Writing courses play a significant role in equipping learners with the skills required to communicate effectively and succeed in diverse contexts. Several researchers highlight the importance of exposing ESL students to diverse genres (Hinkel, 2004; Hyland, 2004; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). This study focuses on evaluating the impact of a genre-based English writing course designed specifically for EFL university students.

The course adopts a genre-based approach, emphasizing the teaching of writing through the analysis and practice of specific text types featured in the students' assigned textbooks. This method aims to provide students with a structured framework for understanding and producing various forms of writing, while also incorporating targeted support mechanisms to address their challenges. By conducting classroom research, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of the course in three areas: successful task submissions, the provided support, and the overall improvement in students' writing competence. The findings from this research will offer valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of genre-based writing instruction, contributing to the development of more effective teaching strategies for EFL learners.

Despite efforts given by universities to provide writing support services, such as writing centres and workshops, these interventions may not always align with the specific difficulties faced by students. Therefore, identifying the precise needs of students in learning English writing skills

is crucial to developing tailored pedagogical approaches that can more effectively support their academic growth. Moreover, addressing these needs through curriculum design, faculty support, and personalized learning interventions can significantly enhance students' ability to express themselves academically, thereby contributing to their overall success.

This research is significant as it explores the effectiveness of genre-based writing course design in enhancing the writing skills of EFL university students. By examining how well the course design supports task completion, the study can provide valuable insights into creating effective writing curricula that align with learners' needs. Additionally, the research evaluates the role of embedded support techniques within the course, offering a better understanding of how these elements contribute to students' active participation and progress in writing. Furthermore, the study assesses the competence of EFL students in writing after completing the course. This evaluation is critical in determining whether the course successfully equips learners with essential skills for academic and professional contexts. The findings will not only benefit educators and curriculum developers but also contribute to improving instructional practices in EFL education and ultimately foster more successful language acquisition outcomes.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a writing course for EFL students by:

1. Examining the effectiveness of the writing course design in enabling EFL female students to complete assigned tasks.
2. Evaluating the usefulness of the support mechanisms integrated into the writing course.
3. Assessing the writing competence of EFL female students upon completion of the writing course.

These goals are addressed through the following guiding research questions:

1. To what extent does the design of the writing course help EFL female students submit tasks successfully?
2. To what extent is the support incorporated in the writing course helpful?
3. How competent EFL female students are in writing after taking the writing course?

Literature review

Studies related to writing skills in general

English teachers should creatively apply effective techniques to enhance students' motivation and skills in English writing. Various approaches and strategies have been suggested by experts from time to time to overcome the challenges faced by EFL learners. Several studies emphasize the importance of understanding attitudes toward writing to enhance writing skills. Hayes and Flower (1986) described writing as a complex cognitive process that requires the simultaneous coordination of three key skills: planning, sentence construction, and revision. All these skills must be synchronized effectively within the same timeframe. According to Johnson and Johnson (2009), cooperative learning involves using small groups in instruction, allowing students to collaborate to enhance both their own and their peers' learning. They highlight challenges in group dynamics, particularly difficulties in distributing leadership and coordinating efforts, which can reduce group effectiveness. Moreover, Storch (2013) presented a comprehensive exploration of collaborative writing in second-language classrooms and focused on strong theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical justifications for its benefits in language learning. Recognizing challenges in implementing in-class and online collaboration, she offers practical guidance on task selection and productive group dynamics. Furthermore, McCutchen (2011)

suggested that writing skills can be improved through explicit instruction, consistent practice, and feedback provision. Strategies to enhance writing include reading extensively, practicing regularly, obtaining feedback, and participating in writing workshops or classes. Cennetkuşu (2017) emphasized grammar, transitions, vocabulary, and clarity as key challenges in academic writing.

Henceforth, Anderson and Cuesta-Medina (2019) noted that students struggle with L2 rhetorical aspects due to inadequate writing training. Similarly, Shakib Kotamjani and Hussin (2017) found that postgraduate students at the University of Putra Malaysia face challenges in critiquing research, identifying gaps, and writing sections like introductions and conclusions. Akhtar et al. (2020) and Mahmood (2020) have also revealed that issues like citations, cohesion, coherence, and topic selection hinder L2 writing. Additionally, Petric (2002) argued that writing pedagogy should address students' beliefs and create growth opportunities through courses or tutorials. Researchers like Ismail (2011) have examined ESP students' perceptions of an Academic Writing Course, finding positive attitudes toward ESL writing and a good awareness of writing needs. Parker and Erarslan (2015) have studied the attitudes of Turkish EFL students toward a university writing course, noting a slightly insignificant decline in their positive attitude towards the course after completing it. Mai and Bao (2020) have explored integrating blogs into Vietnamese EFL writing classes, revealing positive attitudes despite challenges like limited use and reluctance to post publicly. Muliyah et al. (2020) have identified a discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions of feedback, emphasizing the need for clearer error correction in the feedback given by teachers. Khadawardi (2022) has identified Saudi students' mild positivity toward writing assignments despite the challenges they encounter and offered insights for curriculum design. Farooqui (2023) has examined teachers' perspectives on the difficulties facing ESL students in pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. Key issues include writing an outline, structuring sentences, and editing. Teachers recommended providing students with training, guidance, and digital tools to improve their writing skills. Additionally, Tanjung and Sari (2024) have found that peer feedback fosters critical thinking, creativity, and motivation in essay writing. Overall, these studies underscore the need for tailored pedagogical strategies to address student attitudes and perceptions and to enhance writing instruction across diverse contexts.

Studies related to genre-based writing instructions

Genre-based writing instruction has attracted a lot of interest as a successful strategy for improving students' writing capabilities. This approach gives students the necessary skills to understand and create writing texts with particular language and structural patterns by explicitly teaching a variety of genres. The goal of exposing students to a variety of genres—from academic essays to casual correspondence—is to increase their writing proficiency and confidence. In addition to helping students improve their writing skills, the structured approach in genre-based instruction fosters critical thinking and comprehension of language use in many situations. The theories and research discussed in this section contribute to the development of the framework for the current study. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is the basis of genre theory and was developed in Australia by Halliday (1994) and his followers. The work of the British linguist J.R. Firth, who worked from the 1930s to the 1950s, serves as the foundation for SFL. The basis for SFL was established by Halliday's work on systemic grammar and his introduction of the idea that language is a social semiotic system. The foundation of SFL was established in 1985 with the release of "An Introduction to Functional Grammar".

Systemic Functional Linguistics saw substantial growth in the 1970s and the 1980s. This framework started to be used in a variety of linguistic fields, such as sociolinguistics, discourse

analysis, and language instruction. The concept of language as a tool for meaning-making was developed by Halliday and his associates, who emphasized the usefulness of language in social settings. During the 1990s and 2000s, SFL continued to grow and diversify. Scholars like Ruqaiya Hasan, Christian Matthiessen, and others have contributed to the theoretical and practical aspects of SFL.

Eggins (1994) explained that SFL helps us understand how people use language to achieve their goals. This theory focuses on how language creates meaning (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Martin, 1993). According to Hyland (2007), genre-based approaches to L2 writing emphasize communication and show that writing serves a clear purpose in communication.

Recently, the genre-based approach to teaching second language writing has become increasingly popular (Caplan & Farling, 2017; De Oliveira & Lan, 2014; Hodgson-Drysdale, 2016). Unlike the process approach which often lacks a clear focus, this method gives students specific writing goals and a clear purpose (Hyland, 2003, 2004). Furthermore, Hyland (2007) discussed how genre-based approaches support student writing development and how technology can aid instruction. Hence, teachers using this approach can design lessons that help students achieve small, targeted goals. Many theoretical works on genre-based approaches to teaching second language writing highlight numerous perceptions.

Current studies have emphasized the growing recognition of Genre-Based Writing Instruction (GBWI) as an effective method for improving EFL learners' writing proficiency. Bizami and Raftari (2013) underscored the complementary nature of the product, process, and genre approaches, advocating for a comprehensive understanding of these methods to optimize writing instruction. This reinforces the idea that a well-rounded pedagogical strategy can better meet diverse learner needs.

Building on this foundation, Bruce (2013) proposed a dual social/cognitive genre model for EAP writing, emphasizing how genre awareness fosters discourse competence—an essential component of academic writing. Such frameworks lay the theoretical groundwork for investigating how genre instruction impacts learner development.

Empirical studies, such as those by Kuiper et al. (2017) and Thongchalerm and Jarunthawatchai (2019), provide strong evidence of genre-based approaches enhancing writing quality and learner engagement. Their interventions showed measurable improvements in genre-specific linguistic and rhetorical features, while learners expressed positive attitudes and increased confidence—key psychological factors in language learning.

These outcomes are echoed in more recent works. Pham and Bui (2021) highlighted ongoing struggles with genre structures among EFL students, stressing the need for more targeted support and research, particularly in local contexts. Similarly, Yunus et al. (2022) revealed how the structured stages of the process genre-based approach (e.g., BKOF, JCOT) support systematic writing development, although they called for more exploration in varied learning environments. Using the Wilcoxon Test and textual analysis, He (2022) discovered that genre-based instructions greatly enhanced the ability of EFL students majoring in business to write persuasive online advertisements. These students also showed considerable improvements in vocabulary, organization, and persuasive strategies.

Utami et al. (2023) and Nguyen and Truong (2024) further demonstrated that scaffolding and instructional design significantly affect writing outcomes and student attitudes. These studies reinforce the importance of understanding not only what works in writing instruction, but how learners perceive and experience these approaches. Lately, Alhammad (2025) introduced a critical

institutional perspective, showing how instructor knowledge shapes the effectiveness of genre instruction. Despite limited awareness of contemporary methods, teachers recognized the value of genre training in improving student outcomes—particularly in confidence and performance.

Therefore, our study seeks to contribute to this growing field by focusing on female university students in an EFL context, examining how they perceive the impact of a structured English writing course. This perspective is especially important in regions where gender, educational policies, and cultural factors may shape learning experiences uniquely. By exploring both performance and perception, our research aims to provide nuanced insights into the effectiveness of writing instruction, informing future curriculum design and teaching strategies in similar contexts.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the impact of a genre-based English writing course on EFL university students. The study aims to measure the course's effectiveness in facilitating successful task submission, providing support to students, and enhancing students' writing competence. Quantitative data was collected through a structured survey.

Participants

The sample comprised 119 first-year female university students enrolled in an English writing course. The participants were assigned to the researchers, who served as their English language instructors during the first semester of the 2024–2025 academic year at Umm Al Qura University in Saudi Arabia. The selection was based on convenient sampling, including students available and willing to participate in the study during the semester. All participants were first-year students with no previous exposure to university-level writing instruction, ensuring a uniform baseline in writing experience.

Course Design

The writing course was designed using the genre-based approach. This pedagogical framework focuses on helping students recognize and practice various writing genres aligned with the course textbooks. The genres included are 'giving and responding to opinions' and 'writing suggestions'. Key features of the course design include:

1. Collaboration in Group Writing: Students work in groups of four to complete assigned writing tasks. This structured approach ensures that writing skills are systematically developed while fostering collaboration and individual accountability among students.
2. Technology Integration: Platforms such as Blackboard facilitate task submission and provide transparency in task scoring.
3. Time-Structured Assignments: Writing assignments are scheduled progressively, with group tasks submitted in weeks 3 and 7 and an individual task at the end of the semester in week 8. Each genre is introduced and explored for 3-4 weeks before moving on to the next one. This structure allows students to engage deeply with each genre, practice writing in that style, receive feedback, and refine their skills before transitioning to another genre. The gap of 3-4 weeks ensures that students have enough time to understand the characteristics, techniques, and conventions of each genre before moving on to the next one.

Survey Instrument

A structured survey was developed using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Reverse-coded items were included to ensure response validity. The data was collected on three key dimensions:

1. Course Design (14 items): Focuses on the effectiveness of the course structure, collaborative writing, resource availability, and technology integration.
2. Support (6 items): Measures the clarity of instructions, instructors' support, and the facilitation of collaboration during group writing sessions.
3. Competence (6 items): Assesses students' confidence, perceived improvement, and preparedness in writing various genres.

Data Collection

The survey was administered at the end of the semester to capture students' experiences and perceptions after completing the writing course. Responses were collected anonymously to encourage honesty and reduce response bias. The study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the survey. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their data.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. All analyses were conducted using statistical software, and results were reported with significance levels ($p < 0.05$):

1. Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive statistical measures, such as means, standard deviations, and medians were calculated to summarize students' responses for each item.
2. Inferential Statistics: One-sample t-test was performed to determine whether mean scores for each survey item differed significantly from the neutral point (score of 3). Reverse-coded items were appropriately transformed before analysis.

Research Procedures

This study followed a quantitative research design to investigate students' perceptions and experiences in a genre-based English writing course. Data were collected using a structured survey administered to participants at the end of the course. The survey included both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions designed to assess areas such as task completion, perceived support, writing competence, and confidence. Before distribution, the survey was reviewed by the researchers to ensure content validity. The finalized survey was distributed electronically to all participants during class time. The researchers were present to guide students through the process and assist with any technical or content-related questions. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed of the study's purpose and assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. Once the data were collected, responses were coded and entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) were used to summarize students' responses. To examine significant differences or improvements in students' perceptions and skills, inferential statistical tests, including paired-sample t-tests, were conducted. These tests helped identify meaningful changes related to course elements and writing development.

Findings

This section outlines the main findings from the survey, based on the study's research goals. The results show how the genre-based English writing course helped EFL female university students complete their tasks, receive support, and improve their writing skills.

Survey Results

Survey data reveals students' perceptions of the genre-based writing course and its impact on their ability to complete tasks, receive academic support, and develop writing skills. Descriptive and inferential analyses were used to evaluate the impact on students' perceived performance and confidence before and after completing the course.

R Q 1. To what extent does the design of the writing course help EFL female students submit tasks successfully?

The survey items related to 'Course Design' were analyzed to determine how effectively the course supports task submission. The results revealed that students perceive the design of the writing course as generally helpful, with specific strengths in technology integration and collaborative writing techniques. (See Figure One)

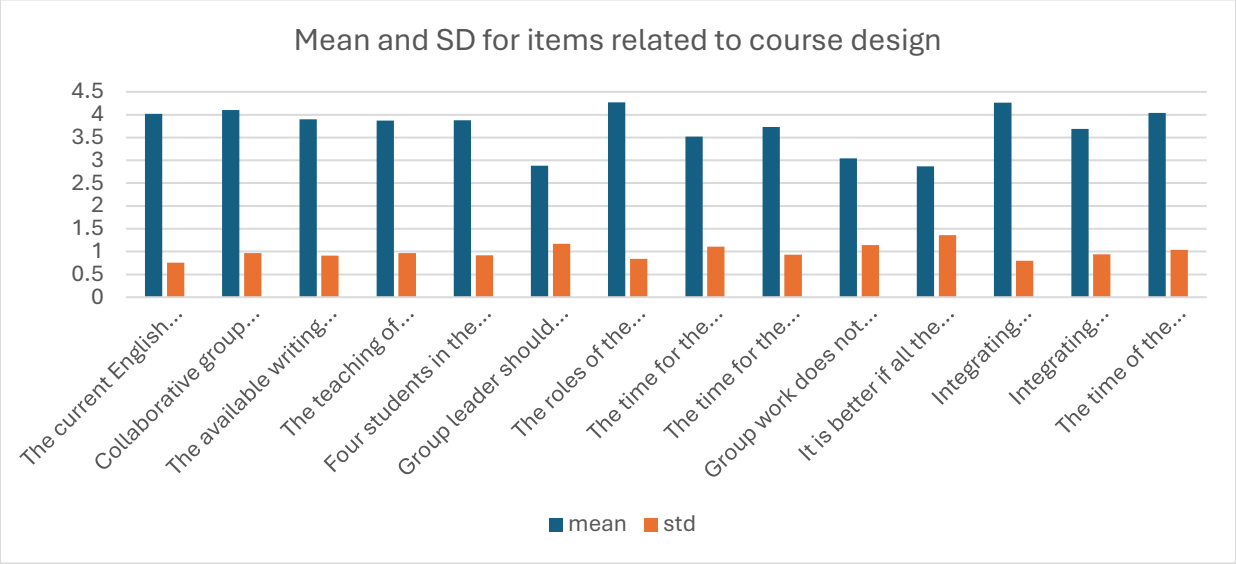


Figure 1. Mean and SD for items related to course design

Descriptive Findings:

- Students rated the integration of technology (e.g., Blackboard) for task submission highly, with mean scores of 4.36 (SD = 0.65) for facilitating submissions and 4.25 (SD = 0.71) for promoting transparency in scoring.
- The value of collaborative group writing also received high ratings (M = 4.12, SD = 0.75), as did the adequacy of writing resources (M = 4.05, SD = 0.79).

Inferential Analysis:

One-sample t-tests showed that the mean scores for most items in this category were significantly greater than the neutral score of 3 ($p < 0.05$). For example:

- Integration of technology for submission: $t(118) = 18.98$, $p < 0.001$

- Collaborative group writing: t (118) = 13.57, p < 0.001

Conversely, reverse-coded items showed significant disagreement with the neutral point:

- Group leadership responsibility: t (118) =−5.44, p<0.001
- Deadline for first group task: t (118) =−4.87, p<0.001

These findings suggest that the course design provides substantial support for students in completing and submitting writing tasks successfully. However, items related to group leadership dynamics and task deadlines highlighted areas for potential improvement.

RQ 2. To what extent is the support incorporated in the writing course helpful?

Survey items related to 'Support' focus on the clarity of instructions, instructor's feedback, and the collaborative environment. Overall, students rated the support positively, with mean scores ranging from 3.62 to 4.20. (See Figure Two)

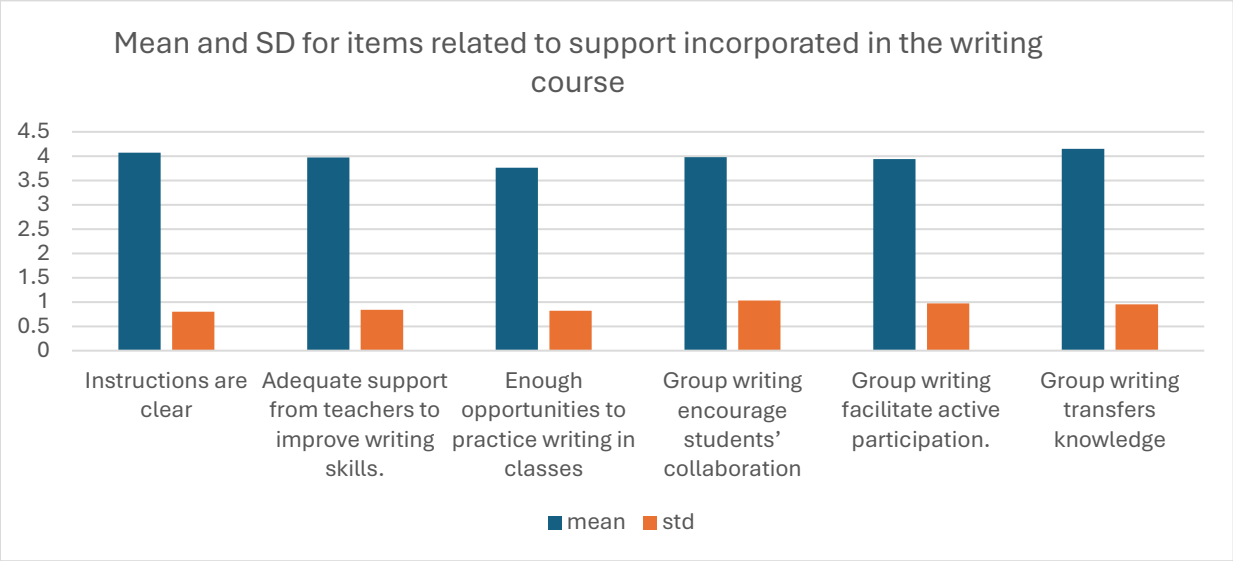


Figure 2: Mean and SD for items related to the support incorporated in the writing course

Descriptive Findings:

- Students found the instructions provided during classes clear and easy to follow (M = 4.20, SD = 0.68) and felt adequately supported by their instructors (M = 4.15, SD = 0.71).
- Group writing during scheduled class sessions was rated as facilitating collaboration (M = 4.10, SD = 0.75) and active participation (M = 4.05, SD = 0.78).

Inferential Analysis:

Items in this category were also significantly higher than the neutral score of 3 (p < 0.05) as shown in Table One.

Table 1. *Results of t-tests for students' perceptions of course elements*

Variable	t-value	df	p-value
Clarity of instructions	18.73	118	p < 0.001
Instructor's support	17.90	118	p < 0.001
Group collaboration	16.02	118	p < 0.001

The significant results showed that there is a difference between the responses of the students and the neutral responses. The findings showed the effectiveness of the support provided in the course, particularly in terms of clear instructions, active collaboration of students, and engagement.

RQ 3. How competent are EFL female students in writing after taking the writing course?

The 'Competence' category evaluated students' confidence and perceived improvement in writing skills. The mean scores indicated moderate competence, with some variability. (See Figure Three)

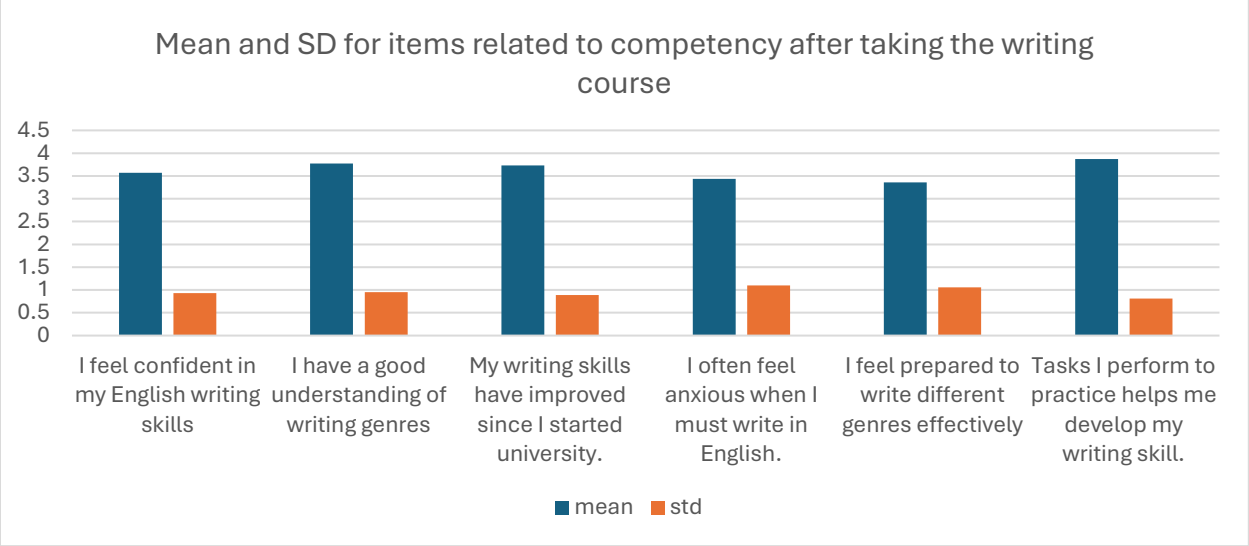


Figure 3. Mean and SD for items related to competency after taking the writing course

Descriptive Findings:

- Students reported a good understanding of writing genres (M = 3.77, SD = 0.95) and improvement in their writing skills since starting university (M = 3.73, SD = 0.89).
- Confidence in writing skills was rated moderately (M = 3.57, SD = 0.93), while the reverse-coded item on writing anxiety indicated some lingering concerns (M = 3.44, SD = 1.10).

Inferential Analysis:

One-sample t-test showed significant positive deviations from the neutral score for the items shown in Table Two.

Table 2: *Results of t-tests for students' perceived improvements in writing skills*

Variable	t-value	df	p-value
Understanding of writing genres	11.58	118	$p < 0.001$
Writing improvement	10.68	118	$p < 0.001$
Confidence in writing	8.59	118	$p < 0.001$

The course significantly enhanced students' perceived competence in writing with notable improvement in understanding genres and writing skills. However, writing anxiety remains an area of concern that may benefit from future targeted interventions.

Discussion

The following section provides a detailed discussion of the main findings.

The findings related to the first research question highlight the extent to which the design of the writing course supports EFL students in successfully submitting their tasks. Overall, students perceive the course design as effective, with notable strengths in technology integration and

incorporation of collaborative writing. These elements appear to contribute significantly to students' ability to complete and submit their assignments efficiently.

One of the most positively rated aspects of the course design is the integration of technology, particularly the use of Blackboard for task submission. With mean scores of 4.26 (SD = 0.8) for facilitating submissions and 3.69 (SD = 0.94) for promoting transparency in scoring, it is evident that students found the technological tools beneficial. The statistical significance of these findings ($t(118) = 18.98$, $p < 0.001$) suggests that digital platforms play a critical role in streamlining submission processes and fostering clarity in assessment criteria. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of technology in enhancing students' learning experiences and reducing barriers to task completion (e.g., Hyland, 2007).

Collaborative writing is another well-received component of the course, as indicated by a mean score of 4.1(SD = 0.97) and a significant t-test result ($t(118) = 13.57$, $p < 0.001$). These results suggest that the group writing technique fosters peer engagement, improves writing proficiency, and enhances motivation among students. Research in EFL contexts has frequently underscored the benefits of collaborative learning, particularly in improving writing skills through peer feedback and shared accountability (Storch, 2013). The high rating of collaborative writing indicates that this instructional approach is well-aligned with students' needs and preferences. This result aligns with the findings of Thongchalerm and Jarunthawatchai (2019) which indicate that students develop a positive attitude toward the learning cycle through explicit and collaborative learning. Moreover, responses to the item stating – 'It is better if all the writing tasks are to be done and submitted individually' show that there is no strong preference for completing and submitting writing tasks individually, as opinions are quite diverse. A mean of 2.87 (SD =1.36) suggests a neutral to slightly negative stance. This implies that students- on average- lean towards disagreement with this item. Some students may prefer individual work for accountability, while others might favour collaborative learning.

Furthermore, the adequacy of writing resources is positively evaluated ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.91$), suggesting that students found the provided material supportive of their writing development. This aspect of the course design is essential, as access to comprehensive writing resources can reduce cognitive load and enable students to produce written work with higher quality (Weigle, 2002). The availability of structured writing material is likely to have contributed to students' confidence in completing assignments successfully.

Despite these strengths, the findings also reveal areas for improvement, particularly in group leadership dynamics and task deadlines. Reverse-coded items show that students disagreed with the neutral point regarding group leadership responsibility ($t(118) = -5.44$, $p < 0.001$) and the deadline for the first group task ($t(118) = -4.87$, $p < 0.001$). These results suggest that some students may struggle with unclear leadership roles within groups or find the deadlines for group assignments challenging. Assigning tasks and coming up with and revising ideas require the identification of members' roles and leadership. Group growth may be hampered by ambiguous or poor leadership positions, which could result in unequal involvement and less successful genre learning. Issues with group dynamics are well-documented in collaborative learning research where difficulties in leadership distribution and coordination can hinder group effectiveness (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Addressing these challenges by implementing clearer leadership structures and providing more flexibility in deadlines may enhance the overall effectiveness of the course design.

Some students felt that submitting their work in week 3 was too early, which may suggest that they needed more time to fully understand, practice, and refine their writing in that genre. Three weeks might not have been enough for students to grasp the genre's conventions, structure, and techniques before producing an individual well-prepared submission. They may have felt rushed.

Thus, the writing course design appears to facilitate task submission among EFL students, particularly through the integration of technology, collaborative writing techniques, and the provision of sufficient writing resources. However, areas related to group leadership and task deadlines require further refinement in the course design to optimize student experiences. Future course revisions should consider structured leadership training for group work and adapted deadline policies to accommodate diverse student needs. By addressing these areas, the course can further enhance student engagement and overall writing proficiency in an EFL context.

As for the findings to answer the second research question of this study, they indicate that the support incorporated into the writing course is perceived positively by students, as reflected in the mean scores ranging from 3.76 to 4.15. The analysis focused on three key areas: clarity of instructions, instructor feedback, and the collaborative environment. Firstly, one of the most positively rated aspects of the course is the clarity of instructions, with a mean score of 4.07 (SD = 0.8). This suggests that students found the guidance provided during classes to be clear and easy to follow, which may have contributed to their overall engagement and comprehension. The inferential analysis further supports this finding as the clarity of instructions was significantly higher than the neutral score ($t(118) = 18.73$, $p < 0.001$). Clear instructions are essential in writing courses to ensure students understand assignment expectations and writing techniques effectively.

Secondly, instructors' support also received a high rating ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.84$), indicating that students felt adequately guided throughout the course. This result is reinforced by the statistical significance in the inferential analysis ($t(118) = 17.90$, $p < 0.001$), showing that students' experiences with the instructors' support were notably more positive than neutral. Effective instructor feedback is crucial in writing courses as it helps students identify areas for improvement and enhances their writing skills through targeted guidance.

Thirdly, students' collaboration played a vital role in their engagement, with group writing sessions rated as facilitating collaboration ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.03$) and active participation ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.97$). The inferential results further confirmed that students significantly benefited from the collaborative environment ($t(118) = 16.02$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that structured group activities helped students exchange ideas, receive peer feedback, and enhance their writing skills collectively.

Hence, the findings demonstrate that the support techniques integrated into the writing course are effective in promoting students' learning and engagement. The positive ratings across all support-related items suggest that students felt well-supported through clear instructions, constructive instructor feedback, and collaborative activities. The statistically significant differences from neutral responses further confirm that students' experiences were not merely average but rather substantially positive. This study revealed that the design of activities is largely dependent on the instructors. Some learners require more time to grasp linguistic features and acquire new knowledge. Practicing these features is a vital step in improving their writing competence. However, the findings indicated that students had a positive attitude toward this stage, as it contributed to the development of their writing skills.

In addition, the findings in answering the third research question indicate that EFL students demonstrated moderate competence in writing after completing the writing course. Their perceived improvement in writing skills and understanding of writing genres suggest that the course effectively contributed to their academic development. However, while students reported gains in confidence, writing anxiety remains a notable concern.

The descriptive statistics show that students feel they have a good understanding of different writing genres ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.95$) and have improved their writing capabilities since starting university ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.89$). Confidence in writing, while moderately high ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.93$), suggests that some students still experience self-doubt. This is reinforced by the writing anxiety measure ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.10$), which indicates that despite progress, some apprehension remains.

The inferential analysis supports these findings, as the one-sample t-test results show significant positive deviations from the neutral midpoint for understanding writing genres ($t(118) = 11.58$, $p < 0.001$), writing improvement ($t(118) = 10.68$, $p < 0.001$), and confidence in writing ($t(118) = 8.59$, $p < 0.001$). These results confirm that students perceive meaningful progress in their writing abilities due to the genre-based writing course. These findings align with previous research conducted on the effectiveness of the genre-based approach in different contexts, including studies by McCutchen (2011), Kuiper et al. (2017), Uthami et al. (2023), and Nguyen & Truong (2024).

Despite these positive outcomes, the presence of writing anxiety suggests that some students still struggle with confidence. This may stem from factors such as language barriers, high academic expectations, or limited exposure to practical writing exercises. To address these issues, future research on writing could incorporate targeted interventions, such as anxiety-reduction strategies, peer feedback mechanisms, and confidence-building exercises.

Thus, the writing course has significantly enhanced students' perceived competence in writing, particularly in understanding genres and improving writing skills. However, the lingering issue of writing anxiety highlights the need for additional support to ensure that students not only develop technical skills but also gain confidence in their writing abilities.

Conclusion

The results demonstrate that the genre-based writing course effectively supports students in successful task submission, provides clear and collaborative instructional support, and improves their writing competence. However, the findings also highlight specific challenges, including group dynamics, task deadlines, and writing anxiety, which should be addressed in future course implementation or interventions designed to improve these challenges. To address these challenges, instructors might consider extending deadlines, offering more structured drafting activities, or ensuring clear expectations about submission timelines from the start. These results highlight the importance of maintaining and potentially enhancing these support structures in the future implementation of the course. Future research could explore additional factors influencing students' perceptions of support, such as individual learning styles or additional instructional resources. Overall, the supportive framework adopted in the writing course appears to contribute significantly to students' success and engagement.

Limitations

The study had a small sample size, consisting of 119 all-female students who were selected non-randomly. Thus, the findings may not be generalized and applicable to the broader population.

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The Use of Discourse Markers in Non-Native Speaker Speech: A Case from Vietnam

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Abstract
Using discourse markers brings various benefits for speakers in communication. The current study investigated the use of discourse markers by Vietnamese EFL students at an English center. The study aims to explore the use of DMs by Vietnamese EFL learners and investigates their perceptions of DMs in conversations. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, utilizing audio recordings, questionnaires, and interviews to collect data. It involved one hundred twenty-five Vietnamese EFL students and five teachers as participants. The findings reveal that students use some discourse markers more frequently than others. The referential discourse markers prevail in participants' responses, while using structural discourse markers is almost negligible. The results also indicate that students are practically aware of the importance and functions of discourse markers; however, they are not quite familiar with the different types of these devices. The teachers also recognized the importance of discourse markers for students' language competence development, but considered their use less effective. This study makes a significant contribution to English teaching and learning in EFL contexts in Vietnam. The research suggests that teachers should raise students' awareness of the benefits of discourse markers in oral communication. This study also recommends various strategies for teachers to improve students' fluency and develop their pragmatic competence through using discourse markers in communication.

Keywords: communication, discourse markers, English as a foreign language, EFL students, non-native speech, pragmatics,

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Introduction

In recent decades, intending to meet global requirements and enhance students' abilities, Vietnam has put a high concentration on improving the quality of the education system. In doing so, increasing English proficiency among Vietnamese students is regarded as highly important. Therefore, English has become a compulsory subject in many legal educational institutions in Vietnam, from primary to university, to help students converse with others in English fluently and effectively.

For EFL learners, apart from essential grammatical knowledge, which includes morphology and syntax, the ability to use Discourse Markers (DMs) is also essential when it comes to a natural-sounding conversation in English (Arya, 2020). The role of DMs in dialogue is spontaneous or unplanned (Tree, 2010). It's a shame that Vietnamese EFL students typically don't know about these powerful discourse markers. Consequently, they have a limited understanding of how to use DMs to enhance their fluency and make their conversations more natural (Truong, 2022). Although discourse markers have been of interest to many researchers in various contexts, there is still a lack of research that focuses specifically on how ESL learners in Vietnam understand and use them, leading to learners encountering communication difficulties. This study aims to fill that gap.

The study explores the use of DMs by Vietnamese EFL learners and investigates their perceptions of DMs in conversations. To achieve these objectives, the current study endeavors to make a significant contribution to English teaching and learning in EFL contexts in Vietnam. The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the use and perception of discourse markers among Vietnamese EFL students. Specifically, the study aims to analyze how Vietnamese EFL students use discourse markers in their speech and explore students' perceptions of discourse markers, focusing on their awareness, and understanding of using DMs in communication. In addition to highlighting the linguistic significance of DMs, this study also provides valuable implications for English language teaching by suggesting strategies to enhance students' fluency and pragmatic competence and helping learners gain a deeper understanding of the perception and use of DMs by EFL Vietnamese learners.

Literature Review

Definitions of DMs

Schiffrin (1987) defines DMs based on the concept of coherence function as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (p. 31). More specifically, they are a set of linguistic expressions made up of word classes such as conjunctions (and, but, or), interjections (oh), adverbs (now, then), lexicalized phrases (you know, I mean) (Schiffrin, 1987), prepositional phrases (by the way), response words (yeah, no), meta-expressions (what I mean is, in other words) (Arya, 2020). The text could become more coherent with the contribution of DMs as they establish the relationship between units of talk, DMs function in a framework that includes five planes of talk: "exchange structure, action structure, ideational structure, participation framework, and information state" and coherence in conversations depends on relationships between two immediately adjacent items (Schiffrin 1987). Still, Lenk (1998) argued that coherence in conversations also relies on global relationships linked by DMs to support the interlocutors' process of establishing coherence. The viewpoint is in line with the work of Fung (2011), where words or phrases that control and structure the flow of a text are considered DMs. At a global level, DMs denote topic boundaries and the beginnings and ends of conversations. At a local level, DMs keep ideas cohesive during a conversation and emphasize the connections between idea units (continuation, sequence, contrast, and conclusion).

Features of DMs:

The grammaticality of the utterance must stay intact regardless of the use of the DMs (Schourup, 1999; Fuller, 2003). Semantically, DMs help the listener or reader interpret the meaning of the preceding te. Fuller (2003) also proposes that when removing the discourse marker, the semantic relationship between the elements they connect remains unchanged; in other words, the truth condition remains the same in most cases. Lexically and phonologically, DMs can occasionally be shortened and separated from the remainder of the utterance by a brief pause. DMs functionally play both textual and interpersonal roles while functioning simultaneously on several linguistic levels. Socio-linguistically, DMs are more common in oral than written discourse (Brinton, 1996; Louwerse & Mitchell, 2003).

Functions of DMs

The changes in content or context, which are co-constructed within the negotiation by the interlocutors are responsible for the varying roles of a discourse marker (Arya, 2020). Another example is "you know", which often implies that the information the speaker is providing is known to the listener, yet this marker allows speakers to present new information and opinions, and to summarize details derived from their earlier remarks (Brinton, 1990; Schiffrin, 1987).

The current study adopts pre-existing categorizations to explore how Vietnamese EFL learners use DMs. Based on the analysis of Fung and Carter (2007), DMs in the current study are analyzed in terms of four categories: interpersonal, referential, structural, and cognitive (Table One).

Table 1. *Classification of DMs*

Interpersonal	*Referential*	*Structural*	*Cognitive*
- Marking shared knowledge: see, you see, you know, listen - Indicating attitudes: well, really, I think, obviously, absolutely, basically, actually, exactly, sort of, kind of, like, to be frank, to be honest, just, oh - Showing responses: Ok/Okay, oh, right/alright, yeah, yes, I see, great, oh great, sure.	- Cause: because, cos - Contrast: but, yet, nevertheless - Coordination: and - Disjunction: or - Consequence: so - Digression: anyway -Comparison: likewise, similarly	- Opening and closing of topics: now, Ok/Okay, right/alright, well, let's start, let's discuss, let me conclude the discussion -Sequence: first, firstly, second, secondly, next, then, finally - Topic shift: so, now, well, and what about, how about -Summarizing opinions: so -Continuation of topics: yeah, and, cos, so	-Denoting thinking process: well, I think, I see, and - Reformulation/Self-correction: I mean, that is, in other words, what I mean is, to put it in another way - Elaboration: like, I mean - Hesitation: well, sort of - Assessment of the listener's knowledge about the utterances: you know

Interpersonal DMs reflect the speaker's feelings about their statements and highlight the affective and social functions of spoken grammar. Referential DMs mark relationships (cause, contrast, coordination, disjunction, consequence, digression) between utterances that precede and follow them. Structural DMs perform metalinguistic textual functions by dividing the discourse flow into discrete segments. Cognitive DMs give the hearer information on how to create their mental representation of the discourse while offering information about the speaker's cognitive state.

Previous studies

Fung and Carter (2007) conducted a study to compare the use of DMs by native speakers and English learners based on CANCODE (The Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) - the pedagogic sub-corpus (460.055 words in size) and a corpus of interactive classroom discourse on secondary students in Hong Kong, which contained data of 14.157 words in total from group discussions of 49 intermediate-advanced English language learners. The findings showed that DMs were effective interactional maneuvers in both groups for structuring and organizing speech at the interpersonal, referential, structural, and cognitive levels. Arya (2020) researched to examine the use of DMs in conversations between Thai students and non-Thai speakers of English. The findings showed that Thai students used DMs deficiently. The study examined the distribution and functions of DMs. Its results revealed that 'Ok,' 'but,' and 'so' are the most frequently used". In line with Fung and Carter (2007), the findings also revealed that referential purposes accounted for most of the students' DM use, with limited application for interpersonal communication and cognitive functions. Notably, structural DMs had minimal occurrences. In slight contrast, Arya (2020) discovered in this study that Japanese and Korean EFL students used referential and cognitive DMs *(I think, and, but)* frequently, while interpersonal markers *(yeah, right, so, see, cos)* were employed less often. Haroon et al. (2000) investigated the functions and positions of DM but (English) and its equivalent lakin (Arabic) in newspaper articles written by native and non-native speakers of English and Saudi and Egyptian speakers of Arabic. This study also reveals that lakin can be found only in the medial position, whereas, but is found in the initial and medial position. It concludes that DMs but and lakin evidence that functions of DMs proposed by Fraser are universal and they could be generalized. Ali (2022) attempted to look at the use of discourse markers by senior university students majoring

in English in Saudi Arabia and its functions and he found that the participating students struggled with the appropriate use of discourse markers and the main reason lies in students' low exposure to discourse markers in class.

In Vietnam, Truong (2022) conducted a study to investigate university students' perceptions of using DMs in English conversation via a questionnaire survey and how they used DMs while speaking via interviews. The research discovered that most participants were aware of the crucial roles of DMs. Many participants demonstrated an understanding of various DM functions, such as expressing the speaker's viewpoint, ensuring smooth and coherent communication, strengthening the interaction between speakers and listeners, and supporting effective responses. Nonetheless, a significant number of them did not realize that DMs also play a role in organizing the sequence of spoken ideas. Unfortunately, the study found that students had a limited application of DMs in oral communication. *Because, and, so*, and *oh* were commonly used while *or, but*, and *then* were hardly used. Notably, *you know, I mean, well, right, now*, and *anyway* were utilized by few or even no participants when they had conversations.

Findings from these studies recognize various functions of DMs, and the functions mentioned above are important in conversations. Although Vietnamese EFL students use DMs in their speech, they use a limited variety, preferring certain types over others. As most researchers conduct these studies in foreign contexts, there is a lack of research in Vietnam.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research. The study employed a descriptive research approach with qualitative data from audio recordings of conversations between a researcher and students. Besides, the study also collected qualitative data from a questionnaire to investigate their students' perceptions of cognitive DMs in their speaking. This study gathers quantitative data to quantify information and apply statistical analysis, thereby confirming or denying alternate knowledge claims. To guide the research, the following questions were put forward: *(i) How do EFL students use DMs?; (ii) What are students' perceptions of DMs in speech?*

Participants

The study population was EFL students who were studying IELTS at the IELTS Fighter Center, located in Thu Duc District, Ho Chi Minh City. A total of one hundred twenty -five students were selected using convenience sampling, as they were readily accessible to the researcher during the data collection process in the academic year 2023-2024. The participants' ages ranged from 15 to 30 years old and were in Foundation A and B classes. To gain further insight into the students' use of DMs, five IELTS teachers at the same center were also purposively selected to participate in the interview, as their ideas could provide valuable insights into the students' use of DMs.

Instrumentation

Audio recordings of conversations: In the current study, one-on-one conversations were conducted and each lasted around 3 to 4 minutes, during which the research group asked the participants questions about their accommodation. The conversations were recorded using a smartphone. These audio recordings also help to illustrate how the students employ DMs in oral communication.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire used in the current study consisted of three parts. Part 1 was designed to get personal demographic information with reference to participants' gender, age and class (Items 1.1-1.3). Part 2 with six items (Items 2.1-2.6) was designed to investigate students' perception of DMs with 5 Likert-scale questions (Items 2.4 to 2.9) ranging from 1 for "Strongly disagree"; 2 for "Disagree; 3 for "Undecided"; 4 for "Agree" and 5 for " Strongly agree". Part 3 with 21 items (Items 3.1-3.21) was designed to investigate the use of DMs among these students based on a 5 Likert scale ranging from 1 for "Never", 2 for "Rarely", 3 for "Sometimes", 4 for "Often", and 5 for "Always". All the DMs used by the participants in conversations were listed in this part of the questionnaire.

Interviews: In the current study, one-to-one semi-structured interviews between the researcher and five teachers were conducted to gather in-depth data on teachers' viewpoints on the importance of DMs in oral communication, their perception of the use of DMs by students, and suggested strategies to enhance and improve the use of DMs among the students.

Data collection and analysis

Collecting the data for this study was performed within three months with three stages. Before collecting the data, the research group requested the center manager's permission to conduct recorded conversations with the students and interviews with teachers. After getting permission from the center manager, the research group set up an appointment with each student. This stage was completed when the researcher collected one hundred twenty -five recordings of conversations. The conversation topic was related to accommodation. The next stage began one week after that. The research group handed out printed questionnaires to one hundred twenty -five participants and provided clear instructions before the participants gave their responses. Once this stage was completed, the researchers conducted in-person interviews with five teachers working at the center.

A quantitative analysis was then performed by calculating the frequency of DMs used by the participants. Towards this end, the following formula was used:

$$\text{Frequency} = \frac{\text{Number of DMs made by students}}{\text{Total DMs}} \times 100\%$$

The functions of these DMs were also identified using the DMs classification framework suggested by Fung and Carter (2007) and the definition suggested by Schiffrin (1987). The analysis occurred through 3 stages: (i) Identification of DMs; (ii) Explanation of DMs; and (iii) Categorization of DMs. Based on the study of Fung and Carter (2007), DMs in the current study were analyzed in terms of four categories: interpersonal, referential, structural, and cognitive. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed via the tool SPSS Statistics 20. The interview data were analyzed using a thematic analysis once the research group coded the transcripts into texts and searched for interrelationships between codes.

Validity and reliability

For validity, the research group carefully reviewed the theoretical framework of the classification of DMs by Fung and Carter (2007). The questionnaire was also designed and reviewed thoroughly to examine its length and issues with items. Vietnamese versions of these items were also included to avoid misinterpretation of the questions by the participants.

For reliability: The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, with the value calculated based on SPSS 20 (Table Two).

Table 2**.** *Reliability statistics of items in Part 2 and 3 of the questionnaires*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	Number of items
.694	0.739	27

As shown in Table Two, the alpha coefficient for the 27 items in Parts 2 and 3 of the questionnaire is 0.694, suggesting a relatively high level of internal consistency among these items. The reliability value of the questionnaire employed in this research varies from .694 to .739, suggesting that the instrument for data collection is trustworthy and reliable.

Results

Results from conversation analysis:

To answer the first research question, the researcher counted the number of discourse markers based on their occurrences in the participants' responses across a total of 125 conversations. This study presents data in numerical and percentage form to illustrate the use of discourse markers in the surveyed conversations. (Table Three).

Table 3. *The frequencies of DMs used by the participants*

DMs		Frequencies	Percentages	DMs		Frequencies	Percentages
1	And	581	34.0%	13	you know	10	0.6%
2	because/cos	389	22.7%	14	yeah	5	0.3%
3	i think	286	16.7%	15	Ok	2	0.1%
4	So	141	8.2%	16	to begin with	2	0.1%
5	Well	72	4.2%	17	absolutely	2	0.1%
6	Or	66	3.9%	18	exactly	2	0.1%
7	Like	65	3.8%	19	however	2	0.1%
8	But	37	2.2%	20	first/firstly	2	0.1%
9	Actually	22	1.3%	21	second/secondly	2	0.1%
10	to be honest	10	0.6%	22	then	2	0.1%
11	kind of	10	0.6%		Total	684	100%

As can be seen from Table Three, there is a total occurrence of 1710 cases with 21 DMs used by the participants. The discourse marker “and” prevails with 581 occurrences (34%), followed by “because/cos” and “I think” with 389 occurrences (22.7%) and 286 occurrences (16.7%) respectively. “So” is used in 141 cases, accounting for 8.2%. “Well”, “or”, and “like” have quite similar occurrences, each accounting for around 4%. Among less frequently-used markers are “but” (37 cases, accounting for 2.2%) and “actually” (22 cases, accounting for 1.3%). “To be honest”, “kind of”, and “you know” all had 10 occurrences (0.6%), followed by “yeah” with 5 occurrences (0.3%). “Ok”, “to begin with”, “absolutely”, “exactly”, “however”, “first/firstly”, “second/secondly”, and “then” are used only twice each, accounting for 0,1%.

Table 4. *The frequencies of the functional classes of DMs*

Functional classes		Occurrences	Percentages
1	Referential	1178	68.9%
2	Interpersonal	383	22.4%
3	Cognitive	120	7.0%
4	Structural	29	1.7%
Total		1710	100%

Data from Table Four reveal that the participants mainly use DMs for referential functions with 1178 occurrences (68,9%). Interpersonal DMs rank second with 383 occurrences (22.4%) while there are 120 occurrences (7%) of cognitive DMs. Only 29 occurrences (1.7%) of structural DMs are recorded in participants’ responses.

Interpersonal DMs:

Table 5. *The frequency of interpersonal DMs*

No.	DMs	Occurrences		Percentages
1	I think	276		72.1%
2	Well	48		12.5%
3	Actually	22		5.7%
4	Kind of	10		2.6%
5	To be honest	10		2.6%
6	You know	10		2.6%
7	Yeah	3		0.8%
8	Exactly	2		0.5%
9	Absolutely	2		0.5%
	Total	383		100%

As can be seen in Table Five, nine DMs were identified within this group, with a total of 383 occurrences. “I think” is the most frequently used among all identified items, with 276 occurrences, accounting for 72.1 % of the total. Ranking at the second position is “well”, with 48 occurrences (12.5%). Next is “actually”, with 22 occurrences (5.7%), followed by “kind of”, “to be honest”, and “you know”, each with 10 occurrences (2.6%). The less common interpersonal DMs include “yeah” with three occurrences (0.8%), “exactly” (2 occurrences; 0.5%), and “absolutely” (2 occurrences; 0.5%). The following excerpt illustrates the use of “I think” in speech:

Excerpt 1:

Researcher: What are the disadvantages of living in the flat?

Student: **I think** it’s safer than the house because it has a person to protect the flat.

Referential DMs

Table 6. *The frequency of referential DMs*

No.	Discourse markers	Occurrences	Percentage
1	And	558	47.4 %
2	Because/cos	389	33.0%
3	So	126	10.7%
4	Or	66	5.6%
5	But	37	3.1%
6	However	2	0.2%
	Total	1178	100%

About referential DMs presented in Table Six, there is a record of 6 DMs in this category. With 558 occurrences (47.4%), “and” is the most popular. This is followed by “because/cos”, which appears 389 times, accounting for 33.0%. Meanwhile, the occurrences of “so” are approximately double those of “or”, with 126 (10.7%) and 66 (5.6%) occurances, respectively. There are 37 occurrences (3.1%) of “but” and “however” only appear in two cases (0.2%). The following excerpts illustrate the use of “And” and “Because/cos” in speech:

Excerpt 2:

Researcher: What part of your house do you like the most?

Student: To be honest, I enjoy living in an apartment because I can enjoy the fresh air there. Moreover, living in a flat allows me to enjoy a beautiful view **and** see every corner of the city.

Excerpt 3:

Researcher: Do you prefer living in a house or a flat?

Student: I prefer living in a flat because it has good views **and** more security **and** privacy.

Structural DMs:

Table 7. *The frequency of structural DMs*

No.	DMs	Occurrences	Percentages
1	So	15	51.7%
2	First/Firstly	2	6.9%
3	Second/Secondly	2	6.9%
4	Then	2	6.9%
5	And	2	6.9%
6	Yeah	2	6.9%
7	To begin with	2	6.9%
8	OK	2	6.9%
	Total	29	100%

As can be seen in Table Seven, 8 DMs are found in this category, accounting for 29 occurrences. "So" prevails with 15 occurrences (51.7%) while "first/firstly", "second/secondly", "then", "OK", "and", "yeah", and "to begin with" appear twice each (6.9%). Excerpt 4 below demonstrates the use of "so" used by the students in speech:

Excerpt 4:

Researcher: What part of your house that you like the most?

Student: Well, I'm a quite introvert person **so** the part that I like the most in my house is my bedroom.

Cognitive DMs:

Table 8. *The frequency of cognitive DMs*

No.	DMs	Occurrences	Percentage
1	Like	65	54.2%
2	Well	24	20.0%
3	And	21	17.5%
4	I think	10	8.3%
	Total	120	100%

As can be seen in Table Eight, 4 cognitive DMs are found with 120 occurrences. Among these, "like" is used the most frequently with 65 occurrences (54.2%), followed by "well" with 24 occurrences (20.0%) and "and" with 21 occurrences (17.5%). Meanwhile, "I think" only accounts for 10 occurrences (8.2%). The way "like" is used as a cognitive DM by the participants in conversations is illustrated in the excerpt that follows:

Excerpt 5:

Researcher: What room does your family spend most of the time in?

Student: I think it's the kitchen. We can eat together and talk **like** tell stories together about your days or your work, something good or bad about yourself.

Results from the questionnaire:

To further investigate the use of DMs among these students and their perceptions of DMs in speech, an analysis of the results from the questionnaire was also taken into consideration.

+ *Students' perception of DMs:* To find out students' perception of DMs, data collected from items 1 to 6 were collected and analyzed.

Table 9. *The EFL students' perceptions of DMs in speech*

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
1. I understand what DMs are.	125	1	5	3.51	1.216
2. I know different types of DMs	125	1	5	2.96	1.128
3. I know the functions of DMs in communication	125	1	5	3.31	1.152
4. I often use DMs when speaking.	125	1	5	3.08	1.067
5. I use DMs when speaking without any difficulty.	125	1	5	3.12	1.023
6. DMs are important in oral communication.	125	1	5	3.39	1.170

As shown in Table Nine, items 1 and 6 recorded relatively high mean scores, with means of M=3.51 (SD=1.216) and M=3.39 (SD=1.170). These results indicate that participants generally know what DMs are, and they are aware of the importance of using DMs in oral communication. With a mean score of 3.31 (SD=1.152), item 3 reveals that the functions of DMs are also recognized by the participants. The lowest mean score belongs to item 2 (M=2.96; SD=1.128), which indicates that the participants are not familiar

with different types of DMs. The item related to the frequency of use (item 4) receives a mean score of 3.08 (SD=1.067). This result implies that DMs only appear sometimes in students' utterances. Item 5 gets a mean score of 3.12 (SD=1.023), showing that the participants still experience difficulties using DMs in speaking.

+ *The use of DMs:* Part 3 of the questionnaire explored the frequency of DMs used by EFL students in their speech (Table 10-see appendix). 21 items in this section represent 21 DMs.

Of the items presented in Table 10, items 1 and 2 stand out to have higher mean scores than others (Mean=3.85). This indicates that the participants prefer using DMs "and" and "because/cos" more commonly than others. Items 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 also have relatively high mean scores, ranging from 3.01 (item 6) to 3.70 (item 3). This result indicates that DMs "I think", "so", "well", "or", "like", and "but" are often used by the participants. The other items receive relatively low mean scores (under 3.0) and items 20 and 21 notably have lower mean scores with 1.96 and 1.92 respectively. These results indicate that DMs "actually", "to be honest", "kind of", "you know", "yeah", "OK", "to begin with", "absolutely", "exactly", "however", "first/firstly", "second/secondly", and "then" are rarely used by the participants. These results align with findings from audio recordings analysis where occurrences of DMs "and" and "because/cos" prevail and account for the majority of occurrences. "I think", "so", "well", "or", "like", and "but" are also among the DMs commonly used by the participants but with a lower number of occurrences. The instances of DMs "actually", "to be honest", "kind of", "you know", "yeah", "OK", "to begin with", "absolutely", "exactly", "however", "first/firstly", "second/secondly", and "then" are considerably low.

Results from the interview:

The interview questions were structured to investigate their perception of the importance of DMs in oral communication, the use of DMs by students, and strategies to enhance the use of DMs by these students. Towards these objectives, the interview was designed with three questions: *(i) What is your opinion about the importance of DMs in speech? (ii) What are your comments on students' use of discourse markers in speech? and (iii) What are strategies to improve students' ability to use DMs in speech?*

In response to the first question, the opinions gathered from the five teachers provide a range of perspectives on the importance of DMs in oral communication, especially for EFL students. The importance of DMs was recognised among most of the teachers, with varying degrees of emphasis on their importance for EFL students, as in:

"…DMs serve several vital functions that enhance the quality and clarity of spoken language. They help structure speech. They allow speakers to organize their thoughts, signal transitions between ideas, and provide listeners with cues about the direction of the conversation…" (Teacher 1)

"…DMs are important. They contribute to the natural flow of conversation. They can indicate pauses, manage turn-taking, and help maintain the listener's engagement…" (Teacher 2)

"…They are important as DMs reflect the speaker's attitude. They can convey hesitation, emphasis, or clarification, which are essential for effective communication…" (Teacher 3)

"DMs play a crucial role in oral communication by improving coherence, and supporting conversational management..." (Teacher 5)

Only one teacher (Teacher 4) presented a contrasting viewpoint, expressing skepticism about the necessity of DMs:

"...While they have some functions, I do not believe they are crucial for effective communication, especially for EFL students. The primary goal for EFL students should be clarity and accuracy in their language use. DMs, such as "well," "you know," "so," and "actually," often serve as fillers that may not significantly contribute to the main message being conveyed. In many cases, students can achieve clear and effective communication without relying on these markers. Overusing DMs leads to speech that sounds repetitive." (Teacher 4)

The argument for this viewpoint is that while DMs have some functions, they might not be crucial for effective communication. Sometimes, overreliance on markers can lead to repetitive speech.

In response to the second question, most teachers stated that students' ability to use DMs indicated some variations. Some students learned them naturally and used them easily, while others were in the opposite situation. Some problems in the use of DMs by students were overuse, misuse, overreliance on some familiar ones, and a lack of DMs in speech. Factors provided for the proficiency of discourse markers might include native language influence, exposure to English, individual language learning aptitude, and confidence in speaking English. Some of the extracts from the teachers' responses are:

"... Some students grasp them naturally, and easily use them, while others struggle to use them effectively. It depends on factors such as their native language influence, exposure to English outside the classroom, and aptitude for language learning." (Teacher 1)

"… students generally understand the importance of DMs in oral communication, but applying them appropriately can be challenging. Many students tend to overuse or misuse them, resulting in awkward speech." (Teacher 2)

"…students' ability to use DMs in oral communication depends on their confidence and their levels of language proficiency. Students who feel comfortable expressing themselves in English and have good language proficiency levels are likelier to experiment with different discourse markers and use them appropriately..." (Teacher 3)

"…Rather than using different markers to convey meaning and structure their speech, they often rely heavily on a few familiar ones." (Teacher 4)

"I've noticed a tendency among some students to use a limited number of DMs in their oral communication... (Teacher 5)

Teachers' responses to the third question provide valuable insights into effective strategies for improving students' use of DMs in speech:

"To enhance students' proficiency with DMs, teachers should provide opportunities for practice and feedback. Additionally, exposing students to authentic spoken English through listening activities and multimedia resources can help them recognize DMs in context and understand their functions." (Teacher 1)

"…teachers should foster a communicative classroom environment. They should encourage interactive activities such as group discussions and role-plays because they allow students to experiment with DMs in authentic communication situations. Moreover, providing explicit instruction on the various functions and meanings of DMs with modeling and guided practice also helps students develop a deeper understanding of how to use them effectively." (Teacher 2)

"… integrating DMs into regular speaking tasks and presentations can greatly benefit students. Teachers should assign tasks that require the use of specific DMs or encourage students to incorporate them naturally into their speech. Additionally, providing personalized feedback and correction on students' use of DMs helps them identify areas for improvement." (Teacher 3)

"… I think teachers should provide contextualized learning experiences. They can select authentic texts or videos that illustrate the use of DMs in real-life conversations so students can understand the practical application of these devices." (Teacher 4)

"… that integrating DMs into regular speaking tasks and activities is essential for improving students' proficiency. One effective way is to provide instruction on common discourse markers and their functions, and then provide practice exercises where students can apply what they've learned in meaningful contexts." (Teacher 5)

From the teachers' responses, it can be suggested that a combination of targeted practice, communicative activities, contextualized learning, and structured feedback can significantly enhance students' proficiency with DMs in oral communication.

Discussion

The use of DMs in speech among EFL students

This section addresses the first research question. The findings reveal that EFL students use a limited range of DMs, with referential DMs such as "and" and "because" being used most frequently. In contrast, structural DMs are almost absent. This suggests that while students show some awareness of using DMs to connect ideas, they lack diversity in their use of these markers, and their discourse organization remains weak.The frequency of DMs in recorded conversations: The results from the audio recording analysis reveal that the referential DMs are the most common ones found in one hundred – twenty five students' responses, while structural DMs are rarely used. This indicates a great awareness of students in an attempt to mark relationships between utterances that come before and after discourse markers. This strategy helps improve the coherence and cohesion of their speech. However, attempts to divide the discourse flow into discrete segments, which allow listeners easily follow their ideas, are greatly neglected. These results are quite similar to the findings of Fung and Carter (2007), and Arya (2020).

Concerning the frequencies of individual markers, the results from audio recordings and questionnaire show similar results that the dominating group includes "and" and "because/cos". These DMs prevail and are used in almost all responses. The second group, which is often used, consists of "I think", "so", "well", "or", "like", and "but". The last group, including "actually", "to be honest", "kind of", "you know", "yeah", "OK", "to begin with", "absolutely", "exactly", "however", "first/firstly", "second/secondly", and "then", is hardly used. Their occurrences are only found in one or two responses. The current findings agree with most previous studies on the EFL students' preference to use some DMs while neglecting others, including Fung and Carter (2007), and Arya (2020). Arya (2020) found that Thai EFL learners relied heavily on a few common DMs (e.g., "OK", "but", "so") and underused others. Similarly, the minimal use of structural and cognitive DMs in this study reflects the patterns found in Fung and Carter's (2007) research on Hong Kong students, where referential DMs dominated. However, unlike Fung and Carter's broader range of DM usage among learners, Vietnamese students in this study appear to exhibit an even narrower repertoire of DMs.

Although most participants demonstrated the use of DMs in their responses, there was little variety in the DMs used by the participants. Only 21 DMs were recorded in the current study. While some DMs were significantly overused, the frequency of others was found to be limited. The interview findings also showed similar results when teachers claimed that students tended to overuse and rely on some familiar DMs.

The functions of DMs as linguistic devices in speech

Findings from the survey reveal that students generally understand the functions of DMs, so they use them quite appropriately in their speech despite some minor slips. *For interpersonal DMs*, "I think" and "well" were used more frequently than other markers. As students were asked questions that sought their personal opinions, "I think" was commonly used as it helped speakers comfortably express their own views with certainty without being judged whether it was reasonable or not. It is natural for speakers to respond when asked a question, so "well", which is a responsive signal conveying the speaker's reaction to the previous question, was frequently used by the students at the beginning of their responses. *For referential DMs*, "and" and "because" were prevailing. This can be explained by the fact that the research participants are IELTS learners, so they are generally taught to expand their answers as much as possible, as longer responses could provide examiners with more background information to assess their performance. "And" and "because" are helpful devices, and they are also easy to use to help learners achieve the purpose of expanding their answers by giving reasons and adding more ideas. *For structural DMs*, "so" was used much more than others by the participants, and it was often put in the final utterance to summarize or conclude their answer. *For cognitive DMs*, "like" was the most commonly used. These students generally had a habit of mentioning broad and general terms or ideas before giving examples and detailed explanations. This was the reason why "like" was frequently employed, as it is helpful for students in the process of elaboration.

Most teachers in the interview emphasized the significant role of DMs in enhancing oral communication. The use of DMs can ensure communications run smoothly. Their various functions help reduce the risk of misunderstandings between speakers and listeners. These perspectives align with previous research highlighting the multifunctional nature of DMs in spoken language (Schiffrin, 1987). Fraser (1996) similarly emphasizes that pragmatic markers serve to indicate speakers' communicative intentions, thereby enriching the pragmatic meaning of their utterances. As a result, second language learners need to develop both communicative and pragmatical competence in the target language in order to become fluent and effective speakers.

For IELTS students, using DMs while speaking is crucial since it is one of the criteria that examiners would consider when they mark their speaking performance. Using DMs appropriately, adequately, and properly makes their speech more coherent and fluent, and only those who can demonstrate good use of them can achieve high band scores for speaking skills. Given the current trends in learners' use of DMs, educators need to prioritize enhancing students' awareness of the significance and benefits of DMs in communication, particularly in fostering coherence and naturalness in spoken discourse. Furthermore, teachers should design and implement highly interactive teaching strategies, such as group discussions, role-playing activities, and speaking practice exercises.

Students' perceptions of DMs in speech

To address the second research question, the data from questionnaires and interviews reveal that students are generally aware of the importance and functions of DMs, particularly in enhancing coherence and fluency. However, their knowledge of different types of DMs remains limited, and they experience difficulties applying them effectively during real-life communication. Results from the questionnaire reveal that, in general, students understand what DMs are. The students also know the functions and their importance in oral communication. This finding is in contrast with findings from Truong (2022). One possible explanation is that the participants in this study are enrolled in Foundation, A, and B classes at the IELTS FIGHTER center. These classes are for students whose levels of English language proficiency range from lower to upper intermediate. The knowledge taught in these classes includes the introduction of DMs as a strategy for improving students' English skills. As the amount of knowledge about DMs is vast, instructors usually introduce only a small aspect of them to students. Therefore, the participants in the current study appear to be largely unaware of the different types of DMs and their functions in spoken language. The findings also show that, although the participants have learned about DMs, they only use these devices occasionally when speaking. Such a result aligns with the findings from the analysis of audio recordings, which show that the participants used a limited number of DMs. This is also consistent with the findings from the study of Truong (2022) in terms of students' limited application of DMs in oral communication.

The disparity between the number of confident and unconfident students about their use of DMs suggests that most students perceive a lack of proficiency or comfort in incorporating DMs into their spoken English, highlighting a potential area for improvement in language instruction and practice. It is also suggested that although teachers recognize and show students the importance of DMs, there is still a notable minority of students who do not receive this emphasis while studying. While a majority of students benefit from explicit teaching on DMs, a considerable proportion of learners do not think they have instructional support, suggesting a potential area for curricular enhancement in language education programs.

Based on the findings, teachers should implement the following measures to enhance students' use of DMs in oral communication. First, teachers should provide precise and detailed instructions on the types, functions, and applications of DMs across various contexts. Additionally, teachers should regularly organize speaking practice activities, such as role-plays, discussions, and debates, to provide students ample opportunities to apply DMs in real-life scenarios. Personalized feedback should be offered, highlighting areas for improvement and strategies for more effective use of DMs. Furthermore, teachers should

underscore the importance of DMs in improving coherence and naturalness in speech and adjust the curriculum to ensure comprehensive instruction on this topic for all students.

Strategies to improve students' use of DMs in speech

To enhance students' awareness of the significance of DMs in communication, teachers should underscore their critical role in improving the coherence and naturalness of spoken language. Conducting seminars that provide clear and comprehensive introductions to the types, functions, and practical applications of DMs in real-life contexts is essential. Moreover, implementing interactive communicative activities, such as group discussions, role-playing exercises, and presentations, can facilitate students' ability to practice and apply DMs in a flexible and effective manner. Lastly, providing specific and personalized feedback will enable students to identify their errors and progressively develop their proficiency in using DMs in everyday communication.

It can be seen from the recorded speaking responses that, although participants almost demonstrate the use of DMs in their responses, there is little variety in the use of DMs by the participants. Participants tend to overuse certain DMs, while others record limited use. Most teachers find that students struggle to use them. Ineffective use of DMs, such as their overuse, misuse, or limited variety, was also observed among students. Such a pattern aligns with the findings from the analysis of audio recordings and questionnaires , which reveal that the participants' use of DMs is ineffective.

Students tend to prefer certain DMs due to the influence of Vietnamese communication cultures, as their use of language is partly shaped by native communicative practices. When communicating with others, Vietnamese people often have a habit of being verbose, so they have an advantage in using certain DMs.

One possible explaination for the higher frequency of "and" and "because/cos" is that these markers allow speakers to elaborate their ideas without noticeably lengthening their responses . Furthermore, Vietnamese people generally place great value on interpersonal harmony, modesty, and humility, and they often strive to maintain their relationships that are free from conflict. As a result, "I think" is quite commonly used as this DM indicates that ideas being presented express personal opinions only, which helps speakers avoid unnecessary arguments with listeners. Arya (2020) observed that Thai EFL learners underused DMs, which may relate to unfamiliarity with DMs in their native communication patterns. Unfortunately, some English DMs have no clear Vietnamese equivalents, or those that do exist are not typically used in everyday communication.As a result, certain DMs are used infrequently. For example, although the Vietnamese equivalent of "you know" is "bạn biết đấy", it is not commonly used in everyday speech. Similarly, Truong (2020) reported that Vietnamese students were aware of the functions of DMs but rarely applied them in actual speech, possibly due to limited instruction and lack of natural use in the first language. These findings highlight that native language influence and students' proficiency levels affect their use of DMs, aligning with previous research by Schiffrin (1987), Brinton (1996), and Arya (2020), who emphasize the sociolinguistic and cognitive roles of DMs in spoken discourse.

DMs are regarded as important linguistic elements in spoken English discourse as they serve a variety of functions and are able to enhance speakers' discourse-pragmatic competence. Using DMs in communication is considered one of the important characteristics of communicating fluently like a native speaker. It is therefore advised that teachers should raise students' awareness of the benefits of DMs in oral communication. In addition to organizing separate sessions that target the introduction and the benefits of DMs before the main course, teachers should also offer several strategies to enhance students' proficiency with DMs. They should ensure good environment for targeted practice, exposure to authentic language, and giving structured feedback. Incorporating listening activities and multimedia resources to help students recognize and understand DMs in context, providing explicit instruction on their functions, fostering a communicative classroom environment with interactive activities to provide opportunities for students to practice DMs in authentic communication settings, integrating DMs into regular speaking tasks that require the use of specific DMs, assigning tasks that require the use of specific DMs and offer personalized

feedback to help students make progress, and enhancing contextualized learning experiences to illustrate the practical application of DMs are common suggestions among the teachers. Methodologically, the context-based teaching approach not only makes the use of DMs more relevant and intuitive for EFL students but also boosts their confidence and competence in using these linguistic tools. By engaging in realistic and meaningful communication tasks, students can internalize the use of DMs, leading to more effective and natural use of DMs in both academic and everyday contexts.

Conclusion

The current study investigates how EFL Vietnamese EFL learners use DMs. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaires, audio recordings, and interviews, the findings indicate limited variety in the participants' use of discourse markers, with only twenty-one types recorded. The majority of them are referential DMs, while the minority of them are structural DMs. The participants use DMs for various functions, but with little variety. Students' perceptions of DMs in speech indicate they know what DMs are. Although the participants are aware of the function of DMs and their importance in communication, they do not frequently use them in spoken language. The participants show a limited awarenes of different types of DMs. Most teachers recognize the importance of DMs and consider the use of DMs by students ineffective. Since students still tend to favor certain discourse markers over others, teachers should place greater emphasis on lessons that highlight the variety of available markers. As some students' responses show a lack of discourse marker use, teachers should raise students' awareness of the benefits of using these markers and encourage their effective use in spoken language. To help learners use discourse markers effectively and avoid misuse, teachers should adopt a context-based teaching approach that incorporates authentic examples of how native English speakers use these markers in real communication. To sum up, this study makes a significant contribution to the field of English language teaching by offering a comprehensive analysis of how Vietnamese learners perceive and utilize DMs in communication.

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Investigating ESL Teachers' Experience in Teaching Online Classes

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Abstract
The rapid transformation of traditional classrooms to online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic has presented numerous challenges for educators, particularly those teaching English as a Second Language. This research aims to explore the challenges faced by ESL teachers in adapting to and managing online teaching, as well as the strategies they employ to navigate this new digital landscape. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three ESL teachers to gather valuable insights into their experiences. Thematic analysis was applied to identify and categorize the challenges encountered by these educators during the implementation of online teaching. Additionally, the study investigated the strategies employed by teachers to overcome these obstacles and enhance the effectiveness of their online instruction. The findings reveal six major challenges faced by ESL teachers, including technical issues, time management, limited student access to technology, monitoring and assessment difficulties, students' issues, and teachers' competency issues. To address these challenges, teachers utilized three main strategies: self-empowerment through self-learning and upskilling in technology, effective monitoring and assessment techniques, and enhancing online learning through interactive engagement. The insights garnered from this study can assist educational institutions, policymakers, and educators in identifying areas that require support and improvement for more effective and efficient online teaching practices. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development for ESL teachers to successfully navigate the complexities of online teaching and meet the diverse needs of their students in the digital age.

Keywords: Educational Technology, Online Learning, ESL classrooms, Teacher Experiences, Strategies, Challenges

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Introduction

During the time of widespread school closures, the field of education has undergone a profound transformation. These closures, which were a response to the unprecedented circumstances surrounding the pandemic, have had far-reaching effects on educational institutions and schools around the world, resulting in significant changes to the teaching and learning process. According to data from UNESCO, the peak of school closures was registered at the beginning of April 2020, when around 1.6 billion learners were affected across 194 countries, accounting for more than 90% of total enrolled learners (UNESCO, 2020). This includes Malaysia, with the Ministry of Education (MOE) instructing all Malaysian schools to do home-based learning. In an effort to assist transition from traditional classroom to virtual learning, the Home-based Learning Manual was established by MOE in April 2020, which serves as guidance for teachers in terms of implementation and approach. Additionally, DidikTV was launched on 21st February 2021 to deliver educational television programs to all students, especially those without internet access.

In 2022, after two years of battling the pandemic, all sectors have finally reopened, including education institutions. The rise of hybrid learning is inevitable as more learners prefer online learning to physical classes. A study conducted by Dochy and Segers (2022) found that 23% of people believe the freedom to learn at a pace that best suits them is the most significant benefit of receiving an education online. Similarly, people place a high value on their capacity to acquire knowledge at home (22%) and their overall flexibility (20%). Where educators are concerned, despite the lack of preparation and difficulties encountered by them, including educational administrators and institutions, the overall picture now reveals a willingness to embrace innovation and new learning opportunities that were not previously apparent. Educators across all grade levels and settings had to reevaluate their roles and the methods by which they assisted students with their academic responsibilities through online platforms (Rapanta et al., 2021).

Online class implementation required a radical change by teachers and students regarding communication style, assessments, and content delivery. Teachers are expected to adapt to the new platform almost instantaneously after the COVID-19 pandemic strikes. Teachers have to equip themselves with skills related to virtual teaching in a short period. Teachers today are expected to be better equipped to use technology in their classrooms than their predecessors. However, research findings show that they are still unprepared for technology integration and find it difficult to use ICT tools in the classroom (Park & Son, 2020). To an extent, parents started questioning teachers' ability and readiness to face the challenge (Shamsuri, 2021). This is consistent with Rodríguez-Muñiz et al. (2021), who confirmed that due to the sudden transition, teachers were forced to slow down their pace and reduce their content as they need more time to prepare themselves with technical and pedagogical aspects of online learning. This is also mentioned by Dhawan (2020), who asserts that educators were reluctant to shift to online teaching but were forced to do so after the COVID-19 outbreak.

This situation raises concerns for teacher educators and researchers. It highlights the need to understand language teachers' challenges and strategies, including their acceptance and experiences with technology in language learning and teaching. Mahyoob (2020) stated that the primary issues influencing and impacting online EFL learning during COVID-19 are technical, academic, and communication challenges. The majority of EFL students in the study were dissatisfied with their online education as they were unable to meet the standards for progress that were expected of them. It is also revealed by Kebritchi et al. (2017) that the challenges faced by

educators ranged from adapting new roles in the classroom to problems with time management and pedagogical approaches. Similarly, Izhar et al. (2021) revealed that teachers' challenges in online teaching include time management, technological skills, interest, knowledge, and self-efficacy. Hence, the current study sought to investigate ESL teachers' experiences in online teaching in order to understand better the challenges encountered as well as their strategies for online teaching. This research aims to investigate the experiences of ESL teachers who teach online classes in order to gain insight into the challenges they face and the strategies they use. The research objectives are as follows:

1. To explore challenges faced by ESL teachers in teaching online classes.
2. To investigate strategies employed by ESL teachers in teaching online classes.

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge

This study works around the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework introduced by P. Mishra and Matthew J. Koehler of Michigan State University in 2006. They identified three primary forms of knowledge: Content Knowledge (CK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Technological Knowledge (TK). TPACK framework consists of three main components: technology knowledge (TK), Pedagogy Knowledge (PK), and Content Knowledge (CK). TPACK components are shown in Figure One below:

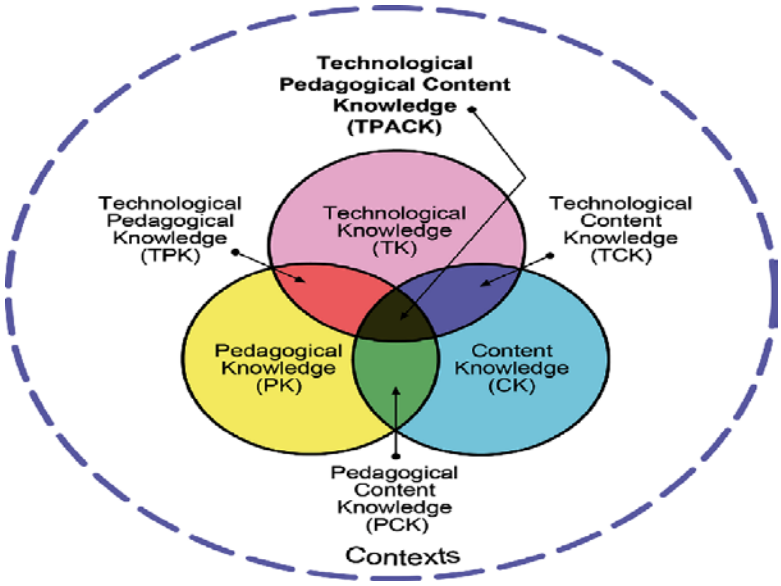


Figure 1. TPACK Framework (Koehler & Mishra, 2009, p. 63-67)

The foundation of effective teaching is Content Knowledge (CK), which encompasses a teacher's in-depth understanding of the subject matter they are responsible for imparting to their students. An English teacher, for example, must be well-versed in language arts concepts, literature, and effective communication techniques. This knowledge provides the necessary content expertise for the development of instructional strategies (Cheng et al., 2022).

Content knowledge is supplemented by Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), which focuses on the art and science of teaching. Understanding the various methods, practices, and approaches for effectively delivering information to students is part of PK. Classroom management, teaching

strategies, assessment techniques, and accommodating the needs of diverse learners are all important components of pedagogical knowledge. According to Basirat and Taghizadeh (2021), a skilled teacher with strong PK can engage students, create a welcoming learning environment, and adapt their teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles.

The understanding of both standard and advanced technologies relevant to the educational context is referred to as Technology Knowledge (TK). It equips teachers with the ability to identify and apply appropriate technological tools to improve the learning experience. Teachers with TK can effectively leverage technology to facilitate optimal learning outcomes, from basic computer literacy to navigating complex digital resources (Sahrir et al., 2021). Furthermore, TK allows educators to keep up with evolving technologies, ensuring their continued integration into teaching practices.

The interaction of these knowledge domains gives rise to a number of critical components in the TPACK framework. Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) is a combination of content and pedagogical knowledge. It focuses on a teacher's ability to teach a specific subject effectively, taking into account the best instructional strategies for conveying content in a way that resonates with students and promotes meaningful learning experiences.

TCK is the combination of technology and content knowledge. Based on a study by Mujallid (2021), it gives teachers the ability to integrate technology into subject-specific instruction seamlessly. Teachers can improve content delivery, assessment methods, and feedback to students by leveraging technology tools, resources, and platforms.

The term TPK refers to the integration of technology and pedagogical knowledge. TPK teachers have the knowledge and skills to thoughtfully incorporate technology into their teaching practices (Keser & Sarı, 2021). This includes choosing appropriate technology tools, creating technology-enhanced lesson plans, and effectively integrating digital resources to support student learning.

These knowledge components work together within the TPACK framework to enable effective technology integration in teaching and learning. TPK, TCK, and PCK enable educators to use technology as a powerful tool to augment content delivery, improve pedagogy, and create transformative learning experiences. By integrating these dimensions, teachers can confidently navigate the digital landscape and provide their students with the necessary knowledge and skills for success in a technology-driven world. As the educational landscape evolves, the TPACK framework remains an essential guide for educators seeking to harness the potential of technology and pedagogy in transforming their students' learning journeys.

Methodology

A qualitative research design is used in this study to gain in-depth insights into the challenges and strategies of English language teachers in online teaching. Qualitative methods are best for exploring ESL challenges and strategies because they provide deep, nuanced insights into learners' experiences, motivations, and the complex social and cultural factors influencing language acquisition. These methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis- allow researchers to capture the "why" and "how" behind learners' behaviors, offering rich, contextualized understanding that quantitative approaches often miss (Pandey, 2025; Schneider, 2023 & Thomas et al., 2024). Recent studies emphasize that qualitative research is especially effective in uncovering underexplored issues, informing culturally responsive teaching, and advancing both theory and classroom practice in ESL contexts (Pandey, 2025 & Thomas et al.,

2024). Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection instrument in this study, and a purposeful sampling technique that focused on English teachers who met specific criteria relevant to the research topic was employed. Subsequently, the study employed thematic analysis as a means to analyze data whereby the researcher examined the interview transcripts of the participants in order to identify significant patterns of words which were then grouped into several meaningful categories known as themes. This study utilized purposive sampling as it is a technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases in order to make the best use of limited resources (Decuypere et al., 2021). In this study, three English teachers were selected from schools in Klang. This selection was based on two key criteria: their teaching experience and educational background. It was crucial to investigate how these attributes might influence the teachers' viewpoints and preparedness for online teaching. This approach aligns with Dworkin's (2012) perspective, where a multitude of articles, book chapters, and books recommend participant numbers ranging from 3 to 50 as appropriate, given the criteria mentioned earlier. The interview questions are adapted from Abdul Razak et al. (2018) and Junus et al. (2021).

For this study, thematic analysis is employed. The data were transcribed, stored, and organized according to the research questions. The first stage of analysis involved reading through the data corpus to identify extracts that are relevant to the topic of ESL teachers' experiences in online teaching. Words related to pedagogy, teaching methods, issues, and challenges were captured. Subsequently, the corpus was examined again to get a clearer understanding. After some patterns emerged from the data set, related phrases and words were highlighted and coded. These codes were then revisited and grouped into several sub-themes, leading to the discovery of potential thematic names and their definitions.

Findings

With a primary emphasis on understanding the research context, this chapter delves into the challenges encountered during the implementation of online teaching. By identifying these challenges, it seeks to provide a thorough understanding of the dynamics of online education for ESL teachers. The participants' responses to the interview questions were recorded in Figure Two below. It addressed the first research question: what are the challenges faced by ESL teachers in teaching online classes? The main themes generated can be seen in Figure Two.

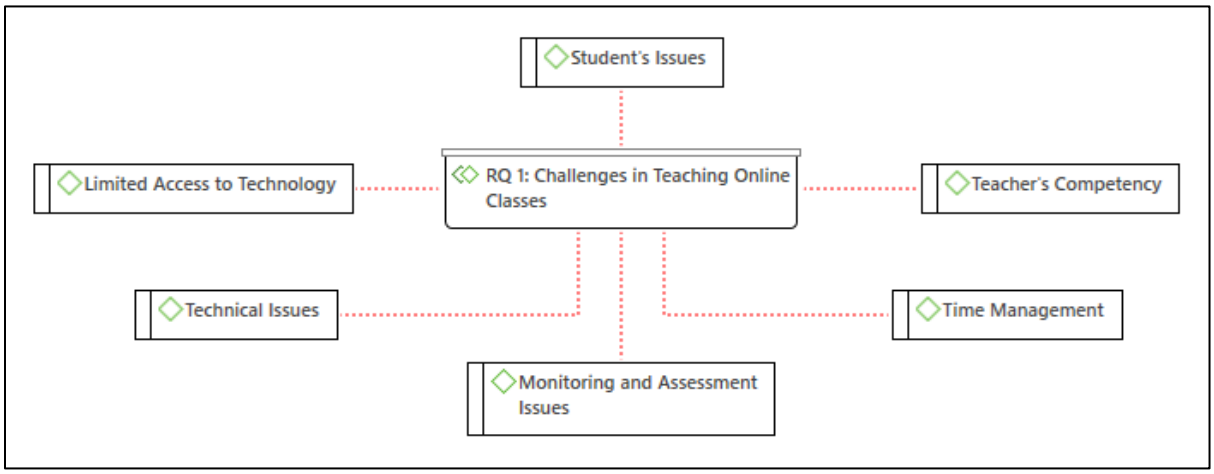


Figure 2. Themes identified for research question 1

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Teachers' Competency

Teachers have had a mixed reaction to the implementation of online classes. Some teachers welcomed the implementation while accepting the challenges it brought, while others expressed resentment and hesitation. Among the reasons behind their hesitation was their lack of experience in handling online tools prior to the pandemic. All participants had similar experiences, as shown by excerpts below:

> No. Never. I have no experience before PKP in teaching online classes. (P1 DU8)
> Prior to PDPR, I just used WhatsApp, sometimes asking the kids to Google up and look up for something. Surprise? Ya, for sure, because we didn't have any experience (P2 DU8)
> I do have experience with online teaching tools experience before. Teaching online classes, huh? I never had any online class before (P3 DU8)

In addition, the absence of formal training had a major influence on teacher's confidence to navigate online classes as it affects their readiness. P2 believed that she had to figure out and prepare herself although there was no formal training given. P2 mentioned:

> I had to be ready. I had to make myself ready. I had no way to communicate and to teach. So, I must say that I wasn't ready, but I had to prepare myself. (P2 DU10)
> Similarly, P3 felt the same way about her level of preparedness. Even though she has received no formal training, P3 is convinced that she must be prepared. P3 mentioned:
> To be honest. I never had any professional training relating to that (P3 DU10)
> By hook or by crook, I need to make myself ready for any circumstances. (P3 DU12)

It can be seen that these factors underscore the importance of teacher competency in handling online classes, as prior experience and formal training play critical roles in determining teachers' readiness and effectiveness in the virtual teaching setting.

Another issue that affects teacher's competency is adapting syllabi with online teaching. P1 and P3 had difficulty preparing materials and spent much time explaining the content due to the existing CEFR syllabus, which was adopted from the European context. P1 and P3 asserted:

> I find it quite difficult to teach pupils about something that is not close to our hearts. Because I teach year 5, the syllabus is more overseas. Even the name in the textbook is confusing to my students (P1 DU12)
> In terms of giving examples in the Malaysian context, I am having some difficulties. For instance, place names, along with people's names used in the textbook are European. So, as for me, I took more time in explaining into local context rather than the lesson content (P3 DU20)

From the excerpts above, it can be said that misalignment between the prescribed syllabus and the demands of online teaching creates additional hurdles for these teachers as they must find ways to modify and deliver the content effectively in an online format.

Technical issues

Experiencing technical issues such as unexpected disruptions while teaching in a virtual classroom is inevitable for all participants. For instance, participants were removed from the Google Meeting due to an unstable connection, accidentally pressing the wrong buttons in the platform, and having to cancel a class due to o power outage. P2 recalled:

> Even during a presentation, your screen goes off. Sometimes accidentally press some buttons, you are taken to other places. (P2 DU34)
>
> But when something goes wrong, for example, electricity that day, you promised to see your children, but you can't, so that is another issue also (P2 DU36)

There were also issues with the audio and video of the learning platform. The teacher's voice was suddenly unheard and sometimes echoed. P1 shared her experience:

> *I hate technical issues. Sometimes, my voice cannot be heard or echoed. I got kicked out of Google Meet several times, too. (P1 DU34)*

One of the participant's senses of helplessness during online classes can be seen when she had to fix unforeseen technical issues, internet connectivity issues, or student-related problems. She felt overwhelmed to meet these challenges with confidence because she lacked the necessary training or prior experience to handle such circumstances. P2 expressed:

> Sometimes, my laptop suddenly goes off, blank, and I shout for help. So yeah. I need help. (P2 DU24)
>
> It's like handling the screen, as well as your book, it's very difficult. And then sometimes they say teacher, I'm trying to click, I'm trying to come in. I had issues like how to settle all those things. (P2 DU34)

Students' Issues

Apart from dealing with technical issues, teachers have to face student-related challenges, too. Being disengaged in class is a major issue, as student engagement cannot be monitored efficiently. Students seemed present, but teachers would not know what was happening behind the screen. Grasping their attention is twice as hard compared to learning in the classroom. Furthermore, young learners, in particular, have short attention spans. P1 and P2 recalled:

> Then, pupils' interest and attention. As we know, even in class for face-to-face learning, it is kind of hard to get a pupil's full attention. (P1 DU28)
>
> Children can't see things that are too long when they sit and listen to you for maybe about 30 or 40 minutes. You cannot drag on. (P2 DU26)

Besides being disengaged, students were reported to be irresponsive, especially passive students. They rarely responded or asked questions during the class. Participants shared:

> They rarely respond or ask any questions. Even when I asked questions, they didn't unmute their microphone and stayed silent. (P3 DU34)
>
> I mean, some are very open to that, but some felt very shy, those passive ones. Always sit at the back of the class. I had an issue. It was a real thing that happened (P2 DU32)

The low attendance rate among students was also a challenge. In a class of 40 students, usually, only half or less than that turned up for online classes. Some absent cases were reported due to insufficient gadgets because students had to share a phone with other siblings or had to wait until their parents returned home after work. P1 and P3 commented:

> Sometimes, they just don't show up at all. (P1 DU28)
>
> For the unfortunate family, the issue will be in preparing the devices and the internet coverage. Some of them might share the devices with other siblings or, even worse, share

> with their parents whereby they need to wait until the parents are available at home in order to join the live lesson or to complete the task given for each particular lesson. (P3 DU38)

Young learners, especially primary school students, are in the initial stages of developing digital literacy and have limited or minimal experience with computers and digital technologies. Thus, attending online classes may overwhelm and cause overexcitement to them at the same time. They tend to press random buttons and suddenly unmute their microphones, exposing conversations and background noise. P2 and P1 shared some anecdotes:

> I was teaching in the afternoon, and we had issues, you know, with the children operating. They were not so good with it (P2 DU12)
>
> I mean, after you come up with the content, and when you present it to the children, they do not know what's going on. They sometimes find it difficult to operate, you know, pressing a simple button. (P2 DU22)
>
> They have more distractions within their environment than inside a classroom (P1 DU34)

Time Management

For teachers, managing time is crucial to ensure lessons are delivered effectively. Activities need to be tailored carefully and implemented within the allocated time. In a normal classroom, sometimes the teacher overlooks the time and gets carried away with some activities. On the other hand, virtual classrooms require teachers to manage a few things simultaneously. Thus, one activity might take longer and affect the implementation of other lesson activities. In addition, prior to online classes, they have already spent a lot of time preparing lesson materials. P1 and P2 stated:

> It is time-consuming when we need to prepare a lot of material (P1 DU38)
>
> Time management, I mean carrying out all activities in one hour, these things are issues for me. (P2 DU22)

Monitoring and Assessment

Due to the virtual nature of the learning environment, teachers have limited visibility in terms of students' behavior, verbal cues, and body language. Thus, it is hard to gauge students' interest as well as their struggles. P2 and P1 shared:

> Even when you are sharing a screen, you can see all of them. But when you have a bigger classroom, you basically cannot see your children when you are presenting. You cannot know what they are doing (P2 DU32)
>
> It is hard. You need to see the behavior also (P1 DU28)

When monitoring is challenging, assessment becomes an issue as teachers need to observe and evaluate students. Both elements need to work simultaneously to ensure the assessment's credibility and validity. However, with limited assessment activity, teachers may struggle to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' progress and achievements. This could result in inaccurate assessments and misrepresentation of students' true abilities, especially for holistic assessment, particularly classroom-based assessment (PBD). P2 commented:

> In terms of PBD assessment, very difficult. Not all activities can be assessed online. If writing, yes, but sometimes, when we need to assess if they are writing neatly, it is quite difficult but achievable. (P2 DU28)

Limited Access to Technology

The most obvious issue that occurred in the early stages of online class implementation was a lack of adequate equipment, particularly for low-income families. Prior to the pandemic some families did not provide their children with cellphones or any other digital device. Parents were the only ones who had cell phones. When the pandemic struck, communication devices such as tablets and mobile phones became essential. In large families, having to share devices among siblings means they must take turns; thus, missing classes is unavoidable. The same is true for internet access. A student with limited internet data cannot attend a Google Meet class because it requires a large amount of data. Participants remembered:

> Basically, every family will have at least one handphone as a communication medium. The question will be whether they have an internet connection or not. (P1 DU44)
>
> ..some of them might share the devices with other siblings or, even worse, share with their parents whereby they need to wait until the parents are available at home in order to join the live lesson (P3 DU38)
>
> Some of them, due to low internet access and low bandwidth, tend to turn off their videos, and sometimes their audios are not heard (P2 DU26)

Strategies for Teaching Online Classes

Strategies in teaching online classes are crucial for creating an engaging and effective virtual learning environment that maximizes student participation and learning outcomes. In the following section, this study presents three main themes and eight sub-themes utilized by ESL teachers in their digital classrooms. The themes yielded from the interview can be seen in Figure 3 below.

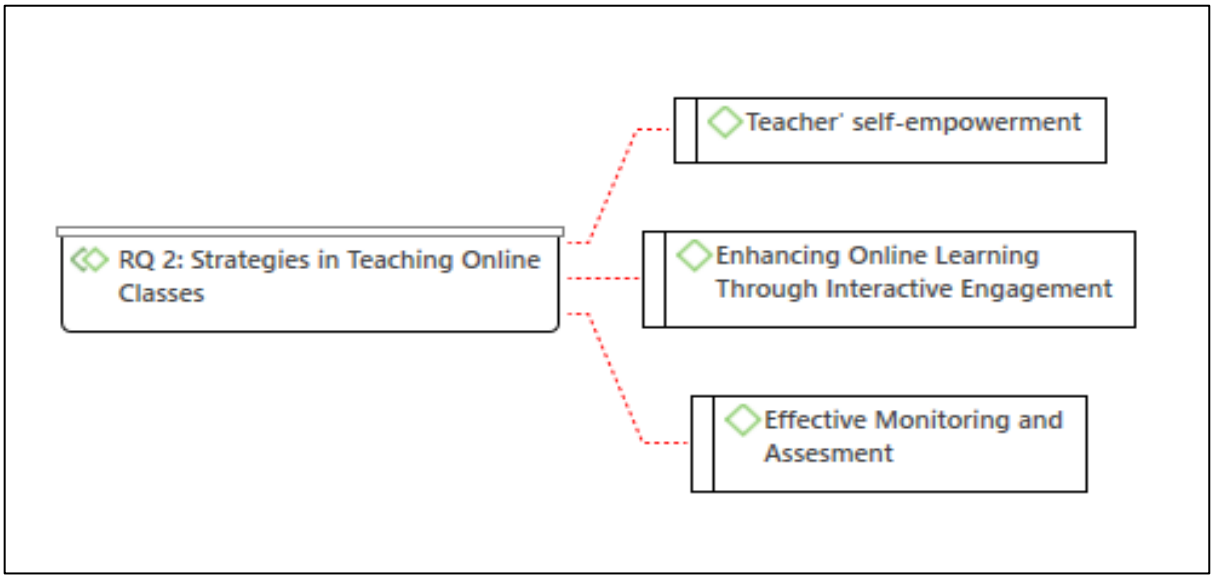


Figure 3. Themes generated for research question 2

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The themes illustrated strategies utilized by English teachers in implementing online teaching. Prior to generating the themes, sub-themes were identified. Eight sub-themes were recorded after the coding of the dataset was done. The main focus of Research Question 2 was on teaching strategies implemented by teachers in online classes. While extracting data on teaching strategies, a distinctive theme emerged with regard to teachers' strategy in preparing themselves for the digital transition, namely teacher self-empowerment. Hence, the researcher decided to include the strategy as it is believed to enhance the success of online teaching and learning potentially. The strategies yielded from the interview were teacher's self-empowerment, effective monitoring and assessment, and enhancing online learning through interactive engagement.

Teacher Self-Empowerment

Due to the absence of formal training prior to the implementation of online learning, teachers exerted considerable efforts to acquire digital skills. Teachers' proactive efforts to equip themselves with new skills, mainly digital skills, demonstrate that they are accountable for their professional development and growth. This enables them to adapt to the shifting educational landscape and improve their teaching practices through the acquisition of new digital competencies. It can be seen in these excerpts:

> I learned a few tips from colleagues who have a lot of experience in IT, such as our Media teacher. Then I also watched a lot of videos on You tube to help me find the best method to teach online classes. (P1 DU14)
>
> I just had a lot of reading on the internet, studying via YT videos, and sharing on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter (P3 DU10)

Seeking mentorship from family members and experienced colleagues is a commendable strategy for self-empowerment. It allows teachers to learn from those who have relevant knowledge, which can help them grow personally and professionally. P1 and P2 asserted:

> I reached out to my colleagues and exchanged some ideas to come out with the best activities that are suitable for my pupils. (P1 DU 26)
>
> So I thought I would rather learn from my hubby how to use that. Later on, yes, we had a number of in-house training, how to use Google Meet (P1 DU12)

Effective Monitoring and Assessment

To address assessment issues, participants used digital resources such as Quizziz and posted questions via Google form to assess students' understanding. Aside from that, chatting apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram were used to get answers and feedback. P1 shared:

> I assess them using digital quizzes such as Google Forms or Quizziz. Sometimes I also give them the exercises in WhatsApp or Telegram group and ask them to send it back to me via WhatsApp or Telegram personally (P1 DU30).

P3 indicated a preference for utilizing digital resources to simplify assessments. It is because these activities can be easily transformed into reports making documentation more organized and straightforward. She explained:

> The activities are more interactive and could get immediate results for each exercise that I possibly will turn into the assessment report. Kinda love it because it will be well-documented and printable. (P3 DU28)

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In terms of the monitoring strategy, participants mentioned using the observation method. Students were asked to adjust their cameras so the teacher could see what happened behind the camera. In one instance, P2 shared an anecdote:

> One funny moment I still remember: I asked them to adjust their camera so I could see what was happening, whether they were taking notes or not, and one boy said he could not. I asked why I could not. He was only wearing a T-shirt or something, he was not wearing proper pants! (P2 DU28)

Participants also periodically call out the names of students to check for attention and comprehension. Students are encouraged to pay close attention and participate actively during online class sessions with this method of instruction. Participants recalled:

> During a question-and-answer session, I will also call their name randomly and ask them if they understand the lesson and if they have any questions. (P1 DU36)
>
> While the lesson is going on, some children will go missing. You will be calling and mentioning names, you know. Are you there? (P2 DU34)

Enhancing Online Learning Through Interactive Engagement

To avoid dull and dry lessons, teachers utilized online interactive resources such as videos from YouTube, PowerPoint presentations, and colorful graphics from Canva to create engaging and vibrant lessons that capture students' attention and maintain their interest throughout the session. Besides, they also use Quizziz to incorporate assessment through fun learning. P1 and P2 commented:

> I used a lot of YouTube videos. I will have a Google Meet with the pupils. I will present the lesson using PowerPoint or Canva, and I also have a question-and-answer session with them. I also use drawing tablets as teaching tools to help them gain for better understanding. (P1 DU32)
>
> You need an interesting presentation. You need to provide, like Zoom, we have breakout rooms. So you can encourage children to communicate and have discussions, and you can vary your teaching. (P2 DU30)

Assigning engaging tasks is another strategy to maintain students' participation in virtual classes. Students were asked to move around, work on projects as well as do presentations form the information they had gathered. Participants recalled:

> Another strategy is yes, they are excited, but they also have to come up with findings, so that they can present. They can share (P2 DU30)
>
> Usually, when I have GM sessions and during Quizziz games. That's when they are very..their participation is very high. (P1 DU34)
>
> I love assigning Project-based activities to the kids, like scrapbooks. I want them to have hands-on activities so they do not feel bored. (P3 DU32)

Encouraging communication among their class members was also utilized to foster collaborative learning as well as to promote and practice the use of language. By encouraging communication among class members, teachers can create a sense of community and interaction, which enhances

collaborative learning and promotes the practice and application of the target language in authentic contexts. P2 used this strategy in her class as she shared:

> You need an interesting presentation. You need to provide, like Zoom, we have breakout rooms. So, you can encourage children to communicate and have discussions. You vary your teaching. (P2 DU30)
>
> So, I asked them can they could move around with their devices. Show me where is your living room, kitchen, bedroom, and then some were like, they were challenged. From there, you promote communications (P2 DU32)

Discussion

Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic abruptly transformed the entire education system, compelling educators to transition rapidly from traditional classrooms to online platforms. Nonetheless, this abrupt shift presented numerous obstacles, as many educators were unprepared to embrace technology for educational purposes fully. As the participants recalled, they were not given any online teaching training or short courses. They had to utilize their basic understanding of online tools and seek assistance from colleagues and family members. This demonstrated that the participants lacked Technological knowledge (TK). However, they were not at fault because it stemmed from the lack of formal training. Teachers must receive adequate training to optimize online learning. This is consistent with Nicole's (2021) assertion that teachers required additional and differentiated professional development due to their varying levels of TPACK.

During the interviews, the participants frequently mentioned technical issues affecting their online teaching experience. They faced unexpected disruptions like power outages and malfunctioning gadgets, resulting in mishandling of the virtual classroom. The challenges mentioned above induced a sense of helplessness among the participants particularly during power outages where their ability to take action was severely limited. As the TPACK framework heavily relies on technology, these technical issues can significantly disrupt online teaching and learning. To ensure smooth online instruction, teachers must be able to troubleshoot basic technical issues or collaborate with IT support (Sahu, 2020). This is consistent with a study by Shabeeh and Hoque (2021), who argued that technical problems and the inability to adapt to new technology were the significant challenges faced by teachers in online teaching.

Teachers found time management to be challenging, especially in two specific aspects. Firstly, material preparation for online classes takes significantly longer compared to preparing conventional teaching materials. They need to create or find suitable activities and videos and navigate through the use of technology despite limitations in their technological skills. Secondly, time management is crucial during class sessions. Teachers must adhere to the designated time frame while multitasking to deliver content, manage students, and handle the online platform simultaneously. However, multitasking was overwhelming to them as they had to constantly switch between different tasks thus potentially disrupting the flow of the class and limiting their ability to give full attention to each aspect. This difficulty was exacerbated by technical issues, which added to their stress and, therefore, made time management even more difficult. As a result, some teachers felt pressed to forego certain activities or rush through content, potentially jeopardizing the quality of their students' online learning experience. This is supported by Izhar et al. (2021), who indicated that challenges with time management may arise due to unfamiliarity with technology or inadequate pedagogical strategies for online instruction.

Another inevitable challenge is limited access to technology. This theme reflects the difficulties faced by students with insufficient access to digital devices and unstable or unreliable internet connections. Students who share a device with other siblings would be required to take turns and would likely miss class, especially if their schedules did not align. Although the government attempted to close the digital divide by distributing laptops and tablets, not all students were on the government's list of recipients. Teachers were limited to assigning offline tasks and sending lesson materials via WhatsApp group in the hope that students would complete them. As revealed by Saefudin et al. (2021), the effectiveness of online classrooms can be hampered by socioeconomic factors such as limited access to technology and internet connectivity which can vary between student populations.

Monitoring and assessment were also noted as challenges faced by teachers in teaching online classes. Due to digital platform limitations, such as small screen sizes and limited visibility, teachers struggle to observe students' behavior and attentiveness during online classes effectively. Teachers can easily monitor student engagement in a traditional classroom by observing their body language, facial expressions, and participation in class discussions. However, in an online learning environment where students may be invisible to the teacher, this is not possible. This is supported by Cahyaningsih et al. (2021) and Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020), who discovered that teachers struggled to control the development of learning and that the teaching and learning processes were difficult to complete without face-to-face interaction. With regards to assessment activity, the participants mentioned the limited number of activities that can be assessed online. As revealed by Kamal and Illiyan (2021), assessment is challenging in a virtual environment in terms of the authenticity of students' work, their comprehension, and behavioral changes, as these assessment issues cannot be verified.

Besides technology limitations, teachers found it challenging when dealing with students' issues. Students were irresponsive, especially passive students. Teachers had to call out their names several times to check their presence and understanding of the lesson. Furthermore, students' lack of interest contributed to their irresponsiveness too. Teachers found it difficult to capture students' attention and interest in online classes. This is supported by Khatoony and Nezhadmehr (2020), who discovered that learners' lack of focus and disinterest in online classes are largely due to insufficient personal connection. In a conventional classroom, students can interact in person with their teacher and peers. This personal connection can help engage and motivate students. In an online learning environment, however, students may feel disconnected from their peers and teachers, thus leads to another issue, which is low attendance rate. Low attendance rate among students was also an issue as they risked falling behind. According to Fard et al. (2023), students' frequent absence or low attendance in class can lead to academic failure and indicate a lack of interest and motivation in learning. Although reminders have been sent to the class WhatsApp group, students kept missing.

Limited digital skills among students also contribute to the issues in the virtual classroom. Many students are not familiar with operating digital platforms like Google Meet or Zoom as they rarely use laptops or computers. As a result, they became overexcited when using these platforms during online classes leading to mishaps such as accidentally unmuting themselves, chatting with friends in the chatroom during lessons, and facing difficulty in typing answers. According to Dhawan (2020), learners may encounter various technical issues that hinder the teaching and learning process and slow down their progress. Additionally, some students may struggle to adapt

to the online learning environment, leading to increased frustration and confusion regarding time management and flexibility in their studies.

The inconducive home environment emerged as a significant challenge for both teachers and students during online learning. Distractions from siblings, television, and other household activities hampered students' ability to concentrate in class. Teachers, on the other hand, encountered difficulties when students struggled to focus, and background noise, as well as passing family members, could be heard when students activated their cameras and unmuted their microphones. This issue is supported by Ismail et al. (2020), who revealed that students' homes lacked a conducive environment for learning. The presence of distracting noise from siblings and limited study space due to small living areas contributed to the challenges faced by students during online education.

Strategies

Under the category of strategies for teaching online classes, three distinct themes surfaced. The initial theme highlighted the teachers' endeavors in self-empowerment to enhance their proficiency in managing digital platforms by seeking guidance from family members and experienced colleagues and learning through tutorials provided online. While this may not be considered a direct teaching strategy, the participants showcased their commitment to managing digital platforms before venturing into the virtual classroom. When teachers engage in self-learning to improve their technological skills, they are essentially developing their Technological Knowledge (TK) within the framework of TPACK. By acquiring these technological skills, teachers can effectively navigate online platforms, address technical issues, and create engaging digital learning materials. Their dedication to becoming digitally savvy played a vital role in ensuring the smooth implementation of online learning. This is supported by the findings from Saienko et al. (2020), as they found that teachers' commitment to self-learning and professional development in technological skills can effectively address challenges in online teaching and learning.

The following theme is the use of effective monitoring and assessment strategies such as using digital resources, carefully evaluating students' work, and observing in a virtual classroom. The participants mentioned checking students on a regular basis by mentioning names and posting questions to ensure their attentiveness. A participant even admitted to adjusting students' cameras to see if they were taking notes. It can be seen that teachers went above and beyond to monitor students' behavior behind the screen. As asserted by Ghateolbahr and Samimi (2021), effective classroom management includes efficient monitoring through teacher-student communication. In terms of assessment, the participants made extensive use of digital resources such as Google Forms, Quizziz, and Kahoot to obtain instant feedback on students' comprehension. Such platforms are not only used to test students' comprehension but they can also be easily converted into assessment reports. Furthermore, online resources are usually interactive and colorful making them ideal for piquing students' interest. As mentioned by Artin (2021) and Feng (2022), creating interesting learning material using online resources and quiz apps motivates students to stay focused; thus, assessment can be done effectively.

The third strategy is to improve online learning by incorporating interactive engagement. The participants practice collaborative work, assigning engaging tasks and encouraging communication among class members in their virtual classroom. Collaborative work allows students to actively participate in learning sessions (Arnesen et al., 2019). It encourages

communication while also instilling a cooperative spirit. According to Khreisat (2022), collaborative learning, such as the use of break-out rooms and the like, is the most important strategy in an online classroom.

Another strategy used by the participants was to include engaging tasks. Teachers created tasks and assignments for students that were interactive, challenging, and interesting. Students were motivated to participate actively in the learning process as a result of these engaging tasks, making the virtual classroom experience more enjoyable and rewarding. The significance of engaging tasks was also mentioned by Artin (2021), Cahyaningsih et al. (2021), and Suputra (2021) as they said that engaging tasks help students maintain their interest and focus, which reduces distractions and improves overall learning outcomes. Furthermore, encouraging class members to communicate is critical in creating a vibrant and interactive virtual classroom (Mustakim et al., 2021). Teachers facilitated meaningful discussions and interactions by creating an environment where students felt comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas. This method not only improves students' communication skills but also fosters a sense of belonging and community in the online learning environment.

The strategies for teaching online classes mentioned earlier demonstrate how the TPACK framework can be used. Teachers' self-learning efforts improve their technological knowledge (TK), while the inclusion of engaging tasks improves their content knowledge (CK). Furthermore, encouraging collaborative work demonstrates their pedagogical knowledge (PK). Teachers can create a dynamic and successful online learning experience for their students by effectively integrating TPACK elements.

This study's findings add to the body of knowledge on online learning by providing insights into the challenges and strategies implemented in teaching online classes. Teachers will be able to reflect and improve their practice by drawing upon the experiences and lessons learned from this research. As the education landscape continues to evolve, the findings will serve as a valuable resource for educators seeking to enhance their pedagogical approaches and adapt to the demands of online instruction.

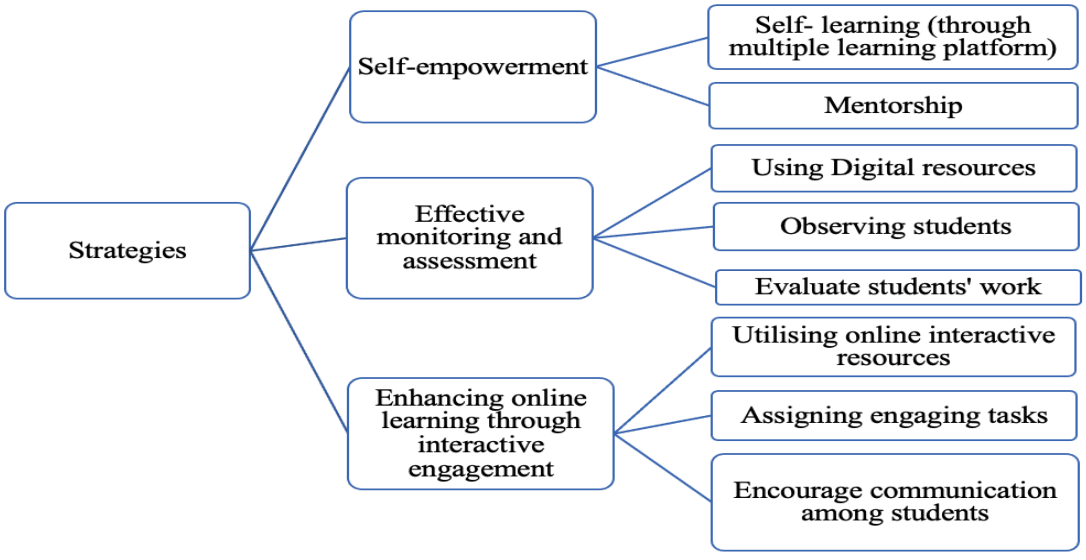


Figure 4. A proposed framework of ESL online teaching strategies

Figure 4 presents a proposed framework for ESL online teaching strategies. It consists of three key strategies identified in the study, providing a concise guide for teachers to optimize their online teaching practices. The framework encourages educators to promote interactive engagement, improve monitoring and assessment, and empower themselves through continuous learning and technological competence.

This proposed framework acts as a roadmap for educators in the online teaching environment. By incorporating these strategies into their practice, teachers can navigate the challenges of online instruction effectively. It offers practical guidance for creating impactful and meaningful learning experiences for students.

The study's identification of strategies that contribute to ESL teachers' success can help bridge the gap between traditional classroom instruction and online learning. Educators can create more inclusive and supportive virtual learning environments for students with diverse linguistic backgrounds and learning needs by understanding how to leverage technology to address the unique challenges faced by ESL learners.

Conclusion

The study identified six challenges that teachers faced in virtual classrooms, which include a lack of technological knowledge, technical issues, time management issues, limited access to technology for students, monitoring difficulties, and issues related to students' lack of interest and digital skills. Furthermore, three key strategies were highlighted, which are teachers' efforts to improve their technological skills through self-learning, effective monitoring and assessment practises; and the incorporation of interactive engagement in the virtual classroom.

The difficulties identified in this study highlight the critical importance of providing adequate training and support to teachers in order for them to master technological skills and adapt to online teaching. Professional development programs such as certification courses on digital platforms should be made available to teachers in order to empower them and improve their competencies in effectively integrating technology into their teaching practices. Policy changes, such as the inclusion of a designated digital skills course in the curriculum and investments in infrastructure to support technology integration in schools, should also be considered.

This study adds to the growing body of knowledge on online learning and has important implications for improving online teaching practices. It emphasizes the importance of improving teachers' technological skills, addressing students' digital skills, and creating a welcoming online learning environment. By implementing these suggestions, educators can adapt to the ever-changing educational landscape and provide effective and engaging virtual learning experiences for their students.

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Postcolonial Symbolic Representation in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness:* A Cognitive-Semantic Study

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Abstract
This study investigates the postcolonial metaphoric symbolism that appears in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* by employing cognitive-semantic theoretical analysis. Through symbolic acts, the book shows how colonial power systems and resistance provide their encoding by using conceptual metaphors together with image schemas. The first research questions focus on how cognitive-semantic models describe postcolonial symbolic actions and how those methods work when analyzing *Heart of Darkness*. The research adapts cognitive semantics and postcolonial theory as its methodological base to evaluate political, cultural and social symbolic acts through Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Image Schema Theory. Social symbolic acts prevail throughout the text as the novel focuses on the dehumanization experienced by colonized subjects and imperial oppression alongside political and cultural symbolic acts that use structured and ontological metaphors to maintain imperial narratives. The research enhances postcolonial literary analysis through cognitive-semantic methods, which explain colonial discourse symbols better. Studies should investigate how cognitive semantics applies to multiple postcolonial literary works to better investigate the relations between language and power structures and ideological forces.
Keywords: Cognitive semantics, postcolonialism, symbolic acts, conceptual metaphor, image schema, *Heart of Darkness*

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Introduction

Evans and Green (2006) explain that cognitive semantics pursues meaning through cognitive processes, which study how language interacts with thinking. The cognitive prefix in cognitive semantics remains under debate. Semantics is cognitive according to Talmy (2000a) making the description of semantics as cognitive superfluous. Saeed (2009), among others, does not find the distinction helpful because language knowledge functions as an element of basic cognition. The interaction of language, cognition, and postcolonial themes can be better understood by taking a cognitive-semantic approach to *Heart of Darkness* (HOD). It enhances the study of symbolic acts by highlighting how characters' meanings are shaped by their lived experiences and contextual knowledge of colonialism.

Symbolic act plays an essential role in literary interpretation. According to Conrad (1983), the essence of all great art is a symbolic act. He stated that “a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion” (p.2). *Heart of Darkness* is a work rich with metaphors. In the 1980s, cognitive semantics first appeared as a component of the loosely organized theoretical field known as cognitive linguistics, which challenged the primacy of grammar and semantics' subordinate role in the generativist theory of language. Rather than being a singular theory of language, cognitive linguistics is a flexible framework. Rather than a single well-defined theory that categorises everything as either belonging to cognitive linguistics or not, it is a cluster of numerous partially overlapping methods (Geeraerts, 2006, p. 2).

Postcolonialism, introduced with Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978), is a new approach to cultural analysis known as postcolonialism, which aims to examine conflicts between various cultures typically those between a colonial power and its corresponding colonized one (Huang, 2017; Said, 1993). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2013) state that postcolonialism "is a way of reading and rereading the history, culture, and politics of colonized societies to understand the processes and effects of colonization" (pp.7-8). The usage of "post" in the term indicates that colonial legacies together with their effects have vanished into the distant past. The practice of neocolonial histories creates ongoing colonial perspectives across the world and non-Western societies continue to face exclusion from Western-knowledge-based power systems. The field of postcolonial philosophy works to grasp both present reality and future possibilities of the world. Global wealth distribution together with power dominance and control over others form the main focus of the subject. Postcolonialism challenges earlier strategies and offers fresh perspectives on historical and contemporary events since it poses issues like these (Rao, 2013). Using postcolonial analysis and cognitive-semantic theory this research examines how *Heart of Darkness* represents colonial symbolism and acts of colonial resistance through symbolism. Compared to earlier perspectives, postcolonialism offers a more nuanced understanding of significant concepts like power, authority, and security. For instance, the colonial world was forced to accept the idea of sovereignty and the modern state by European powers (Alhmdni & Sabeeh, 2022).

The concept of symbolic act was first articulated by Kenneth Burke in 1957. Geertz (1973a) popularized it. The theorists highlighted the cultural essence of human actions through their emphasis on irrational over logical behavior and expressive rather than instrumental qualities and performance-like rather than commercial trade characteristics (Alexander & Mast, 2006). Any action or activity which exceeds its physical manifestation through symbolism qualifies as a cognitive definition of a symbolic act. People consciously perform this behavior for meaningful purposes which go beyond its base objective. Symbolic acts make up a particular kind of symbolic

representation known as symbolism. Symbolism serves as an inclusive concept for using symbols by definition. For example, burning the national flag could be considered a symbolic act of protest or rejection, whereas the flag itself symbolizes a nation and its values. The act of burning the flag is a symbolic representation of rejecting or opposing those values (Bjerke, 2018).

Generally, specific literary classics have drawn much attention and appreciation from those who value innovation and outstanding works that capture the elegance and inventiveness of the imaginative and creative minds who created them. A prominent example of such esteemed literature is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Güven (2013) claims that Conrad's ambivalent treatment of the work, which incorporates applicable postcolonial symbolic uses of cognitive-semantic strategies that touch upon various aspects of life and humanity, is one of its most outstanding examples. The HOD is filled with unique language features, or more specifically, cognitive-semantic elements that demand careful analysis and examination (Black, 2006)

One of the most well-known modern English novelists, Joseph Conrad, employed some cognitive-sematic strategies in his work "*Heart of Darkness*" to indicate postcolonial symbolic acts. It has become extremely well-known. (Conrad, 1902/1983). Literary scholars have examined *Heart of Darkness*; nonetheless, they have inadequately addressed the cognitive-semantic frameworks underpinning its symbolic acts (Black, 2006).

A systematic examination of the conceptual frameworks and symbolic language supporting the postcolonial project is carried out. Employing cognitive semantics and postcolonial theory as analytical tools, the analysis elucidated how the symbolic actions and conceptual metaphors within the text encode and validate the colonizers' possessive connection with the African environment and its inhabitants (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This has prompted the study to concern itself with establishing a pure cognitive-semantic approach to symbolic acts. The absent analysis between cognitive semantics and postcolonial critique requires integration. This study investigates the following matter.

1. How do the cognitive-semantic conceptualizations of postcolonial symbolic acts manifest in Joseph Conrad's "*Heart of Darkness*"?
2. What is the most effective eclectic model integrating various cognitive-semantic analytical approaches to comprehensively examine the postcolonial symbolic act in "*Heart of Darkness*"?
3. How did Conrad’s strategies influence postcolonial critique?

The study adopts cognitive semantics and postcolonial theory to reveal how *Heart of Darkness* communicates its symbolism, which enables colonialist beliefs and oppositional discourses to establish themselves.

Literature Review

The study of cognitive semantics argues that meaning is intrinsically linked to cognitive processes and examines the complex interrelationship between language and thought (Evans & Green, 2006).

The term "cognitive" in "cognitive semantics" has been controversial. Scholars like Talmy (2000a) assert that semantics is fundamentally cognitive, making the modifier superfluous. For individuals like Saeed (2009), the differentiation may lack significance as linguistic proficiency is an element of overall cognitive ability. Gärdenfors (1999) distinguishes between cognitive semantics, which describes meaning to mental representations, and realistic semantics, which

describes meaning to things in the outside world. According to Kertész (2004), cognitive semantics is the empirical study of language meaning as a component of cognition.

The literature review examines the intersection of postcolonial theory, cognitive semantics, and literary symbolism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. While numerous studies investigate its colonial critique, linguistic style, and narrative structure, there is a notable gap in integrating cognitive-semantic frameworks with postcolonial symbolic acts. This knowledge becomes essential because it demonstrates how conceptual frameworks determine interpretations of colonial discourse and reader comprehension.

Cognitive Semantics and Symbolic Acts serve through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to analyze the metaphorical shape determining the reader's interpretation of meaning in *Heart of Darkness*. Despite existing studies that focus on colonial domination and identity formation by Said (1993) and Oomba (2015), and Hegelian master-slave relations by Eriş (2023). Eriş (2023) describes Marlow's fragmented view in the novella, which reveals both the wider unstable colonial ideology and the deep fears about identity and moral power. This aligns with Fluck's (1983) perception that literature operates as a symbolic act through which Conrad states the conflicts running profound within imperial structures. These studies do not analyze how the cognitive processes underlying the symbolic aspects of meaning.

Previous analyses of *Heart of Darkness* by Nofal (2013) and Benabdallah (2018) address lexical ambiguity and modernist techniques, yet they lack discussion of cognitive semantic connections to these linguistic elements. The advantages of cognitive semantics for literary analysis mentioned by Albayati (2015) and Farhud (2024) have received limited application to the study of *Heart of Darkness*. Available studies are insufficient at combining cognitive-linguistic methods with those of postcolonial theory, so it requires further development toward a combined approach. Yasmin (2024) researched power structures that influence character enlightenment in the novella and showed how colonialism caused destructive impacts on human nature by creating separated beings and existential crises. The study by Almhab & Deshmukh (2020) analyzes both oppressive and resistant themes in the novella since it utilizes symbolic elements to explain narrative power dynamics.

The literature review confirms that researchers analyze *Heart of Darkness* characters and significant themes using only qualitative descriptive designs. The current research project introduces a fresh direction to the academic investigation because it implements mixed methods with a descriptive methodology for data collection. The research demonstrates linguistic features that validate the gathered data. Researchers processed the novella text until it became plain text while tagging it with cognitive semantic strategies CMS and ISS before running the software operations to determine the most frequent cognitive semantic strategies among symbolic words in the software. Again and again, it is seen that *Heart of Darkness* stands as a novella filled with multiple symbolic elements. The majority of elements inside *Heart of Darkness* combine varying depths of semantic meaning along with each character and object, and its title. The research focused on three symbolic acts from the collection because they display the thematic elements of culture and imperialism together with human soul corruption.

To the best knowledge of the researcher, studies are needed to develop an extensive research strategy that combines cognitive semantic theories with postcolonial literary criticism. The existing studies about Joseph Conrad’s work have separately examined his linguistic choices and postcolonial commentary at the same time, failing to provide an explanation framework about reader interactions with symbolic elements. The current research connects two strategic fields to

address fundamental gaps in knowledge that employ new analytical methods to examine *Heart of Darkness* with an integrative approach. So, this study combines these theoretical frameworks to form a better analysis of the colonial symbolic meanings of *Heart of Darkness*, which advances both cognitive literary scholarship and postcolonial knowledge.

A symbolic act is a broader topic defined by Moscovici (1984), as a "representation of an object, person, or idea that represents something other than itself" (p.12). These behaviors are thought to have their roots in the cognitive processes that enable people to create and modify mental images, affecting their perceptions, choices, and actions. The cognitive definition of a symbolic act is any behavior or activity that has symbolic significance and represents something more than its literal or physical expression. Humans perform this action to convey significant meanings. The symbolic act belongs to symbolic representation but remains separate from general symbolism, which extends beyond symbolic representation. Burning the national flag qualifies as an expressive protest gesture; however, the flag represents national principles and values.. The act of burning the flag is a symbolic representation of rejecting or opposing those values (Hallsby, 2020).

Symbolic act in literature is the art of representing an abstract idea with an object or a word. A symbolic meaning can be attributed to any action, person, location, word, or item. Rather than stating anything outright, an author can utilize symbolism to allude to a particular mood or attitude. Symbolism in literature can take many different forms, such as figurative language, in which a character, thing, or circumstance has a more profound meaning when considered in the context of the entire narrative, or acts of a character with a more profound meaning (Purwarno, 2012).

Dhain (2015) explores symbolic acts in *Heart of Darkness* to demonstrate that “the perpetual clash of light and darkness demonstrates Marlow's mental conflict while questioning the European binary of culture over brutality.” Through this interpretation, the text obtains more depth to its analysis of imperialism while dismantling standard colonial storytelling methods. According to (Güven, 2013), Conrad's ambivalent treatment touches on many aspects of life and humanity, making invaluable symbolic use of cognitive-semantic strategies. One of the most notable examples of symbolic acts may be found in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which is listed as one of the most remarkable pieces of English literature. Similarly, Güven (2013) contends that Conrad's ambivalent treatment incorporates invaluable symbolic uses of cognitive-semantic devices that touch upon numerous elements of life and humanity. The novella’s language and structure merit further analysis through cognitive-semantic theories. According to Parry (2005), symbolic actions in *Heart of Darkness* fall under political, personal and cultural classifications to expose their significance in postcolonial analysis.

The main theme of Joseph Conrad's "*Heart of Darkness*" is colonialism, which is shown as a devastating force in Africa during the time of European imperialism. The Congo River basin is a prime example of the destruction caused by European nations vying for control and exploitation of the area's resources, including Belgium, France, and Britain (Zeidanin, 2020). Conrad challenges the brutal realities of colonialism through the narrator Marlow, contrasting the idealistic rhetoric of colonizers with their acts of enslavement, forced labor, and genocide (Kademani, 2016; Montalvo & Untermacher, 2007).

Heart of Darkness is still considered a classic work of literature on colonialism and postcolonialism (O'Reilly, 2001). Said (1994) claims that "The whole point of what Kurtz and Marlow talk about is imperial mastery, white European over black Africans and their ivory, civilization over the primitive dark continent" (p.29).

A study known as the "post-colonial literary movement" was started following World War II. Fiction published during colonialism or after a nation achieves independence is known as post-colonial literature in Africa (Muhammad, 2018). The 1978 book Orientalism was written by post-colonial literary scholar Edward Said. "A Western conception about the eastern part of the world: a radical idea of realism whose assembly endorsed the variance between the accustomed (Europe, West, US) and the odd", is how he describes Orientalism (Muhammad, 2018, p. 62). Because of this, colonization is a powerful tool for illustrating the differences between Europeans and non-Europeans.

The study expands research findings through the integration of cognitive-semantic evaluation with postcolonial symbolism to present a fresh *Hearts of Darkness* interpretation method. The research uses Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Image Schema Theory (IST) to examine how symbolic acts generate meaning through a postcolonial interpretation. This research bridges the gap between cognitive semantics and postcolonial critique to establish a new approach to analyzing Conrad's novella. The method integrates cognitive literary studies with postcolonial discourse while establishing improved theories about symbolic acts used in *Heart of Darkness*.

Conceptual metaphor

According to Lakoff and Turner (1989), conceptual metaphors enable a mapping from a more concrete source domain to an abstract target domain; according to CMT, aspects of journeys, such as routes and destinations, help us grasp life stages and experiences, like in the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. CMT distinguishes between the language realizations of the underlying conceptual metaphors. The literal words found in expressions function as metaphorical expressions to convey concepts that match the conceptual metaphors' mental representations (Lakoff, 1993, p. 203).

Conceptual Metaphors Taxonomies

Conceptual metaphors can be classified in a few different ways. Three main categories of conceptual metaphors exist based on their functions: *structural*, *ontological*, and *orientational*. Metaphors can be classified as either *traditional* or *unconventional* based on how conventional they are. We rely on *propositional knowledge* and *image knowledge*, depending on the type of knowledge that forms the foundation of the mapping between the source domain and the destination domain. Additionally, *generic-level* and *specific-level* conceptual metaphors can be distinguished from one another (Abdulla, 2019). Figure One is a summary of all the conceptual metaphor taxonomies.

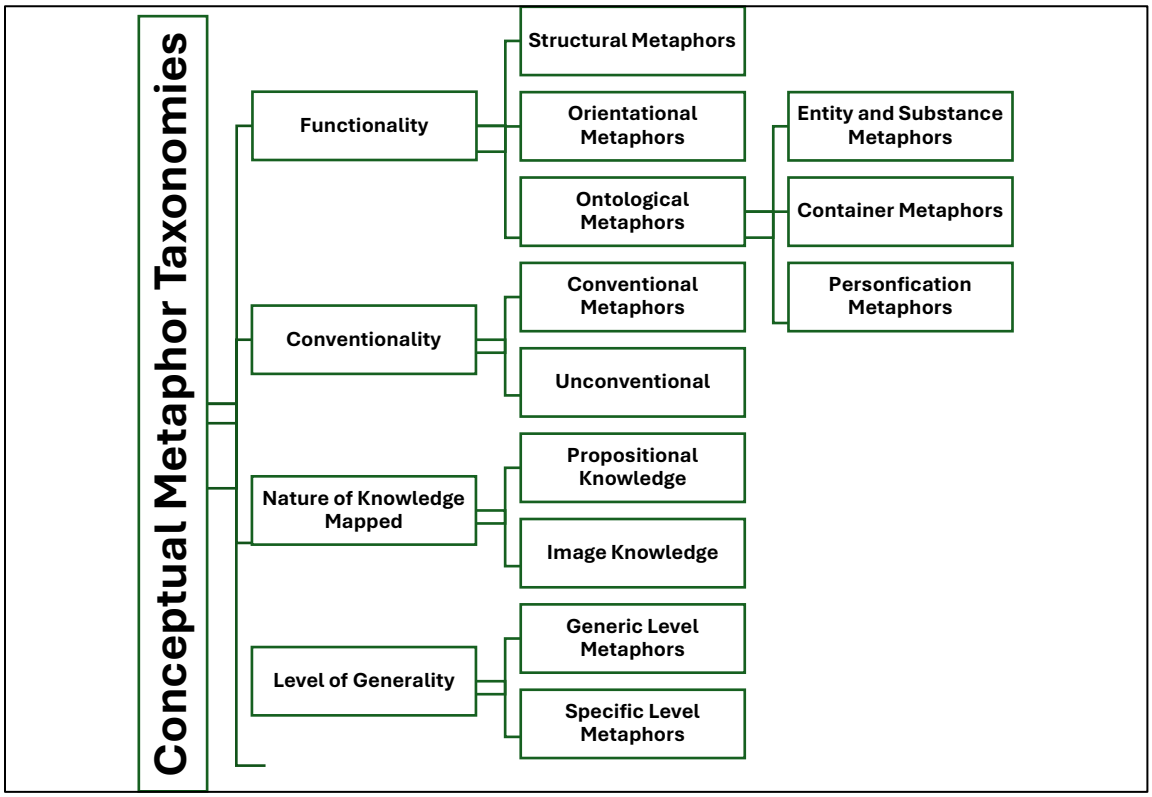


Figure 1. Conceptual metaphor taxonomy (adapted from Lakoff & Johnson 1980a, p.296)

Conceptual metaphor, according to its function, has three classifications: Structural, Orientational, and Ontological. Structural metaphors are ones in which "one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another," according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 14). Other kinds of metaphors, in contrast to structural metaphors, consist of organising an entire system of concepts about one another, rather than only structuring one notion in terms of another. These metaphors, which are primarily associated with spatial orientations like in-out, up-down, on-off, deep-shallow, etc., are referred to as orientational metaphors by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 14).

How people interact with tangible objects is another excellent way to learn concepts. Ontological metaphors aid in organising how people interpret abstract ideas, feelings, moments, deeds, situations, etc., in terms of concrete things. According to Abdulla and Lutfi (2019), ontological metaphors personify abstract notions as humans or reify them (i.e., objectify them as physical entities, substances, and containers) (p.84).

Image Schema

One of the most well-known and ancient theories in CS is the theory of image schemas. Johnson (1987) and Lakoff (1987a) are the sources of this hypothesis (Johnson, 2005, p. 15). An image schema is closely associated with the development of the embodied cognition thesis proposed by Johnson's (1987) "*The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason,*" and Lakoff's (1987) '*Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about Mind.*' Johnson (1987) introduced image schema as: The pattern of bodily encounters and physical movements shapes our perceptual activities into an active, organized pattern which organizes our awareness. So, image schemas are dynamic analog representations of spatial relations and movements in space. Even though image schemas are derived from perceptual and motor processes, they are not themselves sensorimotor processes. Instead, image schemas are the primary means by which people construct or constitute an order and are not merely passive receptacles into which experience is poured. In this way, image schemas are different from the notion of schemata traditionally used in cognitive science, which are abstract conceptual and propositional event structures (Evans & Green, 2006).

The term "image" in "image schema" is equivalent to the use of this term in psychology, where imagistic experience relates to, and derives from, our experience of the *external* world. Another term for this type of experience is sensory experience because it comes from sensory-perceptual mechanisms that include but are not limited to the visual system. It is therefore essential to emphasise that although the term 'image' is limited to visual perception in everyday language, it has a broader application in psychology and in cognitive linguistics, where it encompasses all kinds of sensory-perceptual experience.

The Taxonomy of Image Schemas

The classification of image schemas, which are recurring cognitive frameworks arising from our embodied experiences that facilitate our understanding of the environment. Image schemas are essential to cognitive linguistics, philosophy, and psychology, underpinning abstract thought and language simultaneously. Figure Two below shows a partial list of image schema strategies.

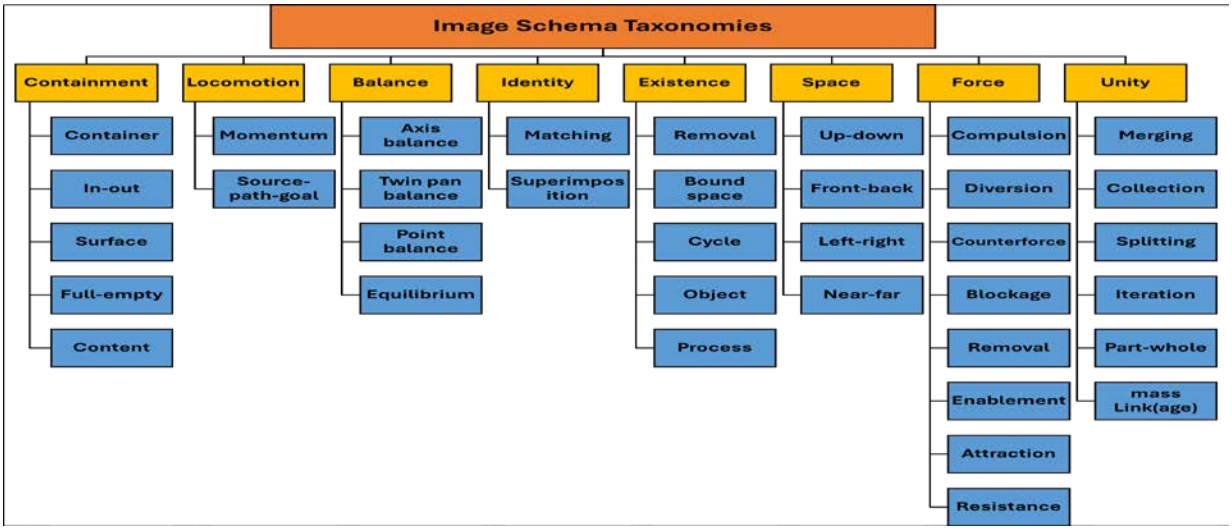


Figure 2. A partial list of image schemas (adapted from Evans & Green,2006, p.190)

Method

The methodology presented in this article is eclectic. It is based on the following models: Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor framework (1980), as well as Lakoff's and Johnson's framework of Image Schema (1987), with some additions by the researcher based on what has been reviewed previously. The study classifies textual extracts into the Political Symbolic Act, Cultural Symbolic Act, and Social Symbolic Act based on the dominant themes in the selected literary work, focusing on the Cognitive Metaphor Strategies (CMS) and Image Schema Strategies (ISS) that are prevalent in *Heart of Darkness* (HOD). After that, the cognitive-semantic strategies used to realize these kinds are discussed, focusing on the overwhelming ones representing the distinguishing features that specify the postcolonial symbolic acts from a cognitive-semantic perspective.

A strictly linguistic approach is adopted and developed, hence bringing to the fore a fact that literary scholars missed out on. Cognitive semantic tools were used to make a precise and more well-grounded description of the text. Although the focus is on the HOD, the study aims to contribute to broader discussions on how cognitive and semantic theories can illuminate the symbolic structure of postcolonial descriptions. Thus, the research is not intended to be an exhaustive postcolonial reading of Conrad's work but instead uses specific texts to illustrate how cognitive-semantic theories can inform our understanding of symbolic acts within a postcolonial framework. The analysis of these frameworks on HOD shapes the interdisciplinary strength of the research by bringing cognitive semantic insights to colonial and postcolonial writings.

Participants

This article examines three symbolic acts from *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, which were chosen based on their representation of key postcolonial issues: political, cultural, and social symbolic acts. The analysts evaluate symbolic acts by applying CM and IS theories from a cognitive-semantic perspective. The study focuses on three significant postcolonial issues embodied in its symbolic acts, which consist of political symbolic acts alongside cultural and social symbolic acts. The novel demonstrates the analysis of colonial events through three main themes,

which integrate psychology with the European-African conflict while delving into psychological studies.

Research Instruments

The evaluation of Conceptual Metaphor Strategies (CMS) and Image Schema Strategies (ISS) in *Heart of Darkness* (HOD) relies upon cognitive-semantic analysis. Researchers who adopt this method gain advanced insight into the postcolonial themes through a more profound comprehension of text-developed cognitive constructs. The systematic research investigates visual aspects of CM and IS throughout the novella. The research evaluates how conceptual metaphors create narrative meanings and how image schemas affect symbolic elements within the written content.

The evaluation locates multiple motifs together with symbolic elements along with metaphorical structures, which demonstrate both colonial and postcolonial aspects. The study integrates various analytical methods to specific portions of the text where researchers evaluate the association of linguistic elements with mental processes alongside the cultural environment. Both textual composition and symbolic process representation are affected by cognitive entities within the theoretical framework. Consequently, the model can be diagrammed as in Appendix A, which offers a systematic way to display connective relationships between various elements.

Primary data include specific texts from the HOD, and the investigation demonstrates the connection between CM and IS. Through the textual analysis of the selected texts, the researcher identifies structural and cognitive, along with symbolic relationships that demonstrate colonial and postcolonial perspectives.

Methods of Analysis

The research project integrates quantitative and qualitative investigation using an integrated mixed research design. The cognitive rules for symbolic acts in the text content are examined through CM and IS analyses as the primary analytical tools. The study calculates the frequency of identified metaphor or image schema by using the percentage equation, which appears as the following mathematical formula:

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{occurrence of each strategy}}{\text{total number of symbolic acts}} x\ 100$$

The formula enables researchers to measure the number of cognitive strategies in the novella, thus revealing their role in postcolonial narrative. The symbolic acts go through categorization as part of an analysis, which interprets their meanings through colonial discourse. The research combines quantitative information with qualitative observations to create a detailed study of cognitive semantics in Conrad's writing.

The Cognitive-Semantic Analysis of Political, Cultural and Social Symbolic Acts

The analysis divides excerpts into Political Symbolic Acts, Cultural Symbolic Acts, and Social Symbolic Acts according to their dominant themes.

A combined analysis of Symbolic Act (SA) Image Schemas Strategies (ISS) and Conceptual Metaphor Strategies (CMS) offers a comprehensive evaluation of Joseph Conrad's political symbolic act in "*Heart of Darkness*". Through its integrated analysis model, the model offers an elaborate explanation of colonial criticism regarding moral values and identity formation (Jameson, 2013).

Political Symbolic Acts (PSA) related to power, colonialism, empire-building, and governance. PSA concentrates on administrative leadership and power relations along with political agent representation. The HOD performs political symbolic acts which reveal both colonial structural frameworks and colonial mental tendencies. Various colonial practices combine exploitation with colonial rule together with martial victory brutality and forced imposition of dominant power along with violent behavior and unlawful actions. For example:

Text 1:

> "The conquest of the earth, which primarily means taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. …" (Conrad, 1902/1983, p.8)

This quote presents an organized cognitive-semantic integration of symbolic postcolonial actions that illustrate a group of PSA (political, cultural, and social) elements, achieved through two primary cognitive-semantic strategies: Image Schema Strategies (ISS) and Conceptual Metaphor Strategies (CMS). Symbolic acts work within political contexts and expand the discussion to encompass cultural and social dimensions.

The two strategies outlined above are further defined by the subsequent sub-strategies: The IS sub-strategies encompassing *identity*, *force*, *space*, and *unity* are integrated with the CMS's sub-strategies of functionality. The concept of "**conquest**" serves as a *structural metaphor*, positioning colonialism as a political symbolic act that is expressed by Muhammad (2018), asserting that colonization is a powerful political tool for illustrating the differences between Europeans and non-Europeans through the lens of war. The HOD presents colonialism as its core political element. Through metaphor we understand colonial activities as harmful activities which reveal the violent nature of imperial projects. The dichotomy between "**civilization**" and "**savagery**" develops a second structural metaphor for cultural evaluation that defines groups through dominance rankings. The colonizers believe they must establish control because they believe they will regulate conflicts between chaos and order.

The metaphorical understanding of reality uses "**Colonialism as a Disease**" to explain its concepts. The cognitive theory demonstrates that imperialism serves beyond actions because it represents an impairing force that impacts both imperialists and subjects of colonization

The colonized frequently appear as the *Other*, resulting in a perception that reduces them to objects instead of recognizing their humanity. Because of this ontological framing, they are dehumanized and their oppression is justified.

"**Taking away**" indicates a *containment* sub-strategy of IS, in which the colonizers force their presence on the land and its inhabitants. This sub-strategy is symbolized by the concepts of journey and movement. The process of conquest entails a physical entry into countries that are not one's own. *The locomotion* sub-strategy is an image of the forceful characteristics inherent in imperialism, wherein colonizers encroach upon territories that do not belong to them, forming a source-path-goal schema to create a political symbolic act of dominance over these spaces.

The notion of *identity* sub-strategy suggests a profound conflict regarding self-definition, wherein the colonizers establish their identity in contrast to those they subjugate. In addition to producing a political symbolic act, this also makes a binary identity that supports ideas of social and cultural symbolic acts.

The *Space* sub-strategy is expressed via Geopolitical Boundaries. The concept of conquering generates novella geopolitical settings characterised by power relations. The colonized regions transform into places of exploitation. The quote illustrates the ethical vacuity of these newly established borders.

The *force* schema is portrayed by the counterforce of dominance through conquering acts, highlighting the violent application of power over others. This emphasises how the CS interpreted the violence of imperial acts and their consequences after colonization.

In the logical understanding of Colonial Justification, there is a *unity* schema. The broken realities of conquest can be hidden by the idea of a single goal to bring civilization to a people. In their search for power, colonizers have a false sense of unity, which is very different from the disunity and suffering of the colonized. Cognitively, the image of "**Civilization is part of power**" forms a whole schema.

By applying cognitive-semantic theories of conceptual metaphor and image schema, the quote reveals more profound meanings in Conrad's criticism of colonialism, which is a critical political symbolic act. The metaphors and schemas not only shape our understanding of imperialism but also reflect the complex cultural and social symbolic acts inherent in the act of conquest. This connection enriches the interpretation of the HOD and highlights the cognitive processes underlying colonial discourse.

Table One and Figure Three below offer the frequencies and percentages of each strategy based on an interpretive analysis of the extract, identifying metaphoric and semantic elements per CSS categories.

Table 1. *The frequencies and percentages of semantic and cognitive devices in text (1)*

Cognitive-Semantic Strategy (CSS)	Frequency	Percentage
Structural Metaphor	2	9%
Ontological Metaphor	3	14%
Orientational Metaphor	1	5%
Conventional Metaphor	2	9%
Unconventional Metaphor	1	5%
Generic level	1	5%
Specific level	1	5%
Containment	2	9%
Locomotion	2	9%
Identity	2	9%
Space	1	5%
Force	2	9%
Unity	1	5%
Total CSS	21	100%

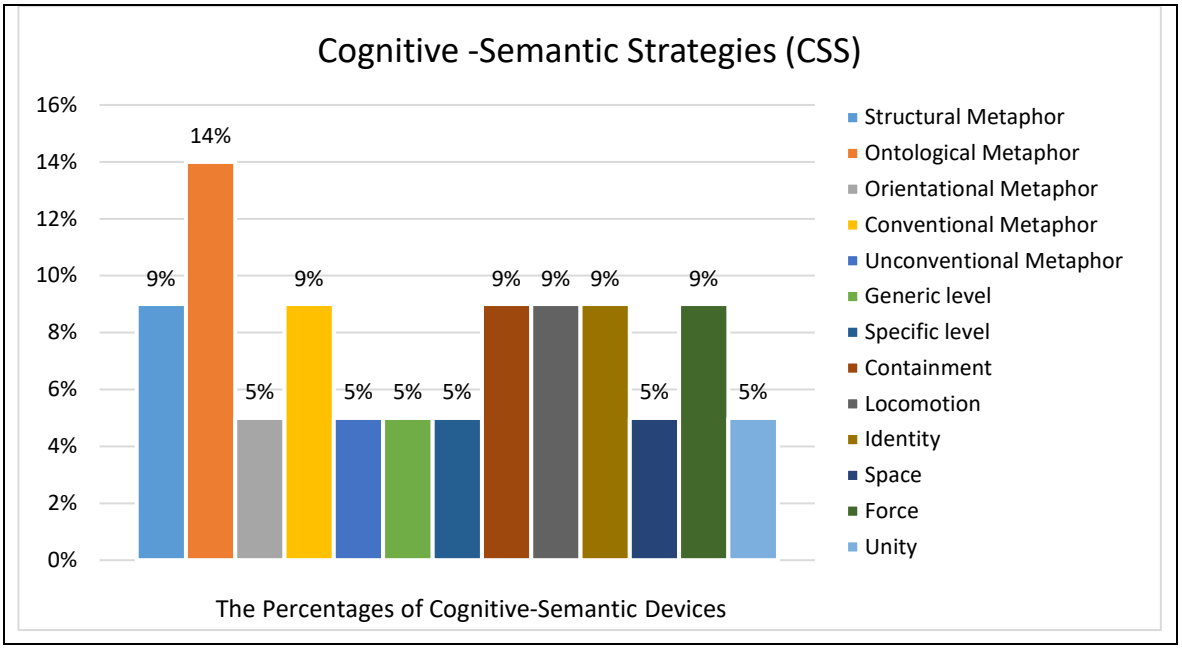


Figure 3. Rates of the cognitive-semantic strategies in text (1)

Cultural Symbolic Acts (CSA) consist of identifying racial meanings apart from ritual beliefs and societal customs which dominate a society. Art, along with religion and language structure, together with music and rituals, represent community lifestyle (Fluck, 1983).

These symbolic acts reflect race, traditions, customs, beliefs, and the clash of civilizations. Indicators of the CSA could be mentioning race (black/white imagery), rituals, ivory, color symbolic acts, as well as references to cultural identity and religious metaphors.

Text 2:

> "The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse……" (Conrad, 1902/1983,p.35)

This extract contains rich imagery and layered meanings that can be analyzed through cognitive semantics, postcolonialism, conceptual metaphors, and image schemas. In the HOD, ivory represents human greed and expoitation. It exposes Europeans' greedy need for money, which can drive them to commit awful crimes. The never-ending search for ivory exemplifies colonial insanity, destroying the humanity of both colonizers and colonized people (Zeidanin, 2020).

According to the functionality classification, the sub-strategy of the CM structural metaphor, the word "**ivory**" serves as a *structural metaphor* for wealth and status, often linked to colonial exploitation. In "**You would think they were praying to it**" the writer demonstrates religious reverence toward ivory pieces and their material worth. In his description of a "**taint of imbecile rapacity**" the author uses ontological metaphor to depict greed as an active agent which spreads as an actual contamination. The excessive interest in ivory surpasses basic material cravings since it demonstrates an actual moral decline. Ul Islam (2023, p. Ul Islam (2023, p. 4) points out that European ivory obsession represents how colonial powers reduced African people into instruments for economic exploitation during their colonial rule.

The extract contains an *Orientational Metaphor* that portrays the act of praying to ivory by positioning the desire for ivory as if it were religious worship, indicating a vertical relationship where ivory is exalted. Throughout the novella and extract readers recognize the symbolic role of ivory which indicates both luxuries and colonial exploitation through *conventional metaphor*. Throughout the novella greed is personified as a "**taint**", which provides an original perspective on this destructive force that exists beyond individual characteristics.

The level of the Generality sub-strategy of the CM can be interpreted as both specific and *generic levels*: The extract speaks to *specific* instances of colonial exploitation and the moral implications of valuing ivory. And *Generic* in the sense that it taps into broader themes of greed, corruption, and the ethical dilemmas associated with material wealth, reflecting a universal critique of consumerism. According to this analysis, it shows that the cognitive domain of the text allows us to explore more profound cultural symbolic acts, positioning greed as a human condition that affects not just individuals but entire cultures.

The containment sub-strategy of IS was founded in the phrase "**a whiff from some corpse**" evokes an image of something decaying and contained, suggesting that the pursuit of ivory is linked to death and moral decay. *Locomotion* sub-strategy represented by the idea of "**rang in the air**" suggests movement and spread, indicating how the obsession with ivory permeates society. *The space* sub-strategy portrayed in **"The Air Filled with the Word Ivory"** creates a cultural SA of a spatial metaphor where this concept occupies a prominent place in the cultural landscape. Force sub-strategy symbolized by the "**taint**" of greediness introduces a force that impacts the characters and society, suggesting that greed has a powerful, negative influence. The unity sub-strategy represented by the imagery creates a sense of unity between the material (**ivory**) and the moral decay it represents, linking societal values with the consequences of colonial exploitation.

Table Two and Figure Four below specify the occurrences and percentages of each strategy based on an interpretive analysis of the extract, recognizing metaphoric and semantic elements per CSS categories.

The extract reveals how cognitive semantics and postcolonialism intersect through metaphorical structures to demonstrate the moral problems arising from colonial wealth, admiration and exploitation. Through vivid images, the material embodies corruption and decay to prompt readers about the societal consequences of greed while showing how ivory served as a commodity during historical times.

Table 2. *The frequencies and percentages of semantic and cognitive devices in text (2)*

Cognitive-Semantic Strategy (CSS)	Frequency	Percentage
Structural Metaphor	1	6%
Ontological Metaphor	2	11%
Conventional Metaphor	2	11%
Unconventional Metaphor	2	11%
Generic Level	2	11%
Specific Level	2	11%
Orientational Metaphor	1	6%
Containment	2	11%
Locomotion	1	6%
Identity	0	0%
Space	1	6%
Force	1	6%
Unity	1	6%
Total CSS	18	100%

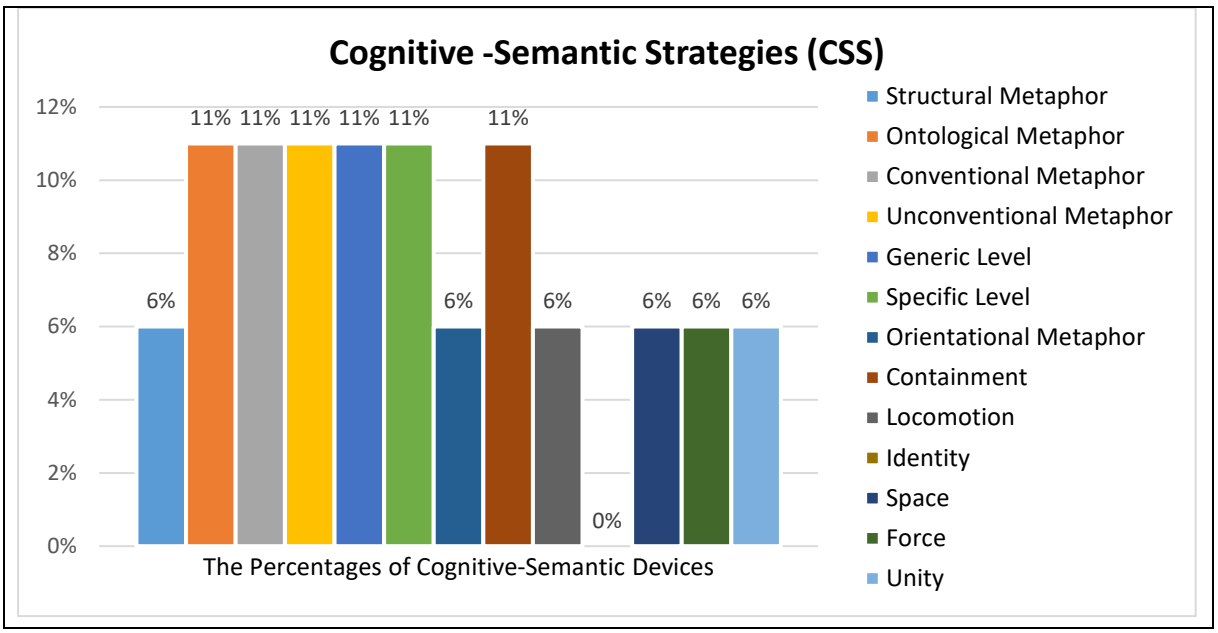


Figure 4. Rates of the cognitive-semantic strategies in text (2)

Social Symbolic Acts (SSA) concern human suffering, morality, and injustice. The SSA focuses on human suffering, morality, racism, and social hierarchy. Postcolonial symbolic acts are recognizable through references to human pain together with lies, deception, greed and hypocrisy. The work addresses social injustice alongside racial inequality and ethical quandaries (For further information, refer to Arendt (1951) and Achebe (2016), and Said (1994))

Text 3:

> "He blew the candle out suddenly, and we went outside. The moon had risen. Black figures strolled about listlessly, pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded a sound of hissing; steam ascended in the moonlight, the beaten nigger groaned somewhere. 'What a row the brute makes!' said the indefatigable man with the mustaches, appearing near us. 'Serve him right. Transgression punishment bang!" (Conrad, 1902/1983, p.40)

The text presents abundant metaphors and images that strengthen its analysis through the eclectic cognitive semantic framework. The text uses dark and light elements to create a structural metaphor which evokes awareness against knowledge gaps. Thus blowing out the candle symbolizes moving away from clear sight toward darkness just like the wider community loses sight of ethical values.

When mentioning "**the beaten nigger**" the author creates an ontological metaphor. The poem describes suffering as a physical experience of events (beating) manifested in a "**beaten**" body metaphor. In this environment, the colonized individual transforms into a mere physical entity, reflecting colonial beliefs that dehumanize those who are oppressed.

"**Moonlight**," "**steam ascending**," and "**pouring water on the glow**" are metaphors for direction and movement. These *orientational metaphors* provide a sensation of something ascending, rising, or flowing. The action of "steam ascending" implies a physical and metaphorical movement towards a higher, untouchable area (perhaps referring to the "purity" of the moonlight, as opposed to the violence occurring beneath).

Using the "**beaten nigger**" as a metaphor is highly unconventional because it makes the person seem less human and more like an object instead of focusing on their humanity. In postcolonial terms, this reflects colonial powers' conventional conception of colonized peoples as objects or lesser persons to be governed socially and culturally.

The extract's generality is in contrast to its precise features. The terms "**transgression**" and "**punishment**" evoke broad ideas about morality, law, and consequences. However, the specificity emerges in features such as "**the beaten nigger**" and "**the indefatigable man with the mustaches**," which indicate a distinct social context, most likely a postcolonial one.

Because the "**beaten nigger**" is physically and socially confined, the term indicates a schema of confinement in imagery. Another possible meaning of the "**candle**" being blown out is the containment of life or hope.

As a sub-strategy of IS, locomotion implies mobility in this context. As a reflection of the unpleasant conditions they face, the "**figures strolled about listlessly**" may suggest a feeling of purposelessness or confusion among the individuals involved. However, the aimlessness of this movement reflects the people's lack of power.

The portrayal of the "**indefatigable man with the mustaches**" communicates a specific identity connected with colonial authority and entitlement, perpetuating power dynamics tropes.

A *spatial image schema* for the colonial society's ethical difficulties is the tension between the moonlight and the darkness. The culturally significant act of purity is symbolized by the moonlight, while Darkness denotes pain and bloodshed. In this dualism, one conceptualizes the moon as representing power and the figures in the dark as representing oppression."**Serve him right**" is an example of a *force schema*, which represents a severe and punishing mindset that justifies punishment by emphasizing the power disparity between the oppressor and the oppressed. *Unity* sub-strategy is represented by the elements of "**punishment"** and "**transgression"**. These elements are unified in the extract, suggesting a complex link between colonial authority and violence.

Table Three and Figure Five present analytic findings on strategies using interpretive analysis from this extract, which breaks down frequencies and percentages for each method while including metaphoric and semantic elements according to CSS categories.

Table 3. *The frequencies and percentages of semantic and cognitive devices in text (3)*

Cognitive-Semantic Strategy (CSS)	Frequency	Percentage
Structural Metaphor	3	12%
Ontological Metaphor	3	12%
Conventional Metaphor	2	8%
Unconventional Metaphor	3	12%
Generic Level	2	8%
Specific Level	2	8%
Orientational Metaphor	2	8%
Containment	2	8%
Locomotion	1	4%
Identity	1	4%
Space	1	4%
Force	2	8%
Unity	1	4%
Total CSS	**25**	**100%**

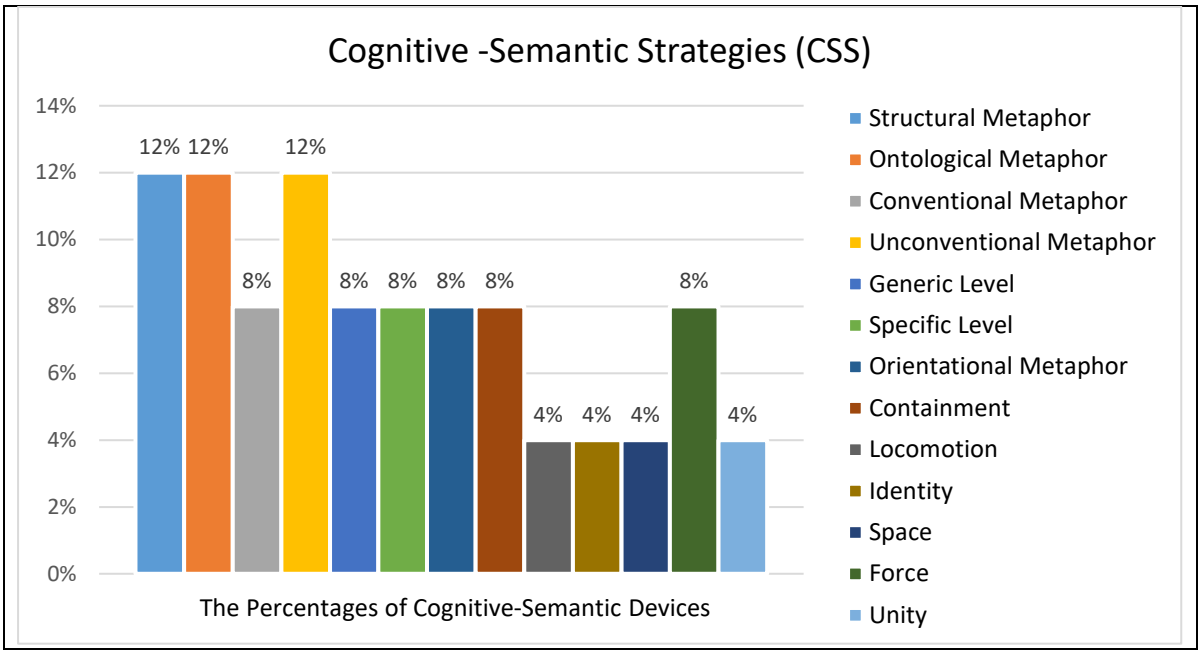


Figure 5. Rates of the cognitive-semantic strategies in text (3)

The analysis of this quote depends on cognitive-semantic conceptual metaphors and image schema theories. Through metaphors and imagery the text shows how cultural and social symbolic acts both exhibit moral complications and brutal nature when it criticizes powerful individuals' attitudes. The investigation yields detailed aspects of the Social Symbolic Act. Darkness together with light creates a model, which demonstrates psychological aspects behind denying humanity to marginalized communities.

Comparison among the three classifications of SAs (PSA, CSA, and SSA)

The subsequent section quantitively examines PSA as well as CSA and SSA and their unique characteristics. The assessments of conceptual metaphors and image schemas identify distinct characteristics that consistently define each category evident in the examined data. These actions have essential symbolic functions in their respective environments because the discussion shows how they actively create meaning to mold political, cultural, and social symbolic acts.

Cognitive-Semantic Strategies *and Symbolic Acts in The Selected Data*

Table Four examines the frequency patterns and percentage distribution of three symbolic act kinds (political, cultural, and social), which use **cognitive-semantic strategies** of **conceptual metaphors** and **image schemas** to display how postcolonial connotation forms within the HOD through different conceptual processes. Figure Six compares the frequencies and percentages of **conceptual metaphor** and **image schemas** strategies across three different postcolonial symbolic acts.

Table 4. *Comparison of the frequencies and percentages of CMS in the PSA, CSA, and SSA in the HOD*

Conceptual Metaphor Strategies	Total Frequency	Political Symbolic Act	Percentage	Cultural Symbolic Act	Percentage	Social Symbolic Act	Percentage
Structural Metaphor	6	2	9%	1	6%	3	12%
Ontological Metaphor	8	3	14%	2	11%	3	12%
Conventional Metaphor	5	1	5%	2	11%	2	8%
Unconventional Metaphor	7	2	9%	2	11%	3	12%
Generic Level	5	1	5%	2	11%	2	8%
Specific Level	5	1	5%	2	11%	2	8%
Orientational Metaphor	4	1	5%	1	6%	2	8%
Containment	6	2	9%	2	11%	2	8%
Locomotion	4	2	9%	1	6%	1	4%
Identity	3	2	9%	0	0%	1	4%
Space	3	1	5%	1	6%	1	4%
Force	5	2	9%	1	6%	2	8%
Unity	3	1	5%	1	6%	1	4%
Total	64	21	33%	18	28%	25	39%

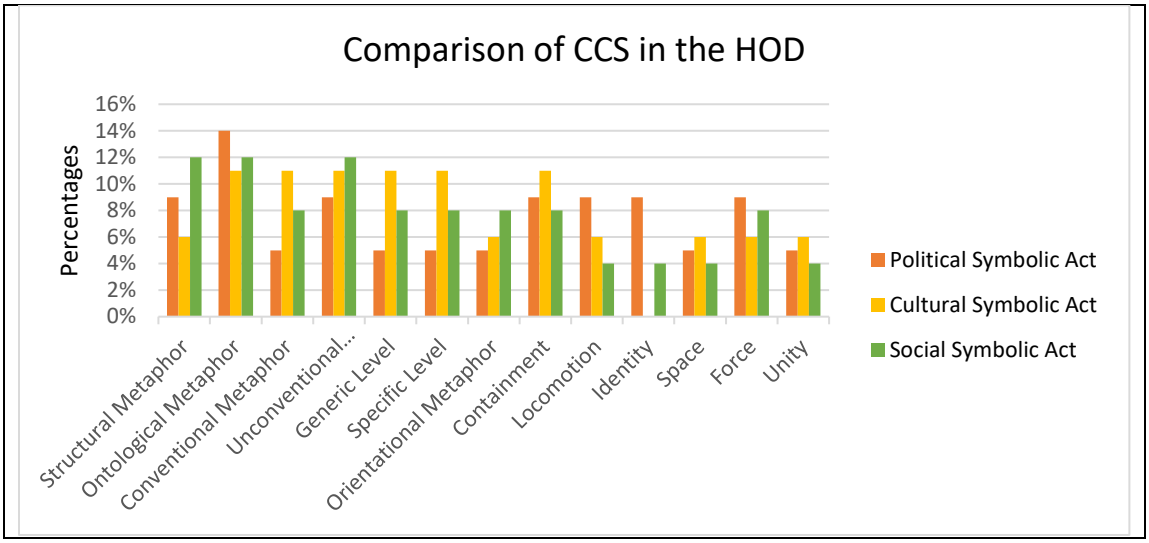


Figure 6. Comparison of the cognitive semantic strategies across political, cultural, and social symbolic acts in the HOD

Analysis of Cognitive Semantic Strategies Across Political, Cultural, and Social Symbolic Acts

This paper examines the distribution of **Cognitive Semantic Strategies (CMS)** across **Political Symbolic Acts (PSA), Cultural Symbolic Acts (CSA), and Social Symbolic Acts (SSA)** in the selected dataset. The primary aim is to identify patterns of Conceptual Metaphor and

Image Schema usage that reinforce **postcolonial themes** in *Heart of Darkness (HOD)* through cognitive-semantic strategies.

Table Four and Figure Six present **64 instances** of CCS distributed across **PSA (33%), CSA (28%), and SSA (39%)**. This indicates that **Social Symbolic Acts (SSA)** exhibit the highest concentration of CSS, reinforcing *HOD*'s **emphasis on human suffering, moral dilemmas, and social injustices**.

Meanwhile, **Political Symbolic Acts (PSA) represent 33%** of the strategy's occurrences, aligning with *HOD*'s critique of **colonialism, power dynamics, and governance**. **Cultural Symbolic Acts (CSA) account for 28%**, reflecting the novella's engagement with **rituals, race, and identity**.

Distribution of Conceptual Metaphor and Image Schema Strategies by Symbolic Acts

Heart of Darkness displays unique patterns of Conceptual Metaphor and Image Schema Strategies through Symbolic Acts among Political (PSA), Cultural (CSA), and Social Symbolic Acts (SSA). The main strategies in SSA reach 39%, whereas PSA maintains 33% and CSA maintains 28%.

The PSA and SSA rely primarily on **structural** then **ontological metaphors** to show imperial control and repression. In contrast, CSA mainly uses **containment metaphors** and **conventional metaphors** to depict rigid colonial stories. The two most prevalent metaphoric conventions in SSA are **force schema** alongside **unconventional metaphors,** which expose HOD's analysis of colonial evil and institutional violence. When translating the meaning of imperial control, PSAs rely heavily on **locomotion** (9%) and **force** (9%) **schema**s. The cultural symbolic act lacks an identity schema entirely, which indicates the HOD devotes fewer analytic resources towards personhood than its political and social postcolonial symbolic act.

The metaphoric distribution in HOD aligns with the postcolonial critique by placing SSA at the forefront because this shows that Conrad devotes his attention to social and ethical imperial consequences beyond cultural or political considerations.

Conceptual metaphor Strategies

1. Structural and Ontological Metaphors

- Structural Metaphor (9% in PSA, 6% in CSA, 12% in SSA)

The social and ethical contradictions in colonial rule are the main focus of structural metaphors in SSA (12%). PSA (9%) adopts structural metaphors to depict colonial control as warfare, whereas CSA (6%) employs them to depict cultural rankings throughout its lines.

- Ontological Metaphor (14% in PSA, 11% in CSA, 12% in SSA)

Ontological metaphors such as "colonialism as a disease" appear across all three symbolic acts. The literary devices apply differently across the three acts in terms of their representation; PSA (14%) employs them to define imperialism, CSA (11%) makes use of them for cultural objects, and SSA (12%) portrays social oppression and dehumanization.

2. Conventional and Unconventional Metaphors

- Conventional Metaphor (5% in PSA, 11% in CSA, 8% in SSA)

Conventional metaphors in CSA feature ivory as wealth because it holds the highest frequency of (11%). PSA (5%) uses fewer established metaphors than other texts, which means political criticism in HOD frequently utilizes alternative metaphorical approaches.

- Unconventional Metaphor (9% in PSA, 11% in CSA, 12% in SSA)

Unconventional metaphors achieve their highest level of occurrence in SSA at 12%, thereby supporting HOD's accusations against corruption and wickedness. Using unconventional metaphors in PSA reached 9% while CSA utilized them to an extent of 11%.

3. Generic vs. Specific Level of Generality

- Generic Level (5% in PSA, 11% in CSA, 8% in SSA)

The majority (11%) of cultural symbolism appears in the CSA, indicating that broad and generalized meanings represent the standard practice in the HOD. General suffering serves as the foundation for statements from SSA (8%), while PSA (5%) builds its arguments using details of colonial governance..

- Specific Level (5% in PSA, 11% in CSA, 8% in SSA)

Among the three symbolic representations, the specific level of suffering occurs at the same rate as the generic level, which confirms that CSA emphasizes concrete cultural meanings and SSA represents generalized and detailed experiences of suffering.

Image Schema Strategies

- Containment (9% in PSA, 11% in CSA, 8% in SSA)

There are numerous containment image schemas that appear most frequently (11%) in CSA, as cultural identity gets represented as captive within colonial discourse.

- Locomotion (9% in PSA, 6% in CSA, 4% in SSA)

The PSA includes the most locomotion schemas (9%) that depict imperial expansion, yet CSA include (6%) and SSA creates (4%) of these ISs to demonstrate cultural displacement and social movement.

- Identity (9% in PSA, 0% in CSA, 4% in SSA)

CSA (0%) contains no identity metaphors, highlighting that the HOD perspective focuses on cultural elements as opposed to personal identity. The concepts of identity take different forms through PSA (9%) and SSA (4%), as they show imperial authority and social alienation, respectively.

- Space (5% in PSA, 6% in CSA, 4% in SSA)

Spatial schematic representation appears more frequently in CPSA (6%) than in the other symbolic acts (SSA and PSA).

The metaphorical usage of force occurs at a rate of 9% in PSA, while CSA exhibits 6% and SSA shows 8%.

The analytic categories in force metaphors show colonial authority in PSA (9%) as well as cultural enforcement in CSA (6%) and social suppression in SSA (8%).

- Unity (5% in PSA, 6% in CSA, 4% in SSA)

Unity schemas describe imperial control in PSA (5%), and cultural symbolic acts also exist in CSA (6%), yet social struggles are shown in SSA (4%).

Discussion

The study investigated how *Heart of Darkness* represents postcolonial topics through both Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Image Schema Theory (IST). The researchers grouped symbolic actions under three categories, which included Political Symbolic Acts (PSA), Cultural Symbolic Acts (CSA), and Social Symbolic Acts (SSA), to investigate their impact on colonial discourse.

The research showed SSA was the strongest category because it comprised 39% of all cognitive-semantic strategies (CSS). The novella dedicates its focus to both the suffering of people

and unjust social programs alongside moral conundrums. Through structural, ontological and unconventional metaphors, SSA demonstrated how imperialism both contradicted itself and dehumanized people during its operations.

PSA occupied one-third of the cognitive-semantic strategies (CSS) to evince colonial governance and expansion paradigms. His publication utilized structural along with ontological metaphors as well as locomotion and force schemas as its primary semantic cognitive strategies. The metaphors combine to showcase that colonial power features embedded structural elements demonstrating imperial domination over the colony.

The (28%) portion of the CSS that fell under the CSA category represented both cultural identity symbolism and imaginary colonial myths. The depiction of imperial ideologies in this category depended mainly on containment and conventional metaphors, which concentrated on cultural entrapment and maintaining colonial narratives. CSA avoided demonstrating identity metaphors throughout its entire content (0%), while emphasizing objects and rituals that surpassed personal identities.

Metaphorical structures appeared predominantly in SSA with (12%) compared to (9%) and (6%) in PSA and CSA, respectively, for showing colonial power hierarchies. The pervasive, destructive nature of imperial rule became reinforced through ontological metaphors using comparisons like “colonialism as a disease” throughout all symbolic act categories.

Two significant groups of metaphors are divided into conventional and unconventional categories. Throughout CSA, conventional metaphors made up (11%) of the content, yet SSA employed (12%) unconventional metaphors as a method to both critique and challenge colonial contradictions. The PSA metaphorical dimension brought themes of authority and alienation through its usage of (9%).

The research analyzed particular image schema approaches which significantly impacted colonial theme representation. In CSA (11%) of schemas depicted cultural entrapment by using containment schemas, whereas locomotion schemas (9% in PSA) presented colonial expansion to viewers. Some images in PSA and SSA (9%, 8%) depicted both dominance and defiance against imperial power simultaneously; other images (PSA=6%, CSA=6%) showed total ideological control and resistance to imperialism.

The cognitive-semantic analysis of *Heart of Darkness* shows how complicated colonial discourse operates and gets challenged throughout the text. This analysis applies the methods of metaphorical and schematic analysis, while showing how Conrad writes about postcolonialism through *Heart of Darkness* and describing key symbolic moments throughout the story.

Conclusion

This investigation shows that *Heart of Darkness* uses cognitive-semantic strategies to transmit colonial ideologies and their associated forms of resistance. SSA carried the most remarkable frequency of usage because it brought attention to imperialism's social as well as moral implications. Structural and ontological metaphors appear persistently throughout the play to demonstrate that colonialism exists deeply within linguistic systems and cognitive functions, hence shaping how people perceive dominance relations.

The author uses CSA to maintain colonial views, yet PSA uncovers imperial control frameworks before SSA unveils imperial violence and ethical flaws. Subsequently, dehumanization becomes a central theme in colonial discourse because CSA avoids using identity metaphors.

Combining these two frameworks enables this research to forge a connection between cognitive literary studies and postcolonial criticism, resulting in new insights into colonial literary symbolism. The investigation affirms that Heart of Darkness makes a dual statement against colonial oppression while examining how language constructs imperial imagery. Conducting cognitive-semantic model analyses across various postcolonial texts would yield a deeper understanding of the linguistic and cognitive dimensions of power dynamics within literary discourse.

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Exploring the Relationship between Classroom English Proficiency and Teacher Self-Efficacy Among Polytechnic EFL Teachers

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Abstract
This study aimed to examine the relationship between classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy among English as a Foreign Language teachers in Chinese polytechnics. Specifically, it sought to address to what extent classroom English proficiency affects teacher self-efficacy in Chinese polytechnic EFL teachers. It is significant as it highlights the crucial role of classroom English proficiency in shaping teacher self-efficacy, offering insights for targeted professional development programs. Data were self-reported by 254 polytechnic EFL teachers using two validated measurement scales. Both Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis yielded satisfactory results, affirming the factor structure and indicating a good model fit. Descriptive analyses showed that both classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy were at moderate levels. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy, with grammatical and lexical accuracy and range, as well as language of interaction, exhibiting stronger correlations with teacher self-efficacy compared to pronunciation, stress and intonation, and language of instruction. The multiple regression analysis further demonstrated that grammatical and lexical accuracy and range, together with language of interaction, have a significant positive impact on teacher self-efficacy. These findings underscore the importance of prioritizing strategic training in grammar lexical accuracy and range, and the language of interaction skills for EFL teachers with limited English proficiency. Enhancing these competencies is posited to contribute to the development and sustained enhancement of self-efficacy among EFL teachers in Chinese polytechnics.

Keywords: Classroom English proficiency, English as a foreign language, grammar and lexical accuracy and range, language interaction skills, teacher self-efficacy

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Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative requires Chinese to have qualified English proficiency since English, as a lingua franca (Luczaj et al., 2022; Seidlhofer, 2013), greatly facilitates interpersonal communication and contributes positively to the framework of global governance (Gao, 2020). The English Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education (2021 edition) further highlights that EFL teachers should be equipped to provide effective English instruction and engage in educational research (The Ministry of Education, 2021). For non-native English teachers, English proficiency serves as a foundational component of their teaching confidence and efficacy (Karas & Faez, 2021; Kamhi-Stein, 2009; Murdoch, 1994). Despite this emphasis, recent data from the EF English Proficiency Index (2023), which ranks 113 countries and regions by English skills, places China the 82 nd with low proficiency (Education First, 2023). This result underscores the need for substantial improvement in English proficiency to meet the standards for high-quality English instruction. Enhancing teachers' English proficiency is essential for improving teaching effectiveness (Aisyah, 2022; Richards, 2017) and fostering greater self-efficacy in their teaching roles (Choi & Lee, 2016; Karas & Faez, 2021; Xu et al., 2022; Yilmaz, 2011), especially as they face the unique challenges of English Language Teaching (ELT) in the classroom (Freeman, 2017; Freeman et al., 2015). According to Bandura(1997), self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully organize and perform the necessary actions to achieve a particular goal. Bandura (2001) further elaborated that self-efficacy has a profound impact on how teachers approach their work, including the types of goals they set and the level of dedication they commit to achieving these goals. Extending Bandura's work, Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy ((1998) described teacher self-efficacy as a teacher's belief in their ability to plan, coordinate, and implement a range of teaching strategies within a specific classroom setting. Teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to have greater confidence in their instructional strategies (Poulou et al., 2019) and teacher quality (Na & Isa, 2024).

Over the past twenty years, numerous studies have investigated the connection between teachers' language proficiency and self-efficacy (Choi & Lee, 2016; Karas & Faez, 2021; Wang & Sun, 2020; Yilmaz, 2011). English proficiency is commonly acknowledged as a key factor influencing teacher self-efficacy, especially for non-native English instructors (Choi & Lee, 2016; Kamhi-Stein, 2009; Nakata, 2010). A sufficient level of proficiency in English is crucial for EFL teachers, as it allows them to provide richer and more effective language input to students (Van Canh & Renandya, 2017). More specifically, classroom English proficiency enables teachers to concentrate on language skills that are directly relevant to the tasks at hand, which in turn boosts both teaching effectiveness and student involvement (Freeman, 2017; Freeman et al., 2015). Since there is ongoing debate over whether general English proficiency or classroom English proficiency is of more significance for English teaching (Freeman et al., 2015; Wang, 2021), this study primarily aimed to explore the relationship with self-efficacy from the perspective of classroom English proficiency, helping to fill the research gap in this field, particularly in the context of China's growing focus on higher vocational English education. By supporting EFL teacher development, this study contributes to China's educational goals under the Belt and Road Initiative, aiding talent cultivation for global collaboration. Based on the backgrounds and the objectives, the following research questions need to be answered:

RQ1: What are the levels of classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between classroom English proficiency, grammatical accuracy and range, pronunciation, stress, and intonation, the language of interaction, the language of

instruction, and teacher self-efficacy?

RQ3: What are the effects of classroom English proficiency, grammatical accuracy and range, pronunciation, stress, and intonation, the language of interaction and the language of instruction on teacher self-efficacy?

Literature Review

Classroom English Proficiency

Global efforts to improve the quality of instructed English language learning have heightened the demands on teachers to achieve higher proficiency in the target language (Argudo Serrano et al., 2021; Faez et al., 2021; Masduki et al., 2022; Van Canh & Renandya, 2017). Ellis (2005) highlighted that teachers with advanced target language proficiency are considered more effective at delivering abundant language input to students. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasises the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and indicates that Learning is most effective when activities are designed within this zone, allowing learners to engage in tasks just beyond their current capabilities but achievable with appropriate support (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). In the context of second language acquisition, Ellis (2005) and Krashen (1985) suggested that effective language acquisition takes place when learners are provided with input that is just beyond their current language ability, often referred to as i+1, which they can still understand, in Vygotsky's terms, falling within their ZPD. In the case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), teachers are often the primary source of such input. Teachers with advanced target language proficiency are considered more effective at delivering abundant language input to students (Ellis, 2005), thus enhancing teaching effectiveness (Sadeghi et al., 2020). Teachers with advanced language skills can offer learners the right balance of challenge and support, ensuring that they are consistently exposed to language that encourages development without being overwhelming. Walsh (2002) emphasized that language use in the foreign language classroom is crucial, as it directly impacts learner participation and interaction, and teachers must be aware of the link between their language choices and pedagogic goals to maximize learning opportunities and promote effective communication. Thus, a teacher's English proficiency plays a central role in facilitating students' language acquisition and growth, as students expect their teachers to possess a satisfactory level of proficiency, which in turn enhances their communication abilities (Masduki et al., 2022).

However, the difficulty in researching teachers' target English proficiency stems from the way language proficiency as a construct is defined (Van Canh & Renandya, 2017). Classroom English proficiency and general English proficiency have been subjects of considerable debate in recent years, particularly interested in determining which of these two factors plays a more significant role in English language teaching (Freeman, 2017; Freeman et al., 2015; Macaro, 2020; Rouf & Mohamed, 2022; Thi Hong Nhung, 2018; Van Canh & Renandya, 2017; Wang, 2021). Macaro (2020) indicated that English teaching requires classroom language skills that extend beyond general language proficiency. Freeman (2017) conducted a study advocating for the importance of teachers' classroom English proficiency, highlighting that language instruction focusing solely on general language skills often does not address the specific professional needs of educators. This is because "English-for-Teaching" is a framework designed to focus on how teachers use English in the classroom setting. A conversation analysis was conducted to examine how teachers' use of the target language creates learning opportunities for L2 learners, indicating that while general language proficiency impacts classroom language use, classroom-specific proficiency is equally important in supporting student learning (Van Canh & Renandya, 2017). Thi

Hong Nhung found that teachers preferred classroom English training for its relevance to their teaching and recommended prioritizing it in contexts with a shortage of qualified teachers and high proficiency standards (Thi Hong Nhung, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to explore the research on classroom English proficiency in greater depth, and this study will conduct an in-depth investigation with classroom English proficiency as one of the key variables. In the context of this study, classroom English proficiency refers to EFL teachers' ability to use English effectively for implementing specific classroom activities in polytechnic settings.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, a core construct in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977), refers to an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute actions required to achieve specific outcomes (Bandura, 1986). The level of self-efficacy significantly influences individuals' choices (Chunta & DuPaul, 2022; Kahraman et al., 2021), goal-setting, and their commitment to pursuing and achieving those goals (Bandura, 1997; Hoffmann & Plotkina, 2021).

In recent years, the study of self-efficacy has expanded across numerous disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and education, drawing attention from international scholars and researchers. In the educational context, research has addressed a wide array of participants, from students and instructors to educational policymakers (Roddenberry & Renk, 2010; Smith et al., 2023; Smith, 2022). Teacher efficacy, a subset of self-efficacy within educational research, refers to teachers' beliefs in their abilities to achieve desired student outcomes, such as engagement and learning (Bandura, 1986). Building on Rotter's Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966), early researchers from the Rand researchers conceptualized teacher efficacy as the degree to which teachers believe they can influence the results of their actions within the classroom. Guskey and Passaro (1994) further emphasized this, defining teacher efficacy as the conviction that educators can positively impact student learning, even when working with students who are challenging or unmotivated. In the context of this study, teacher self-efficacy refers to EFL teachers' confidence in effectively planning and implementing actions to achieve specific teaching objectives in polytechnic settings.

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) refined the concept by defining teacher efficacy as a teacher's belief in their capacity to organize and implement actions needed to accomplish specific teaching tasks in particular contexts. They developed a cyclical model of teacher efficacy that includes two interrelated components: (1) Analysis of Teaching Task (ATT): this refers to teachers' assessment of the instructional demands they anticipate within their teaching context. Teachers analyze the level of complexity and specific conditions needed to be effective in that environment (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). (2) Assessment of Personal Teaching Competence (APTC): teachers evaluate their skills, knowledge, and teaching strategies, acknowledging strengths and identifying areas for improvement. This self-assessment is influenced by personal attributes and perceived limitations. These two components interact to shape a teacher's overall self-efficacy, as they assess both task demands and personal competence to meet these demands. For this study, Tschannen-Moran et al.' model serves as the guiding theoretical framework, with a specific focus on classroom English proficiency as an element of personal teaching competence. Within this framework, classroom English proficiency is integral to teachers' perceptions of their competence in teaching English, especially in polytechnic educational settings where language instruction requirements are unique. By focusing on classroom English proficiency within the context of teacher efficacy, this study addresses a gap in the literature, providing insights that are particularly relevant to polytechnic English education in China.

Relationship Between Classroom English Proficiency and Teacher Self-Efficacy

Research on the relationship between English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy has been conducted in recent decades (Choi & Lee, 2016; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Karas & Faez, 2021; Thi Hong Nhung, 2018; Wang, 2021; Wang & Sun, 2020; Xu et al., 2022; Yilmaz, 2011). Most studies have considered general English proficiency as a key factor linked to teacher self-efficacy and have highlighted a certain relationship between the two (Choi & Lee, 2016; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Karas & Faez, 2021; Thi Hong Nhung, 2018; Wang & Sun, 2020; Xu et al., 2022; Yilmaz, 2011). Language proficiency and teacher self-efficacy are interdependent, with teachers who exceed the minimum threshold levels of both attributes showing positive associations with increased English use in the classroom (Thi Hong Nhung, 2018). However, these studies fail to offer useful insights for enhancing teacher self-efficacy in alignment with language of instruction and language of interaction (Wang, 2021). Freeman et al. advocated for a redefinition of teacher language proficiency, suggesting that it should not be viewed as general language proficiency, but rather as a specialized set of language skills necessary for lesson preparation and instruction (Freeman et al., 2015). A significant positive relationship was found between classroom English proficiency of teaching self-efficacy among English teachers (Wang, 2021). These findings implied that enhancing teachers' English proficiency may not only improve the quality of instruction but also bolster their confidence and perceived effectiveness in their teaching practices.

Despite extensive research on language proficiency and teacher self-efficacy, there is a significant gap in understanding the self-efficacy of EFL teachers in vocational education, particularly in relation to classroom English proficiency. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to address this gap, offering valuable insights into self-efficacy in this specific context.

Method

The Quantitative method was used in this research. Firstly, EFA and CFA were used to explore the factors and verify the construct validity. Secondly, descriptive analysis was employed to identify the level of classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy. Moreover, the Pearson correlation analysis was applied to reveal the relationship between classroom English proficiency, grammatical accuracy and range, pronunciation, stress, and intonation, the language of interaction, the language of instruction and teacher self-efficacy. Finally, the multiple regression analysis was utilized to analyze the effects of classroom English proficiency, grammatical accuracy and range, pronunciation, stress, and intonation, the language of interaction, and the language of instruction on teacher self-efficacy.

Respondents

Convenience sampling was employed to recruit respondents for this study. The respondents consisted of EFL teachers from Chinese polytechnic institutions. Following data cleaning procedures, a total of 254 valid responses were collected, yielding a final sample size of 254. To ensure the confidentiality, all data were securely stored and anonymized. The identities of respondents were not disclosed in any published materials. The detailed demographics of the respondents based on gender and teaching experience are listed in Table One:

Table 1. *Demographics of the respondents*

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	24	9
Female	230	91
Teaching Experience		
1-5 years	39	15.4
6-10 years	32	12.6
11-15 years	48	18.9
16-20 years	76	29.9
21 years and	59	23.2

Research Instruments

The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) used was established by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). Recent studies have confirmed that TSES is a reliable instrument for evaluating teaching self-efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) identified three dimensions of this scale: Efficacy for instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. The reported reliability coefficients for these three sub-scales are 0.91 for instructional strategies, 0.90 for classroom management, and 0.87 for student engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

The TSES scale is available in both a 24-item long form and a 12-item short form. This study used the modified short form of the scale, changing "children" to "students" and replacing two items from the long form. In classroom management, "How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?" was changed to "To what extent can you clarify your expectations about student behavior?". In student engagement, "How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?" became "How much can you do to foster student creativity?" Additionally, all items were rephrased as statements starting with "I can" for consistency with other scales (Wang, 2021). The validity of the instrument was assessed based on feedback from participants and three field test experts. A 5-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire. EFL teachers in Polytechnic were asked to rate items according to how much they agreed or disagreed with them.

In the pilot study, the Cronbach's Alpha of TSES in this study was 0.79, indicating the scale has good internal consistency with good reliability. In addition, the factor structure of the TSES was tested using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Varimax rotation. The KMO value obtained was 0.809. This analysis identified three dimensions that aligned with the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), accounting for 53.28% of the variance in the model. The factor loadings were to range from 0.62 to 0.82. Furthermore, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to verify the construct validity (Kline, 2023) with the Amos 28 program. The model demonstrated a good fit by using the criteria of Fornell and Lacker (1981) with the data, as indicated by Chi-square ($\chi^2 = 76.54$, df = 51, p = 0.01) with CMIN/DF = 1.50, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, and RMSEA = 0.04, PCLOSE = 0.65). These indices, along with adequate NFI (0.89) and IFI (0.96) values, suggest that the hypothesized factor structure aligns well with the observed data, meeting commonly recommended thresholds for acceptable model fit. CFA results showed acceptable factor loadings (ranging from 0.48 to 0.79). The AVE values for each dimension were

below the recommended 0.5 threshold indicating limited convergent validity. However, the construct reliability (CR) values were above 0.70 for efficacy for classroom management and student engagement, 0.66 for efficacy for instructional strategies, suggesting a reasonable level of internal consistency (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Lam, 2012). Discriminant validity was confirmed by HTMT ratios ranging from 0.28 to o.43 (below the 0.85 threshold). These results support the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement model.

The Classroom English Proficiency Scale

The Classroom English Proficiency Scale (CEPS) was established by Wang (2021) based on the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority & Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2001). There are 12 self-reported items with four dimensions namely grammatical and lexical accuracy and range, pronunciation, stress and intonation, the language of interaction and the language of instruction with Cronbach's Alph 0.94 for internal consistency (Wang, 2021). A 5-point Likert scale was used in this study.

In the pilot study, the Cronbach's Alpha of CEPS in this study was 0.77, showing the scale has good internal consistency with reasonable reliability. The factor structure of the CEPS was tested using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Varimax rotation. The KMO value obtained was 0.77. This analysis identified four dimensions that aligned with the CEPS, accounting for 60.9% of the variance in the model. The factor loadings were to range from 0.59 to 0.81. Moreover, the model of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) demonstrated a good fit with the data by using the criteria of Fornell and Lacker (Smith, 2022), as indicated by Chi-square ($\chi^2 = 81.91$, df = 48, p = 0.00) with a CMIN/DF = 1.71, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, and RMSEA = 0.05, PCLOSE = 0.38). These indices, along with adequate NFI (.88) and IFI (.95) values, suggest that the hypothesized factor structure aligns well with the observed data, meeting commonly recommended thresholds for acceptable model fit. CFA results showed acceptable factor loadings (ranging from 0.44 to 0.81). The AVE values for each dimension were below the recommended 0.5 threshold, indicating limited convergent validity. However, the construct reliability (CR) values were above 0.70 for grammatical and lexical accuracy and range, pronunciation, stress and intonation, the language of interaction, 0.55 for the language of instruction, suggesting a reasonable level of internal consistency (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Lam, 2012). Discriminant validity was confirmed by HTMT ratios ranging from 0.20 to o.38 (below the 0.85 threshold). These results support the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Research Procedure

To fulfill the aims of this study, the selected respondents were asked to complete an online survey questionnaire, which included a series of validated measures for the variables. The survey was designed using the widely used online platform "Wenjuanxing" by incorporating questionnaire items into the system. Afterwards, the survey links were distributed to EFL teachers from Chinese polytechnics. Prior to answering the questionnaire items, the respondents received instructions on how to complete the survey. They were also informed that their respondents would be utilized solely for research purposes and that the confidentiality of the collected data would be strictly maintained.

Results

Level of Classroom English Proficiency and Teacher Self-Efficacy of EFL Teachers

The descriptive statistics shown in Table One provide the means and standard deviations for each scale and subscale. The Skewness and Kurtosis of all the variables in this study fell within the range of range of (-2, +2), indicating that data were approximately normally distributed (Pallant, 2020). The data shows that EFL teachers reported high levels of self-efficacy (M = 3.83) and among self-efficacy dimensions, classroom management scored highest (M = 3.98), while classroom English proficiency (M = 3.94) and student engagement (M = 3.57) were slightly lower. EFL teachers reported high levels of classroom English proficiency (M = 3.94). The level of all four sub-dimensions (e.g., grammatical, pronunciation) had similar mean scores around 3.93-3.96, indicating consistently strong proficiency in classroom English use.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics for classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy*

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Teacher Self-Efficacy	3.83	.33	.02	.02
Efficacy for Instructional Strategies	3.94	.41	-.04	1.1
Efficacy for Classroom Management	3.98	.42	.15	.19
Efficacy for Student Engagement	3.57	.46	-.01	-.11
Classroom English Proficiency	3.94	.27	-.09	.73
Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range	3.93	.39	-.52	2.9
Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation	3.93	.40	-.05	1.3
Language of Interaction	3.96	.39	.01	1.25
Language of Instruction	3.93	.39	-.08	.96

N = 254, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Relationship Between Classroom English Proficiency, Grammatical Accuracy and Range, Pronunciation, Stress, and Intonation, the Language of Interaction, the Language of Instruction, and Teacher Self-Efficacy

The correlational analysis was used to examine the relationship between classroom English proficiency, grammatical accuracy and range, pronunciation, stress, and intonation, the language of interaction, the language of instruction and teacher self-efficacy. The Pearson correlation analysis in Table Two demonstrates a strong positive relationship between classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$). Within the four sub-scales of classroom English proficiency, grammatical and lexical accuracy and range ($r = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$), and language of interaction ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$) showed stronger correlations with teacher self-efficacy compared to pronunciation, stress and intonation ($r = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$) and language of instruction ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$). The results of the Pearson correlation test are as follows:

Table 2. *Pearson correlation test results of the relationship between classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy of EFL teachers.*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Teacher Self-Efficacy	1					
Classroom English Proficiency	.40**	1				
Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and Range	.35**	.68**	1			
Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation	.26**	.67**	.28**	1		
Language of Interaction	.33**	.74**	.27**	.37**	1	
Language of Instruction	.18**	.70**	.34**	.21**	.41**	1

The Effect of Classroom English Proficiency, Grammatical Accuracy and Range, Pronunciation, Stress, And Intonation, the Language of Interaction and the Language of Instruction on Teacher Self-Efficacy

The multiple regression analysis was employed, in which classroom English proficiency and its four components were used as predictors of teacher self-efficacy. Prior to doing the multiple regression, the linearity, homoscedasticity and normality tests were done through SPSS 27 program. The result of the scatter plot (Figure One) confirmed the fulfillment of the requirements of linearity and homoscedasticity. The result of the residual normal plot (Figure Two) shows that the data distribution was normal because it was bell-shaped. The regression normal P-P plot (Figure Three) illustrates that the data points were approximately aligned along a diagonal line from the bottom left to the top right. This alignment suggests that the data didn't deviate from a normal distribution and there was a positive correlation between independent variables and dependent variables (Pallant, 2020).

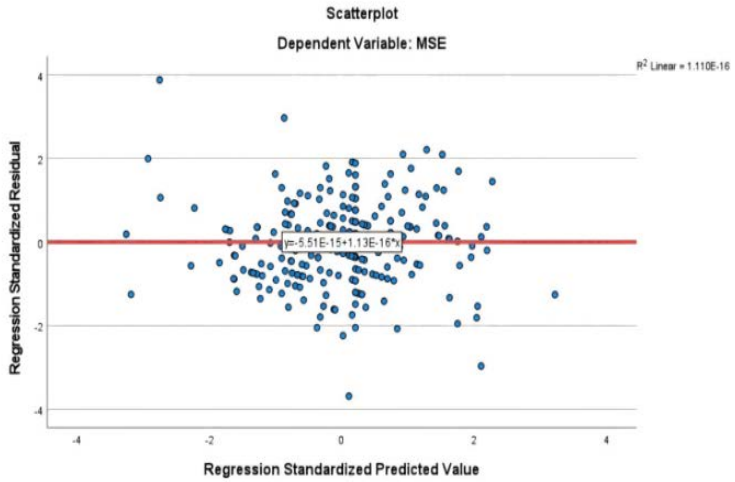


Figure 1. Residual Scatter plot

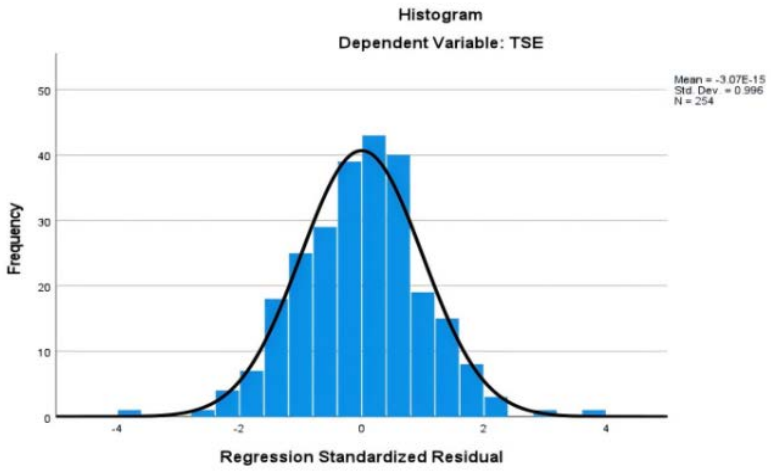


Figure 2. Regression standardized residual plot

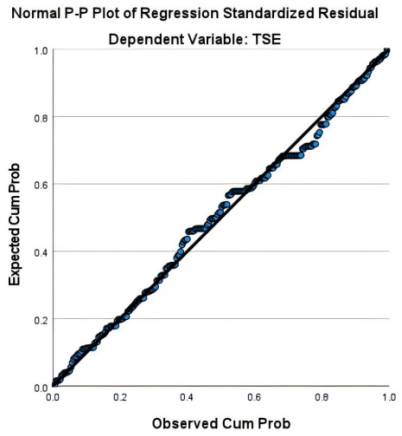


Figure 3. Regression normal P-P plot

Table Three presents an analysis exploring how classroom English proficiency and its four components predict teacher self-efficacy. The R^2-value [R^2= 0.19, F(4, 249) = 14.82, P < 0.001] indicated that 19% of the variance of teacher self-efficacy was explained by classroom English proficiency. The results show that grammatical and lexical accuracy and range (β= 0.273) and language of interaction (β= 0.229) had a significant positive impact on teacher self-efficacy. However, Pronunciation, Stress, and Intonation (β= 0.098) and Language of Instruction (β= -0.025) didn't have a significant effect. The VIF values for predictors were below 10, indicating no issues with multicollinearity, supporting the validity of the regression model (Hair et al., 2019). The result of the multiple regression analysis is as follows:

Table 3. *Multiple regression analysis for classroom English proficiency predicting teacher self-efficacy*

Variables	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	p	VIF
	B	Std.error	Beta			
(Constant)	1.94	.27		7.2	.00	
Grammatical and Lexical Accuracy and	.23	.05	.27	4.4	.00	1.2
Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation	.08	.05	.10	1.6	.12	1.2
Language of Interaction	.19	.06	.23	3.5	.00	1.3
Language of Instruction	-.02	.06	-.03	-.39	.70	1.3

N = 254, R^2 = 0.19, F(4, 249) = 14.82, p < 0.001

Discussion

The results showed that EFL teachers had high levels of both classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy, with classroom management scoring the highest among self-efficacy dimensions. The four sub-dimensions of classroom English proficiency also demonstrated consistently strong performance. Correlation analysis indicated a positive relationship between classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy. Among the sub-dimensions, grammatical and lexical accuracy and language of interaction had strong links to teacher self-efficacy compared to pronunciations, stress, intonation, and language instruction. Regression analysis confirmed that classroom English proficiency significantly influenced teacher self-efficacy, particularly grammatical and lexical accuracy and language of interaction. In contrast, pronunciation, stress, intonation, and language of instruction had no notable impact.

The descriptive data results of this study indicate that EFL teachers in this study perceived themselves as having high levels of self-efficacy, particularly in classroom management, with slightly lower self-assessed proficiency in instructional strategies and student engagement. The finding is quite consistent with the previous studies in the field of EFL teaching (Kaygısız et al., 2018; Safitri, 2021). The consistency across the four sub-dimensions of classroom language proficiency—grammatical and lexical accuracy, pronunciation, interaction, and instruction—suggested that teachers possessed a well-rounded ability to utilize English in various instructional contexts. This uniformity might indicate a comprehensive development of language skills tailored for classroom teaching, possibly a result of focused language training specific to instructional needs. These findings suggested that EFL teacher training should emphasize strategies for student engagement, as this area scored lowest in self-efficacy. Additionally, the consistent proficiency across all language sub-dimensions indicated that integrated language skill development is effective; thus, future professional development should maintain this comprehensive approach. Supporting teachers in both classroom language use and engagement strategies could enhance their overall instructional effectiveness (Aisyah, 2022; Freeman et al., 2015; Wang, 2021).

The Pearson correlation analysis shows a moderate positive relationship between classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy ($r = 0.40$), indicating that improved classroom English proficiency was linked to higher self-efficacy (Choi & Lee, 2016; Thi Hong Nhung, 2018; Wang, 2021). Among proficiency areas, grammatical and lexical accuracy and range and the language of interaction had the strongest associations with self-efficacy, suggesting these skills are key in supporting teacher self-efficacy. These detailed findings is not consistent with those of Wang (2021), which indicates that the correlations between the language of instruction and interaction with teaching self-efficacy were stronger than those between grammar and pronunciation.

The regression analysis indicates that classroom English proficiency accounted for a notable portion (19%) of the variance in teacher self-efficacy, with grammatical and lexical accuracy and language of interaction emerging as significant predictors. These findings suggest that teachers' abilities in these specific language areas were closely tied to their confidence and perceived effectiveness in the classroom. In contrast, pronunciation, stress, and intonation, along with the language of instruction, did not show a significant impact, possibly because these elements, while important, may be less central to self-efficacy in instructional contexts.

In recent years, classroom English proficiency and general English proficiency have been widely debated, with researchers focusing on which plays a greater role in EFL teaching (Aisyah, 2022; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Freeman, 2017; Thi Hong Nhung, 2018; Van Canh & Renandya, 2017; Wang, 2021; Yilmaz, 2011). In this study, grammatical and lexical accuracy, emerged as a significant predictor of teacher self-efficacy, underscoring the importance of these areas as part of a broader language proficiency. The findings of this study align with previous research (Aisyah, 2022; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Yilmaz, 2011) that emphasized the significance of teachers' general English proficiency in EFL teaching. Language of interaction was another important predictor of teacher self-efficacy. This result suggests that classroom language skills (such as language of interaction) play crucial roles in enhancing teaching effectiveness and self-confidence, consistent with the arguments of Freeman (2017), Thi Hong Nhung (2018), and Wang (2021). Therefore, teacher development programs should focus on strengthening both aspects of grammar, vocabulary and classroom interaction language rather than prioritizing one over the other. This approach would better support teachers in developing the comprehensive language skills needed to foster effective teaching and positive classroom dynamics.

Conclusion

This study highlights that EFL teachers generally perceive themselves as highly self-efficacious, particularly in classroom management. However, their self-efficacy in student engagement and instructional strategies was reported to be slightly lower. Additionally, classroom English proficiency emerged as a significant factor influencing teacher self-efficacy, with grammatical and lexical accuracy and range, as well as language of interaction, being the strongest predictors.

The positive relationship between classroom English proficiency and teacher self-efficacy suggests that teachers who demonstrate greater command of classroom English feel more confident in managing their teaching tasks effectively. In particular, a strong grasp of grammar, vocabulary, and interactive language skills appears to contribute significantly to teachers' ability to engage students and deliver lessons with clarity and confidence. Conversely, pronunciation, stress, intonation, and language of instruction were found to have a weaker influence on self-efficacy, indicating that while these skills remain important, they may not play as central a role in shaping teachers' confidence in their instructional abilities.

These findings underline the need for targeted professional development programs that prioritize the enhancement of grammar, vocabulary, and interactive communication skills among EFL teachers. Providing structured training and practice opportunities in these areas could foster greater self-efficacy, ultimately leading to improved teaching effectiveness. Moreover, policymakers and educational institutions should recognize the role of classroom English proficiency in shaping teachers' confidence and consider integrating specialized language training into teacher education programs.

Future research could further explore how different aspects of classroom English proficiency interact with teaching practices and student outcomes. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of teacher training initiatives on self-efficacy could provide valuable insights into sustainable strategies for teacher development in EFL settings.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data was based on self-reported measures, which could lead to biases like social desirability or inaccurate self-evaluation. Although the scales used were validated and yielded good model fit in both EFA and CFA, self-reported data might not fully capture actual classroom English proficiency or the multifaceted nature of teacher self-efficacy. Second, the study was conducted within a specific context—Chinese polytechnics—which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings or regions with different cultural and educational practices. Additionally, while the study identifies significant predictors of self-efficacy, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causation to be inferred. Longitudinal studies would be needed to determine whether improvements in specific language skills lead to increased self-efficacy over time. Finally, the study did not account for potential mediating or moderating variables, such as teaching experience, training background, or institutional support, which may influence the relationship between language proficiency and teacher self-efficacy. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating observational data, exploring different educational contexts, and adopting longitudinal designs.

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"Teach It, and Then Set Me Free": Saudi EFL Learners' Voice and Choice in Grammar Pedagogies

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Abstract
While beneficiary satisfaction is getting significant traction in academic discourse, learners' voices in EFL classrooms remain largely overlooked, highlighting a critical gap in second-language education. Explicit and implicit grammar instruction research, for example, is mainly informed and shaped by reductionist performance-based queries or teachers' reflections on past practices, all while leaving a critical element, the learner, behind. The current study aims to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of Saudi EFL learners attending a Saudi University (i.e., the University of Jeddah) after being exposed to three different modes of grammar instruction: explicit, implicit, and differentiated, for three weeks, twice a week, in sixty-minute sessions. After the sessions, five students from each instructional group (a total of 15) were randomly selected for comprehensive interviews, during which the study's main constructs (e.g., explicit and implicit distinctions) were introduced in simplified and relevant terms. The results suggest that differentiated instruction was perceived as the most effective form of teaching (as it was associated with interesting themes like guided autonomy and useful learner-condition or form-condition interactions), followed by implicit instruction (with themes like self-regulated autonomy, authenticity, and involvement standing out) and, finally, explicit instruction (the effectiveness of which is mainly controlled by form-complexity). These results have some important implications for the field of second language teaching.
Keywords: Differentiated instruction; explicit instruction; grammar teaching, implicit instruction; language education, learners' lived experiences

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Introduction

One of the classic debates in second language research is the question of why (unlike first language acquisition) success in second language learning differs considerably from one individual to another (Hulstijn, 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). One assumption made to address this question is the premise that second language learning is controlled by many factors, mainly those of learners' individual differences (Brown, 2006). Language teachers often come across students from different educational backgrounds, learning at different paces, handling abstract ideas in various ways, and, above all, having different needs and abilities. Ellis (2009), for example, has described a situation where teachers might have two types of learners in a language classroom: A) learners who can use a specific L2 feature fluently without having any metalinguistic awareness of the rules underlying their utterances and vice versa; B) learners who can verbalize the rules, yet are unable to apply them in real-life communications. To address this issue of variance, scholars and educators in the field have been experimenting with different instructional designs tailored to the needs of either type A or type B learners but not always to a class full of both (see Norris & Ortega, 2000 or Spada & Tomita, 2010; for a comprehensive overview of explicit and implicit instruction research). Most of these studies are performance-based, placing more value on the outcome than on the unfolding process as experienced by students. The current study, therefore, is driven by a specific interest in the way learners perceive binary (either-or) and differentiated forms of instruction.

Literature review

A review of the current body of literature on explicit and implicit instruction suggests that most studies conducted are mainly informed by reductionist views of teaching while dismissing the role of learning in general and some specific relevant notions, such as learners' individual differences. When defining explicit and implicit instruction, for example, Norris and Ortega (2000) referred to explicit instruction as a type of teaching that involves a direct presentation of rules or activities that require learners to attend to specific linguistic forms. Implicit instruction, on the other hand, was described as involving none of the above. Central to both definitions, then, is getting students to consciously examine and attend to the form without questioning whether they have the necessary attentional resources or sufficient working memory capacity to process it without paying close attention. This missing part of the puzzle might explain why there is no clear-cut answer to which type of instruction (explicit or implicit) is more effective than the other, as will be mentioned next. An alternative solution to this issue, as suggested by Ellis (2009), is to stop adopting the "either-or" binary approach to grammar teaching and to combine both forms of teaching as a form of differentiated instruction, which initially came as a response to learners' diversity and individual differences (Tomlinson, 2017).

While research on explicit and implicit distinctions dates back to the origins of educational theories, differentiated instruction has emerged as a reform to address the rigidity of traditional teaching methods in contemporary mixed-ability classrooms. Tomlinson (2017) and Joseph (2013) defined it as a proactive method of teaching that takes into account learners' diverse abilities, interests, and learning profiles (Joseph, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017). It revolves around understanding that students are different and addressing their needs while disregarding what has long been known as "one-size-fits-all" instruction (Subban, 2006). The fixed "either-or" use of explicit and implicit instruction, in the case of this study, is believed to meet the description of this one-size-fits-all notion as it assumes that by using either explicit or implicit instruction, everyone will be able to

fit in. Nevertheless, it dismisses the possibility that some students might achieve better outcomes when exposed to the other.

Overview of Experimental Explicit and Implicit Instruction Research

Experimental research studies that focused on the impact of explicit and implicit instruction on grammar learning fall under three categories: 1) studies that favor the former (e.g., Robinson 1996), 2) studies that lean more toward the latter (e.g., Herron & Tomasello, 1992) 3) studies that perceive both approaches as equally useful, regardless of which one is better (e.g., Andringa et al. 2011; Doughty, 1991). A meta-analytical review by Norris and Ortega (2000) of these studies showed that the majority, in fact, favor explicit instruction. Ellis (2009), nonetheless, has two concerns regarding these results. First, he believes that most studies included in the review only examined the knowledge gained under specific conditions that favored a particular type of learning. Second, the measures used to elicit implicit/explicit knowledge, as he believes, were not doing what they should. He claims that most of these measures are biased toward explicit (declarative) language knowledge, which is why they failed to detect improvement in implicit procedural knowledge. Besides these two factors (measures and concept operationalization), researchers in the field identified two kinds of interactions that might also affect the way explicit and implicit instruction work, i.e., form-condition and learner-condition.

Other Mitigating factors

The role of explicit and implicit instruction research in language classrooms is controlled by two main factors: learners' individual differences and form complexity (Ellis, 2009). Williamson (2017) defined learners' individual differences as "the traits that distinguish individuals" (p. 1). Learners' traits determine how much they benefit from instruction, resulting in learner-condition interactions. An example of this kind of interaction is the correlation between working memory capacity and explicit instruction. According to Ellis (2009) and Green and Flower (2003), explicit instruction puts heavy demands on working memory, resulting in learners with high working memory capacity being more prone (than their colleagues) to benefit from explicit instruction. Green and Flower (2003) justified this association by explaining that when receiving explicit instruction on a specific rule, learners will be either 1) trying to memorize/recall the rule, 2) worrying about its application, or 3) using their attentional resources to discover and apply it, respectively (with the latter being even more cognitively demanding than the former.

The other type of interaction mentioned by Ellis (2009) is the one that occurs between form-complexity and instruction. Spada and Tomita (2010), in their meta-analytical study of explicit and implicit instruction research, defined this element as the number of transformations a form goes through. Based on this definition, it would be logical to assume, for example, that present tense verbs in third singular questions are more complex than the English articles because they involve more transformations. Some researchers (e.g., Robinson, 1996) believe explicit instruction is more effective when teaching simple grammar. Another study by Hulstijin and De Graff (1994), however, shows that it also works just fine with complex rules.

Perception-based Explicit and Implicit Instruction Research

In general

Although the use of explicit and implicit grammar instruction has received considerable attention from SLA researchers, most studies on their effectiveness are, in fact, experimental and

performance-based. Little attention was given to how these concepts were perceived by the individuals involved, teachers and students. This reluctance to seek their opinions is primarily caused by two factors: 1) the widely held assumption that students' opinions should not be equated with knowledge, and 2) the question of whether students can meet discriminant validity (i.e., the ability to differentiate between different forms of instruction) (Fauth et al., 2014). As a result, the validity and reliability of this area have been questioned more frequently compared to other research types (Spooren et al., 2013).

Among the few studies that explored this side of explicit and implicit instruction research is one conducted by Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018) in the Iranian context. Using a mixed-method design, their study explored the effect of explicit and implicit feedback on students' willingness to communicate (WTC) through a classroom experiment and follow-up interviews with students. The results showed an alignment between learners' perceptions and their performance in the post-test tasks. Both have shown that implicit feedback did not impact students' willingness to communicate, whereas explicit feedback increased it. The interview data revealed that the increase in learners' WTC was attributed to their elevated self-perceived confidence, which is the feeling that a person is well-equipped with sufficient resources to perform a task at a particular time (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Students also reported that their motivation increased, and their anxiety decreased subsequently. The interview results also showed that students attached great significance to being explicitly corrected whenever making a mistake. According to them, explicit means of feedback (e.g., metalinguistic explanations of rules or attention-raising questioning techniques) worked as progress checks on their performance. This preference for explicit feedback and metalinguistic explanation of rules has also been perceived positively by students in Cornillie et al.'s (2012) study under one condition: being intrinsically motivated. The few learners who preferred implicit instruction described the overall experience as engaging and immersive.

In another study conducted to investigate learners' perceptions of grammar teaching in general, Sopin (2015) pointed out a noticeable variance in how learners perceive explicit and implicit instruction. This variance was driven by their varying proficiency levels and learning experiences. Although all students in their study emphasized the importance of explicit grammar instruction, they also noted that it is only effective at the early stages of language learning but not when learners are advanced. Other relevant themes that emerged from their responses were: 1) the disruption caused by explicit feedback to students' engagement with the lessons, 2) the importance of using explicit rules as references to communicate fluently with others, and 3) poor retention.

In a study conducted in the Turkish context, Başöz (2014) found that teachers perceive implicit instruction very positively because, as they believe, it promotes and assimilates authentic, real-life tasks rather than the rigid, superficial practices associated with explicit instruction. Those teachers, however, also placed great importance on acquiring explicit grammar knowledge as they believe it is a mediating factor in language development. To find a middle ground between the two critical concepts— authenticity and explicit grammar knowledge — they suggested that the best way to teach grammar is to blend both forms and focus on preparing students for real-life language use.

In the Saudi context

In the Saudi context, research on explicit and implicit instruction in EFL settings is generally experimental in design (e.g., AlHashmi & Elyas, 2018; Alsakaker, 2025; El-Dakhs et

al., 2022; Khan, 2024; Qari, 2021; Sabir, 2018). There seems, however, to be an emerging, yet still under-researched, interest in the following areas 1) responsive instruction (i.e., differentiated instruction) which takes into account learners' needs and differences (e.g., AlHashmi and Elyas, 2018) and 2) research studies that target perceptions of the people involved (e.g., Abduh & Algouzi, 2020; Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016; Alsakaker, 2025). The first two studies targeted university-level EFL teachers. Similar to the results of Başöz (2014), teachers in both studies seemed to perceive explicit knowledge of grammar as necessary. Although they explicitly stated that they were not in favor of explicit instruction, they perceived drilling activities and rule memorization as useful, which suggests an inner preference for explicit instruction. Another indication of this preference is their description of having students figure out the rules themselves (though they referred to it as implicit instruction) as efficient.

All in all, the results of Alghanmi and Shukri's (2016) and Abduh and Algouzi's (2020) studies show a clear preference for explicit instruction by EFL teachers (perceptions and practice wise). To the best of our knowledge, the only study that has explicitly targeted learners' perceptions of explicit and implicit instruction was conducted by Alsakaker (2025) using a Likert-scale questionnaire. Their results showed a general preference for inductive instructional methods. However, there was no other information available about which aspects of learners' lived experiences were targeted in the questionnaire, highlighting another gap in the current literature.

Summary and final remarks

At the end of this review of perception-based research on explicit and implicit instruction, we would like to highlight four important points. First, experimental performance-based research and perception-based research are believed to share a common thread. Both approaches significantly shape the overall picture of how effective explicit, implicit, and differentiated instruction is. As Seldin (1993) puts it, "the opinions of those who eat the dinner should be considered if we want to know how it tastes" (p. 40). Second, most studies that have focused on students' perceptions of explicit and implicit instruction have focused more on "what" method is preferred, while little has been said about why, especially in the Saudi context. Third, the only studies that have addressed this topic (i.e., the question of "why" a method is effective) in the Saudi context have only taken account of teachers' points of view. Shedding light on how students perceive both is equally important, as they are on the receiving end of the line. Last but not least, learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of instruction differ from one generation to another and from one context to another, including the linguistic context (Gass & Mackey, 2006). It is always recommended, therefore, to apply "multiple measures, multiple times, over multiple periods" to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching (Ferguson, 2012).

Methodology

Study Procedures

The data collection process consisted of three main stages: A. variable control (participant-wise), B. intervention (as a preliminary procedure), and C. interviewing (as the main research instrument). Below is a description of each stage, followed by an illustration of how the results were analyzed.

A. Variable Control: Participants

Three sections of female EFL students at the pre-intermediate level in their first year at the University of Jeddah were randomly selected for intervention. A placement test was first administered to students to ensure that all three groups would start the intervention on equal footing. This step was essential to eliminate any possibility of learners' Language Proficiency Level (LPL) affecting their responses. Although Table One shows slight variances in LPL, it also indicates that most participants are pre-intermediate-level learners, just as stated by the English Language Institute.

Table 1 *Participants' language proficiency level*

	Group A		Group B		Group C	
LPL	N	%	N	%	N	%
A1	5	17.9	8	20.5	5	13.2
A2	18	64.3	26	66.7	28	73.7
B1	5	17.9	5	12.8	5	13.2
Total	28		39		38	

A. Intervention

The three groups were then exposed to different modes of grammar instruction: explicit (EI), implicit (II), and differentiated (DI). The intervention lasted for three weeks, held twice weekly in sixty-minute sessions. The following table is a systematic summary of how each form of instruction was operationalized:

Table 2 *Operationalisation of explicit/ implicit/differentiated instructio*

	Content	Process	Product	Feedback
EI	Content was planned and determined beforehand. Based on input-enhancement (target elements were highlighted, underlined, or made bold).	Using metalinguistic terminology, learners' attention was directed to the form (which sometimes appeared in isolation) in a planned, obtrusive manner.	Controlled tasks (e.g., fill in the gap, multiple choice questions).	Metalinguistic explanation of the error.
II	Content was delivered spontaneously. Based on input enrichment (input-flood).	It involved attracting learners' attention indirectly to the form (which is almost always contextualized) in an incidental, non-obtrusive manner without any metalinguistic explanation.	Free production (e.g., story narration and descriptive tasks).	Recast
DI	Some parts of the content were planned while also leaving the doors open for variation and creation.	It involved indirect attempts to attract learners' attention to the form in context in a non-obtrusive manner, followed by gradual and planned attempts to direct their attention to the form in isolation using some metalinguistic explanation.	Promotes the use of both controlled and free-production tasks.	Mixed (depending on the task)

C. Reflection: One-on-one In-depth Interviews

At this stage, five random students from each group (a total of 15) were selected for in-depth phenomenological interviews. At the heart of this type of interviewing is understanding 1) the lived experience of a concept from the perspectives of people involved and 2) the meanings

they construct out of it (Ary et al., 2010). Those people are usually selected because they can share valuable thoughts and feelings better than anybody else. For this reason, it was decided that the interviews should be conducted right after the intervention. Once students have experienced it, it was easier for the researcher to define abstract concepts (which are not usually easy to understand) just by referring to what happened during class.

To carry out the interviews, Dolbeare and Schuman's (Seidman, 2006) three-interview series model was applied because it provides a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under study, focusing not only on the experience itself but also on what had happened before and what they think should follow. Unlike the original model (according to which each individual should be interviewed three times), this study opted to merge and combine all three interviews into a single one, structured as follows: 1) focused history, 2) details of the lived experience, and 3) reflection on the future. In the focused history part, participants' experiences were placed in context by asking them to elaborate on their past experience with the topic (e.g., how grammar was taught in previous school years). The second part targeted concrete details of the present intervention. The questions were semi-structured to ensure that the researcher did not unconsciously guide learners' responses. They were then asked to reflect on the usefulness of the instruction they received and share their thoughts on its advantages and disadvantages. In the third part, the participants were asked to draw their conclusions and final remarks on what they think should be done in the future.

Data Analysis

Coding in qualitative research can take either a top-down or a bottom-up approach to data analysis. The first, usually referred to as content analysis, starts with a set of categories in mind. In contrast, the other approach, referred to as thematic analysis, assumes that the categories should emerge from the text itself (Flick, 2018). In this study, a combination of both approaches was used for two main reasons. First, starting the analysis with the research questions (forming general categories) in mind will keep it focused and systematic without having to deal with significant deviations from the main goal, i.e., answering the research question. Second, conducting a subsequent thematic coding during which more categories emerge will add flexibility to the analysis. It will also contribute to the development of an agenda-free comprehensive report of results. The main reason for selecting one-to-one interviews with learners as a method has, in the first place, come as a response to the rigidity of experimental research designs and to explore other facets of reality as perceived by the individuals involved.

To illustrate how this mixed qualitative analysis was conducted, it is essential to first highlight the steps of both approaches— content and thematic analysis. According to Schreier (2014), any top-down content analysis should follow a sequence of procedures: establishing a research question as a start-point, selecting the data, coming up with a framework for coding, segmentation, preliminary coding, evaluating and modifying the codes, building the main analysis, presenting the results and finally interpreting the findings. The steps of bottom-up thematic analysis, however, are as follows: getting familiar with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing the themes, assigning proper definitions and terms, and finally reporting the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Combining both, the analysis of this study's interview results has gone through the following steps: identification of the main research question, building a general coding framework, getting familiar with the data, segmentation, code-generation, theme-generation, theme-refinement, reporting, and finally interpreting the results.

Given that the interview questions were generally structured around exploring the perceived usefulness (PU) of each form of instruction (research interest), whether explicit (EI), implicit (II), or differentiated (DI), the following general categories have thus served as the starting point for coding.

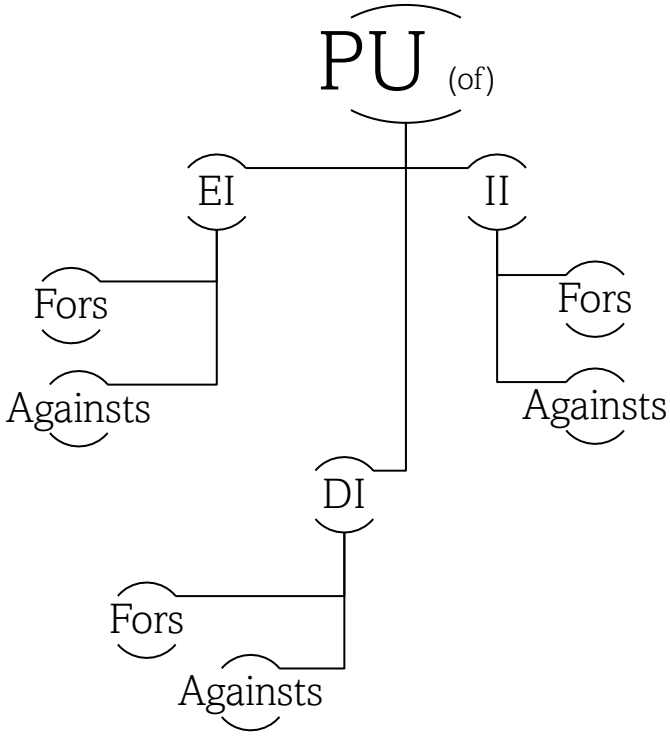


Figure 1. Perceived usefulness of explicit, implicit, and differentiated instruction

Once these general categories were set, a thematic bottom-up approach was used to generate relevant patterns of meaning from the text (interview results). This process started with data transcription and was then followed by a careful examination of its content several times over four weeks (to get familiar with the data). Using NVIVO, the segmentation then began to extract all useful information and categorize it under different general nodes (see Figure One). The next step was to re-examine these segments and assign them initial codes. These codes were used to generate different themes, which were revised, refined, and renamed multiple times to ensure they accurately reflect the intended meanings.

Another point to mention before presenting the results is how the anonymity and confidentiality of participants have been addressed in this report. Whenever a reference to one of the participants is made, a two-character code is used (instead of the participant's real name). The codes were assigned based on two aspects: the student's group (A for explicit instruction, B for implicit instruction, and C for differentiated instruction) and then a sequential number from 1 to 5, given that there were only five participants in each group. AS5, thus, refers to the fifth interviewee student from the explicit condition group, BS4 to the fourth interviewee student from the implicit condition group, and CS2 to the second interviewee student from the differentiated condition group.

Results and Discussion

To create a holistic and smooth narrative of the study findings, this section combines learners' responses (results) with their interpretation, all to explore Saudi EFL learners' voices and choices in explicit, implicit, and differentiated grammar pedagogies. To position these findings within a proper literature-based framework, references to previous research studies will be embedded within the narrative to maintain a clear, precise, and elaborate flow of ideas. Starting with the perceived usefulness of explicit and implicit instruction and ending with the differentiated version of both, the presentation of themes will also include supporting quotations and details.

Perceived Usefulness of Explicit Instruction

Despite being teachers' favorite and the most commonly used mode of teaching (see Abduh & Algouzi, 2020; AlGhanmi & Shukri, 2016), explicit instruction was perceived by students as the least preferable form of teaching. While some current study themes are similar to those already discussed in other perception-based research (e.g., poor retention), the lengthy three-phase interviews resulted in new interesting themes (e.g., cognitive load and form-condition interactions). In the following, these themes will be discussed, starting with the ones standing against the effectiveness of explicit instruction (poor retention, limited opportunities, passivity of learners, high cognitive load) as they were dominant, followed by the one that came as neutral (i.e., systematicity) and ending with the one standing with its effectiveness (i.e., useful form-condition interactions).

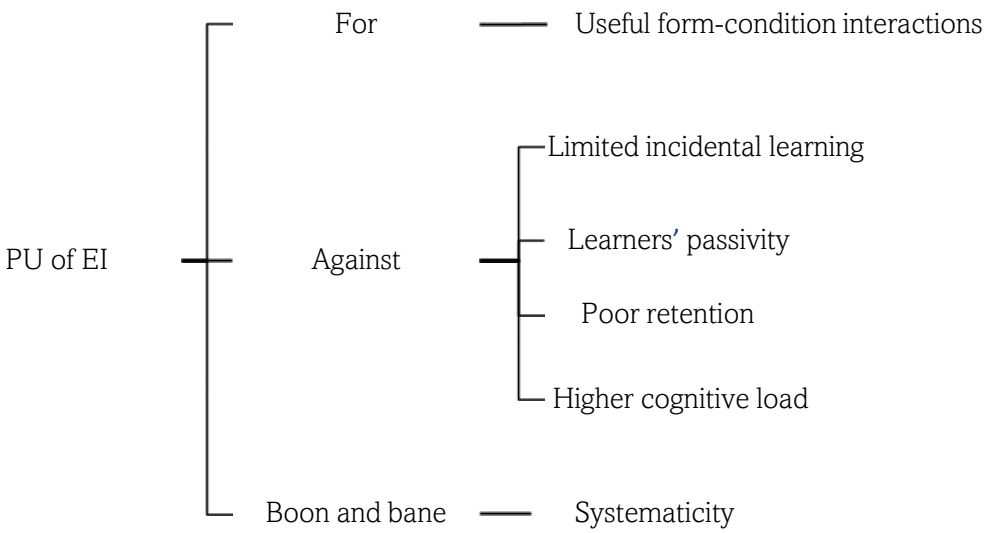


Figure 2 Perceived usefulness of explicit instruction

Poor Retention

When asked to recall and reflect on their past experiences with the subject matter, learners referred to explicit instruction as the formal and traditional way of grammar teaching. Some, however, also mentioned the occasional use of a more differentiated approach with varying levels of explicitness/implicitness. With that being said, a few students have pointed out that one of the drawbacks of explicit instruction is its short-term effect and how it does not stand the test of time. A student, for example, said: "We study the same (grammatical elements) every year, yet I still

find them difficult, maybe because they were not taught right?" (AS4). This retention issue is not new, as it was also raised by students in Sopin's (2015) study. Students in their research mentioned that although they were taught grammar explicitly in the past, they still do not feel competent enough to use it or feel comfortable around it.

Limited (incidental) Learning Opportunities

When asked about the drawbacks of explicit instruction during the sessions they attended, AS4 said, "The instruction was so limited. If it were not so direct, we would have had the chance to learn more stuff." This limitedness is contrastively linked to a point raised by learners (in the implicit condition) regarding their ability to go beyond simple grammatical knowledge and how they developed some competence in how to speak about specific topics using what they referred to as a "field-related word repertoire" (BS2).

Higher Cognitive Load

Another important point mentioned by the interviewee participants is that explicit instruction can sometimes get cognitively demanding as it 1) requires them to do a lot of rule memorization (AS4) and 2) focuses on abstract notions and concepts (e.g., definiteness and specificity when it comes to the English Article system) *(AS3).* Although this theme has not been addressed in the reviewed perception-based research, we believe it supports Ellis' (2009) and Green & Flower's (2003) argument that rule-application and rule-discovery explicit instruction place significant demands on students' cognitive resources.

Passivity of Learners

In line with the stereotypical image of explicit instruction as a "teacher-led" form of teaching, some students' responses emphasized the lack of engagement and absence of challenging activities, as indicated in the following quote.

> I do not usually give much attention to teachers who speak 100% of the class time and leave no space for me to be active or even just talk! I am taking a course with Ms. X this semester; she is excellent. She keeps me engaged and alert all the time (knowing that every now and then, she will challenge us with a question or an activity; some of these activities are based on movies we have watched, for example) (AS1).

Systematicity and Preciseness

The systematicity of explicit instruction was found to be a recurrent theme, one that was perceived as both a drawback and a merit. When mentioning the advantages of explicit instruction, a student, for example, described the direct explanation of rules as a rigid "1, 2, 3, 4" way of teaching (AS1). Another student from the same group, however, stated the opposite, as shown in the following quote:

> Explaining information directly and quickly and then providing me with some examples will do the job perfectly well. The sessions we attended were brief and concise. There was no extensive talking or mention of unimportant information; we were just given the gist, and that is what really matters (AS2).

According to her, focusing on metalinguistic explanation of rules ("the gist") constitutes the best teaching practice. A factor that may influence learners' perceptions of the matter is their motivation

to learn English. Being intrinsically motivated, for example, as found in Cornillie et al.'s (2012) study, is one of the few reasons why learners perceive explicit instruction as "useful".

Useful IC-FC Interaction

The only positive theme that has emerged from the interview results is the useful interaction between explicit instruction and complex rules. A student from the explicit condition alluded that this form of teaching (referring to explicit instruction) works best when there is a considerable amount of grammatical transformations, concepts, and comparisons, which supports other researchers' argument that complex rules are better taught explicitly (e.g., Hulstijn and De Graaff's, 1994). According to her (see the following quote), pointing out the differences between one form and another and "putting them in schedules for comparisons" is a good grammar teaching practice.

> Well, I have been taught by many teachers. The best one used the board to dictate grammatical rules, especially when there were a lot of changes, concepts, similarities, and differences. She would divide the elements into groups, put them in schedules, and then highlight the differences and similarities between one element and another (AS1).

Perceived Usefulness of Implicit Instruction

The discussion in this section will start with the themes standing with the effectiveness of implicit instruction (i.e., learners' autonomy, authenticity, involvement, and learning opportunities) as they were dominant, followed by their counterparts (i.e., increased anxiety and goal-ambiguity). As shown in Figures Two and Three, the results standing with the notion of implicit instruction outweigh the ones related to explicit instruction. This supports AlSakaker's (2025) overall finding that Saudi EFL learners perceive inductive means of grammar teaching more positively than explicit instruction.

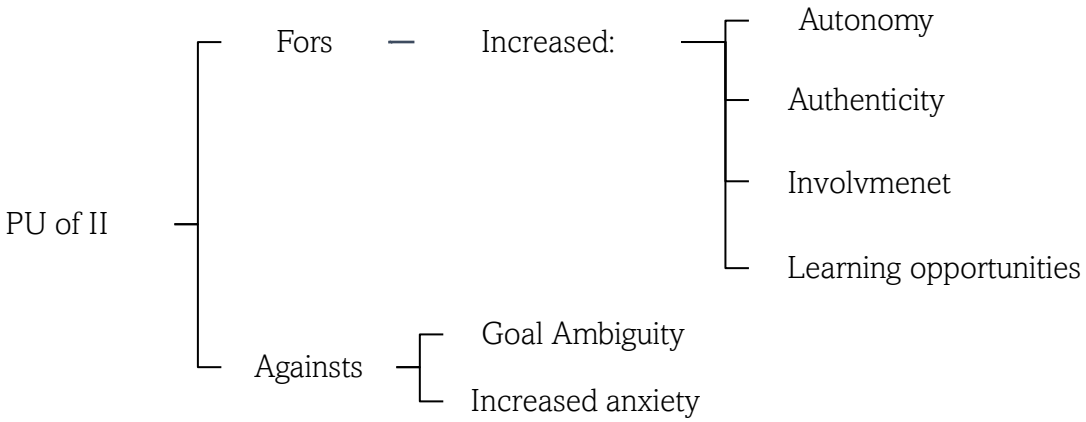


Figure 3 *Perceived usefulness of implicit instruction*

Learners' Autonomy

The increase in learners' autonomy is one theme that stands out in learners' responses. Students seem to take this autonomy very positively. They mentioned that it contributed to other important elements like motivation and engagement, as the following quotes suggest:

> We relied heavily on ourselves; the class was fun, as if we were playing games without realizing we were actually learning stuff. We also had so much freedom. There was no

> time to sleep or get bored because we were either thinking, writing, or speaking. That, in my opinion, is a good thing (BS1).
> When instruction is indirect, we learn, rely on ourselves, explore, search for new ideas, and be more motivated (BS2).

Authenticity and Unconventionality

Another theme that seems relevant is the breakout from conventional forms of instruction. The unconventionality of implicit instruction, as perceived by learners, promoted greater authenticity and made them less conscious of the setting (being in a formal language classroom). When talking about the advantages, for example, a student said: "I did not feel like I was forced to learn grammar; we barely noticed that we were actually learning anything. This way of teaching breaks the usual grammar learning ideals and makes it very much like real life" (BS3). The use of implicit instruction then, as understood from this quote, seems to answer the common teachers' call for instruction that assimilates real-life situations instead of the rigid superficial practices associated with explicit instruction (see Başöz, 2014)

Learners' Involvement

Due to the above two factors (class authenticity and learners' autonomy), students' involvement appears to have increased among participants in the implicit condition. Such increase is evident in learners' use of expressions like "we had no time to sleep or get bored" and "we were motivated" when describing implicit instruction. This was also notable in Cornillie et al.'s (2012) study, which linked students' perceptions of explicit and implicit instruction to their motivation and the reasons why they are learning English in the first place. Their results showed that while learners with intrinsic motivation perceived explicit instruction as "useful," those who favored implicit instruction used words like "engaging and immersive" to express their attitudes. A factor worth investigating in the future, then, is the extent to which learners' motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) plays a role in the way they perceive explicit/implicit instruction.

More Learning Opportunities (Intended and Incidental Learning)

According to students involved in the implicit condition, they not only learned grammar but also acquired other elements, such as "field-related" vocabulary. One of them, for example, stated: "My language repertoire developed a lot during the sessions. I gained more vocabulary, and now I feel more confident talking about certain topics" (BS2). This suggests that learners in this condition have developed some self-perceived confidence, the feeling that they have enough resources to perform a task (Macintyre et al., 1998).

Increased Anxiety

The free-production tasks used in the implicit condition seem to have increased students' anxiety. A student, for example, said: "Sometimes I was overly hesitant over what and how to write or speak. That fear of making mistakes or missing your point was a bit disturbing" (BS1). This feeling has also been aptly described by another student from Sopin's (2015) study, who noted that "If you do not know grammar, you cannot organize your sentences, and you may, therefore, speak incorrectly" (p. 69). Being exposed to some level of explicit instruction, as another student from Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi's (2018) study described, will reduce this anxiety about making mistakes.

Goal Ambiguity (or Un-systematicity)

This theme has been one of significant recurrence in students' responses when discussing the points they considered as drawbacks of implicit instruction. A student, for instance, said, "I liked this form of teaching. But when it comes to quizzes, exams, and formal assessments, I need to know exactly what I should learn" (BS2). The fact that these responses followed an elaborate description of the current study's aim and a clear statement of the target points (being grammar-related) suggests that their description of the un-systematicity and goal-ambiguity of lessons might have been a reaction to their recent realization of what they viewed as an unalignment between instruction and intended outcomes. Some learners have also reported feeling lost during the sessions, especially when they could not figure out precisely what they were learning *(BS4)*. Other students suggested that some level of explicitness is required, as complete implicit instruction and "not exaclty knowing what is going on" were confusing *(CS3)*.

Perceived Usefulness of Differentiated Instruction

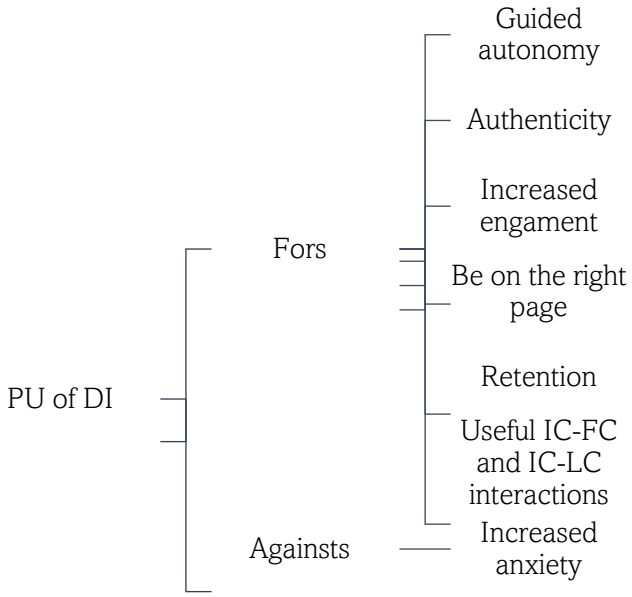


Figure 4. Perceived usefulness of differentiated instruction

A logical assumption that can be made when mixing explicit and implicit instruction is that learners' perceptions of DI would generate themes similar to those presented earlier. The interview results confirmed this assumption, with slight differences in how each theme was tackled. A point worth mentioning at this stage is that these results support Tomlinson's (2017) argument that using different methods within the same class is the best teaching practice in mixed-preference and ability classrooms. When asked which form of teaching they would like to receive in the future, all the interviewee students (15 in total) voted for the differentiated condition, which is a sign of their diversity. This diversity has been represented differently in other research studies. Sopin (2015), for example, has noticed that learners' preferences on the matter varied widely, with some at opposite extremes of the continuum and others falling in between.

Authenticity

The authenticity reported by students in the DI group varied in degree from earlier findings (in the Perceived Usefulness of Implicit Instruction section). Learners in the implicit group mainly

noted that they were less aware of the formal language classroom setting, perceiving the lessons as naturally immersive. In contrast, the DI group acknowledged the formal classroom environment but emphasized the importance of incorporating real-life tasks to enhance authenticity by connecting formal instruction to everyday life (AS2). One student remarked, "I believe combining both approaches will help me integrate the knowledge explicitly gained and apply grammar in my daily life" (BS3).

"Guide Me And Then Set Me Free" (Guided Autonomy)

Another interesting theme that was remarkably recurrent is learners' conceptualization of DI as a kind of instruction that would facilitate their autonomy. When asked about what form of instruction they would like to join in the future, for example, many of learners' responses came as follows:

> I would like to join the third (DI). Why? Because I appreciate it when teachers explain things directly and then allow me to participate, speak, learn, express myself, and handle what I have learned in my own way (AS1).
>
> Providing us with the gist (or setting us on the right path) and then allowing us to explore and branch out to different places is good (as if we were exchanging roles) (CS3).

Most of these responses suggest that learners perceived explicit instruction as "guidance" to set them in the right direction. This guidance, according to them, is the first step toward finding their own paths and reaching a level where they can rely on themselves. These findings support Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi's (2018) results, in which students indicated that explicit instruction increases their willingness to communicate, for it provides them with sufficient resources to perform communicative tasks.

Learners' Involvement

The increase in learners' involvement is another theme related to students' lived experiences in the DI condition. Under this general theme, three levels of involvement can be identified: affective, communicative, and cognitive. At the level of affective involvement, students noted an increase in their motivation. This has been indicated through students' use of simple emotional terms like "excited" in the following quote: "The more diverse the methods used, the more active and excited we get" (CS3), and "no time to bored" in "every lesson differentiated will be new and different with no time to get bored" (BS3).

Contrary to the theme of learners' passivity in explicit instruction and similar to that of learners' involvement in implicit instruction, a student from the differentiated condition mentioned that part of her being active was the result of being engaged in two-way communication and exchanging utterances with others. She said: "I liked that we were allowed to be active and communicate (to give and take, not just take)" (CS5).

Students have also reported being cognitively involved when linking explicit knowledge of rules (acquired through exposure to explicit instruction) to its procedural equivalent (acquired through exposure to implicit instruction). A student, for example, stated that "when I was applying the rules, my brain was working very well; as I was paying some effort (linking the knowledge of rules to how these rules are used in real-life tasks) *(CS2).* On another cognitive level, another student used the adjective "attentive" to describe their state of mind throughout the differentiated sessions *(CS5).*

"Being on the Right Page"

When justifying why they wanted to join the DI condition in the future, many learners mentioned that they found explicit instruction too rigid and systematic (and traditional), while implicit instruction sometimes felt unstructured. They preferred a balanced approach operating at the edge of systematicity, where they could explore and step out of context while still being guided and set on the right path, as indicated in the following quotes.

> I feel like we need at least ten minutes of explicit instruction to be on the right page (BS5).
>
> I prefer differentiated instruction. Explicit instruction is something I am already used to. I do not think I prefer implicit instruction as well, as I generally like to be aware of what I am learning, the plan, and the process. (CS1)

Useful IC-FC and IC-LC Interactions

Under this theme comes the interactions between instructional conditions (DI in this case) and 1) form complexity (IC-FC interactions) on the one hand and 2) learners' characteristics (IC-LC interactions) on the other. As to the first, students indicated that while some linguistic forms can be acquired naturally, others require certain levels of explicit instruction. One of the students, for example, justified her preference for DI by saying: "Not all elements are naturally learnable. Sometimes, we need the teacher to say the rule explicitly" *(BS2)* and vice versa.

When it comes to the interaction between learners' characteristics and the instructional condition, there was far more data than the ones before. A possible reason might be that students' understanding of themselves and their characteristics is better than their knowledge of linguistic forms. Some indications of this IC-FC interaction involve simple acknowledgments of the match between oneself and differentiated instruction. A student from the explicit condition, for example, has mentioned that she would like to join Group C (DI) in the future, saying, "It is the most effective way of teaching for me as AS1." The fact that she pointed out to herself in "for me" and then mentioned her own name indicates that she is aware of her individuality and possible differences from others.

When justifying her preference for differentiated instruction, a student from the implicit condition stated that "every learning situation is different. Some people are skilled at inducing the required item without needing anyone else. I, on the other hand, like to be given the information directly, and then I will find a way to handle it myself" (BS1). Another student pointed out that purely explicit instruction might benefit some students but not others and the same applies to implicit instruction. The differentiated condition, according to her, will 1) help everybody access the lesson and (in some cases) 1) grant everybody two chances to learn.

> It differs from one person to another. If it were 100% direct, some students would not go beyond the lesson; they would only learn what the teachers say without bothering to look up more information. (BS2).
>
> It grants everyone two chances to learn (CS4).

Given that "learners' characteristics" in this section refers to all sorts of individual differences and does not exclude learners' preferences or any other aspects in particular, it could also then be said that there were some references where learners mentioned that differentiated instruction is their preferred form of teaching as in the following two quotes:

> I would like to join the third type (differentiated condition) because it combines both, and I love diversity (CS2).

> I liked the diversity in the method used. It was not as boring as when only the teacher talks. We can collaboratively explore new ideas by watching videos or sharing our perspectives on various topics. (CS3)

Promotes Retention

The interview results also revealed that differentiated instruction promotes retention. That was, for example, pointed out while a student from the explicit condition was discussing the drawbacks of explicit instruction. She said: "… the information given was all abstract. I prefer it when the teacher considers me a child and uses lots of videos, stories, and examples. These make the instruction long-lasting". When asked about what she meant by "to be considered a child", she then elaborated:

> (You see) You (teachers) should be dealing with the human mind as if it were a baby. Everything should be explained in detail using stories, photos, and videos so the baby can understand. I understood all grammatical rules during the sessions, but I forgot everything I had learned when I wanted to do the activities and exercises; do you see my point? (AS3)

Another student from the differentiated condition also discussed this theme (which means the reference here is contextual, not just an assumption). When asked about the positive sides of enrolling in these DI sessions, she said: "During the sessions, I used to listen to your explanation of the rules, be active all the time, and then that is it … it sticks to my mind immediately" (CS1). In another context, she said: "I did not need to go back to the lessons and revise at all" (CS1).

Increased Anxiety

An intriguing point that was also mentioned by students attending the differentiated condition is that their anxiety levels when doing the free-production tasks have increased because of the explicit instruction they received halfway through. They argue that this part made them conscious and aware of what they were expected to do, and that increased their fear of not doing it properly. The following conversation illustrates this point:

> CS3: Some of the activities used (like story narration and picture description) were difficult.
> Interviewer: You mean you preferred closed activities like fill-in-the-gap?
> CS3: Yes.
> Interviewer: Is there a specific reason for this preference?
> CS3: Yes. We are often afraid of making mistakes or not fulfilling the task requirements when participating in those activities.

How Can this View Inform the Field of SLA?

Despite the numerous criticisms of students' perception area of research and the frequent questioning of its reliability and validity, the current results suggest something different. The fact that learners managed to identify what works best for them demonstrates their awareness of their individuality, as discussed earlier. This awareness is also evident in their ability to differentiate between various teaching methods, including the advantages and disadvantages of each, what each one promotes (e.g., authenticity, systematicity, retention, communication), and what keeps them motivated and engaged. Once validated in the future, these results, just like in other contexts, can be used in 1) crafting new directions for teachers' professional development and improving the

quality of teaching (Ferguson 2012), 2) providing evidence for important decisions (such as annual evaluations and promotions) 3) making input for institutional accountability (Kember et al., 2002).

One limitation of this paper is that the qualitative interview results were not triangulated with positivist performance-based data from the same participant group. Integrating both is believed to 1) help provide a more comprehensive view of how effective explicit, implicit, and differentiated instruction is and 2) contribute to the reliability of student perception area of research. Finding a direct alignment between what learners think and what their scores indicate, for example, might suggest that learners can identify what works best for them academically, making the above implications more solidly grounded. Such results (if no alignment was found) might also inform learners and instruction recipients of the gap between what they believe is the best and what their performance indicates.

Conclusion

In a world fixated on numbers and metrics, we often evaluate the quality of teaching based on exam scores rather than the unique, unfolding experiences of learners. The current study aimed to understand the way Saudi EFL learners perceive three different modes of grammar instruction: explicit, implicit, and differentiated. They were exposed to these forms for three weeks and then went through comprehensive interviews using a three-stage interview model. The results reveal that differentiated instruction was perceived as the most effective and preferred form of teaching. Despite implicit and explicit instruction (subsequently) being also perceived as effective, 15 out of 15 students selected the DI condition as the one they wish to join in the future. According to them, it promotes learners' autonomy, content authenticity, and positive IC-FC and IC-LC interactions. It also results in increased levels of engagement, retention, and security. Based on these findings, it could be argued that foundation-year learners are well aware of what works best for them, which enhances the validity of their perceptions and evaluations of different teaching approaches.

These findings have several important implications for future practices. At the level of teaching, EFL teachers in the context of this study are recommended to consider the notion of differentiated instruction instead of one-size-fits-all teaching practices. They are also advised to give learners a voice in the teaching-learning process. As Seldin (1993) puts it: "the opinions of those who eat the dinner should be considered if we want to know how it tastes" (p. 40). Policymakers are also advised not to impose a single teaching method and designate it as an exemplar of how teaching should occur, unless the decision is well-informed. Instead, DI should be fostered in teachers' training programs. Lastly, involving learners in the teaching evaluation process might also be another useful implication.

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The Effects of Writing Anxiety on Writing Performance of Argumentative and Narrative Essays Among Intermediate EFL Learners in China

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Abstract
This study examined how writing anxiety and genre affect writing performance in group difference analysis among intermediate EFL learners in China, based on Hayes's revised writing model. Writing performance was assessed using measures of syntactic and lexical complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Using the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory, a total of 104 intermediate EFL students were categorized into high- and low-anxiety groups. Participants wrote both argumentative and narrative essays, analyzed with the second language (L2) Syntactic Complexity Analyzer, Lexical Complexity Analyzer, Grammarly Premium, and manual error coding following Polio and Shea's guidelines. Mixed analyses of variance and *t*-tests revealed significant impacts of writing anxiety on complexity and fluency, and genre effects on all complexity, accuracy, and fluency, except for interaction effects. These results highlight significant variations in performance due to anxiety and essay type, supporting Skehan's Limited Attention Capacity hypothesis and Biber and Conrad's functional explanations. The findings advocate tailored pedagogical strategies to reduce anxiety in EFL genre-specific writing and improve educational outcomes.

Keywords: Complexity, accuracy, and fluency, Chinese EFL learners, genre, second language writing, writing anxiety

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Introduction

Recent trends in second language acquisition (SLA) studies emphasize the central role of second language (L2) writing, particularly concerning individual differences (IDs) (Manchón & Sanz, 2023). Among various IDs, anxiety has been underexplored, necessitating further examination of its impact on L2 writing (Li, 2023). Writing, a complex cognitive and emotional activity, is significantly affected by anxiety (MacIntyre, 2017). This affective reaction can exacerbate the challenges faced by L2 writers, introducing additional physiological and psychological stresses associated with using a non-native language (Li, 2023).

In terms of the writing anxiety construct, instructional strategies to mitigate anxiety are a major area of interest, while their correlation with writing performance is still underdeveloped. Pedagogically, a coping strategy to appease this emotional tension is based on a better understanding of the links between writing anxiety and writing performance. Theoretically, a detailed description of the relationships with writing performance also makes clear the impact of affective IDs on L2 writing. Thus, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of how writing anxiety influences L2 writing performance, focusing on the constructs of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF). These metrics, which are pivotal in writing assessment and indicative of proficiency, have not been extensively examined in relation to writing anxiety (Housen & Kuiken, 2009).

Furthermore, genre knowledge and selection of research subjects are crucial in studying writing anxiety. Different writing genres, such as argumentative and narrative, possess unique characteristics that can influence writing performance (Beers & Nagy, 2011; Crowhurst, 1990; Heng et al., 2023). In this study, we incorporate these two genres to explore their impact on the relationship between writing anxiety and performance and include Chinese EFL non-English majors— a group not previously focused on in this context— to explore the nuances of writing anxiety at an intermediate proficiency level.

The study aimed to investigate the effects of writing anxiety and genre on CAF measures among intermediate EFL learners in China. The impacts of writing anxiety and genre on writing performance and exploring any interaction effects between these variables will be assessed. This approach addresses gaps identified in the literature review and contributes new insights into the pedagogical strategies for L2 writing instruction.

Literature Review

In 1996, Hayes proposed a revised writing model to offer a clearer and more comprehensive framework for describing writing activity. This framework expands upon the initial model by Flower and Hayes (1980). This newer model accentuates the critical roles of emotion and genre, recognizing writing as a generative and intellectual process that interweaves these elements (Hayes, 1996). Building on this theoretical foundation, this study examines writing anxiety, a key emotional factor, to assess its influence alongside genre on L2 writing performance. Our literature review first provides an overview of writing anxiety and genre, followed by an examination of L2 writing performance with a particular focus on CAF measures. It then introduces the study's primary subjects— Chinese EFL non-English learners— and outlines the study's objectives by addressing sorted gaps in the existing research.

Overview of Writing Anxiety and Genre

Since Daly and Miller (1975) introduced the term "writing apprehension", the construct of

writing anxiety has been extensively explored, covering various dimensions over nearly five decades. These dimensions include its definition and conceptualization (Daly & Hailey, 1984; Latif, 2019), potential causes of anxiety (Abdel Latif, 2015; Aldrich, 1982), and its cognitive, somatic, and behavioral manifestations (Hassan, 2001; Pajares, 2003). Further studies have developed measurement scales (Cheng, 2004; Limpo, 2018), developed coping strategies to relieve anxiety (Alshehr, 2024; Zarrinabadi & Rezazadeh, 2020; Zhang, 2021), and investigated its correlations with other individual differences like self-efficacy, motivation, and attitudes (Almutairy, 2024; Papi et al., 2022; Woodrow, 2011), though research specifically linking writing anxiety with writing performance— particularly through CAF measures— remains relatively underdeveloped. Housen and Kuiken (2009) have underscored the multidimensional nature of writing performance, while major studies have focused on isolated components of CAF notions. Some studies have examined grammatical or syntactic complexities (Güvendir & Uzun, 2023; Haddad, 2018), while others have looked at fluency (Limpo, 2018; Machida & Dalsky, 2014) or combined elements of complexity and accuracy/ fluency (Rahimi & Zhang, 2019; Waked et al., 2023).

Besides, studies have discussed the intact CAF triad correlates of writing anxiety. Zabihi (2017) regarded writing anxiety as a mediating factor to examine whether self-efficacy could indirectly affect CAF indices in regression analyses. Zabihi et al. (2020) explored correlations between writing anxiety and CAF measures where writing anxiety was conceptualized as somatic anxiety, cognitive anxiety, and avoidance behavior. Tahmouresi (2021) used path analysis to predict the impact of writing anxiety on writing quality and CAF performance, offering insights into the systemic effects of anxiety on writing. However, scarce research has examined the relationships between writing anxiety and CAF notions in group difference analysis, to explore the possible differences between high and low anxiety writers in CAF dimensions. This represents the first research gap addressed in this study.

The concept of genre encompasses “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes” (Swales, 1990, p. 58). Since its initial discussion in the 1980s (Swales, 1981), the study of the genre has expanded, particularly in how different genres require distinct linguistic features to communicate varied functions (Biber & Conrad, 2009). Research into genre-specific writing has demonstrated that different genres possess unique language features that may necessitate distinct approaches by writers (Yoon, 2021). However, many studies on writing anxiety and CAF performance examine only one genre, limiting generalizability (Güvendir & Uzun, 2023; Limpo, 2018; Rahimi & Zhang, 2019; Tahmouresi, 2021; Zabihi, 2017). Zabihi et al. (2020) uniquely included both argumentative and narrative genres in their correlational research on anxiety and CAF, but their emphasis was on the interaction between anxiety types and genre, rather than on how genre itself impacts CAF measures. Furthermore, most literature on genre and CAF performance has focused on how genre affects lexico-grammatical complexities rather than the broader CAF measures (Beers & Nagy, 2009; Heng et al., 2023; Qin & Uccelli, 2016). This study bridges the second research gap by investigating how both argumentative and narrative genres impact CAF achievements, examining the main effects of genre and its interaction with writing anxiety.

Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency Measures in L2 Writing

In the field of L2 writing research, a learner’s writing competence is often reflected through their performance, which can be meticulously evaluated using CAF measures (Ellis & Barkhuizen,

2005; Housen & Kuiken, 2009). CAF encompasses elaborateness and variety, error-free proficiency, and "native-like rapidity" in writing (Lennon, 1990). This study adopts quantitative and general CAF indices to measure written drafts, categorizing them into syntactic complexity, lexical complexity, accuracy, and fluency measures. Syntactic complexity is analyzed based on length, subordination, coordination, and specific structures, with a recommendation for selecting multiple dimensions in different units to capture a broader perspective of syntactic intricacies (Norris & Ortega, 2009). Key indices such as mean length of clause (MLC) in the length unit, dependent clauses per clause (DC/C) in the subordination unit, and verb phrases per T-unit (VP/T) focusing on specific structures are used to assess syntactic complexity, identified as effective measures in recent studies (Kyle et al., 2021; Lu, 2011; Lu & Ai, 2015).

Lexical complexity measures concentrate on the density, sophistication, and diversity of written texts. This study employs measures like the ratio of the number of lexical words (N_{lex}/N, marked as LD), which serves as a primary indicator of lexical density (Lu, 2012), and the sophisticated word types (Ts/T, marked as LS2), which gauges lexical sophistication (Laufer, 1994; Yang et al., 2023). Diversity is evaluated through the type-token ratio ($T/\sqrt{N}$, marked as RTTR) and verb variations (T_{verb} /$\sqrt{2N_{verb}}$, marked as CVV1), both of which are highly regarded for their effectiveness in capturing lexical diversity (Hao et al., 2023; Lu, 2012).

Accuracy is commonly measured by the count of errors or error-free units (Polio & Shea, 2014). The number of error-free clauses (EFC/C) is used to ensure that every participant's output is assessable, avoiding instances of zero error-free T-units. Frequency measures, capturing the rapidity of writing, include the number of words per minute in untimed writing or the total number of words, clauses, or T-units under timed conditions, to reflect the spontaneous production capacity of the writers (Li, 2023). This study employs the total number of words (W) and the total number of clauses (C) to calculate fluency in timed written texts.

This systematic approach to adopting CAF measures ensures a comprehensive and detailed understanding of L2 writing ability, adhering strictly to the validated metrics in contemporary research. Table 1 displays all CAF measures selected in this study.

Chinese EFL Non-English Learners

Chinese EFL learners, particularly non-English majors, have been underrepresented as research subjects in existing literature (refer to *Overview of Writing Anxiety and Genre*), despite their significant relevance to scholarly inquiry. Non-English majors face substantial academic pressures, notably the requirement to pass the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) to fulfill graduation criteria (Xie, 2021). The CET-4, a nationwide standardized test, assesses various English sub-skills and is tailored specifically for non-English majors. Previous studies (He & Niao, 2015; Li et al., 2012; Sang, 2017) indicated that writing anxiety impeded these students' ability to achieve higher CET-4 scores, highlighting a gap in understanding how writing anxiety affects performance in the two often tested genres of argumentative and narrative writing. This study addresses the third research gap by focusing on Chinese EFL non-English majors, specifically those who have reached an intermediate proficiency level as decided by a placement test. Detailed criteria for participant selection and the implications for research findings will be elaborated on *Participants*.

The Current Study

Building on the outlined context, this study is designed to investigate the impacts of writing anxiety (high and low levels) and genre (argumentative and narrative essays) on the ten CAF measures (MLC, DC/C, VP/T, LD, LS2, RTTR, CVV1, EFC/C, W, and C) among intermediate Chinese EFL learners. Specifically, we first examine the impact of anxiety levels on CAF performance. Previous research suggests a detrimental effect of high anxiety on writing achievements (Beers & Nagy, 2011; Yoon & Polio, 2017). Thus, learners with lower anxiety may outperform their higher anxiety counterparts across all CAF dimensions. Secondly, we assess the impact of genre on CAF outcomes, hypothesizing significant disparities between argumentative and narrative essays based on mixed findings from past research. Lastly, we explore the potential interaction effects between writing anxiety and genre on CAF dimensions. Drawing on analogous studies in L1 contexts, such as the work by Faigley et al. (1981), we anticipate that these interactions may significantly impact CAF performance.

Based on the three research objectives outlined above, the current study proposes the following research questions:

1. Does the low anxiety group perform better than the high anxiety group in all measures of complexity, accuracy, and fluency among Chinese intermediate EFL learners?
2. Are there any main effects of the genre on the measures of complexity, accuracy, and fluency among Chinese intermediate EFL learners?
3. Is there an interaction effect between writing anxiety and genre on any of the CAF measures among Chinese intermediate EFL learners?

Table 1. *Targeted syntactic complexity, lexical complexity, accuracy, and fluency measures*

Construct	Measure	Formula
Syntactic complexity	Mean length of clause (MLC)	# of words / # of clauses
	Dependent clause ratio (DC/C)	# of dependent clauses / # of clauses
	Verb phrases per T-unit (VP/T)	# of verb phrases / # of T-units
Lexical complexity	Lexical density (LD)	# of lexical words / # of words
	Lexical sophistication-II (LS2)	# of sophisticated word types / # of word types
	Root TTR (RTTR)	# of word types / # of square root of words ($T/\sqrt{N}$)
	Corrected VV1 (CVV1)	Based on the number of verb types ($T_{verb}/\sqrt{2N_{verb}}$)
Accuracy	Error-free clauses (EFC/C)	# of error-free clauses / # of clauses
Fluency	Total number of words (W)	# of words / # of texts
	Total number of clauses (C)	# of clauses / # of texts

Methods

Our methods introduced the participants and the placement test (Oxford Quick Placement Test) for screening, then outlined the involved instruments and materials including Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), argumentative and narrative writing prompts, L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer (L2SCA), Lexical Complexity Analyzer (LCA), Grammarly and Polio & Shea's coding guidelines. It provided a summary of the two-day data collection procedure and elaborated on the adopted statistical methods in R Studio and SPSS.

Participants

Participants were recruited from a top private university in Central China based on the following eligibility criteria. i) freshman status: participants were first-semester, non-repeat

freshmen to ensure no prior exposure to the research instruments used in this study. ii) non-English majors: all participants were non-English majors required to take a standard English course comprising listening, reading, translation, and writing sections. This course, aligned with the writing genres studied here (argumentative and narrative), prepares students for the CET-4 exam, minimizing sampling bias by enrolling students with similar college entrance exam scores across various majors. iii) language proficiency: participants were required to achieve an intermediate level (30-39 points) on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OPT) (Syndicate, 2001), which correlates with the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Vasylets & Marin, 2020). Although the initial plans of our study considered selecting upper-intermediate students in line with previous research, the average proficiency level of first-year non-English EFL learners led to the selection of those at the intermediate level (Li et al., 2022).

Based on the three criteria, following a call for participants in classes taught by the same English teacher (Class of 2023, over 300 students), nearly 200 volunteered. After initial screening with the OPT, 167 students qualified (114 males, 53 females), ages ranging from 17 to 21 years (M = 18.40, SD = 0.73). All were native Chinese speakers, with an average of 9 years of English learning. The standard CET-4 course was the only context involving L2 writing for these students. Participants were awarded credits for their involvement.

Instruments

Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory

The SLWAI, developed based on data from Chinese EFL learners, is a 22-item, 5-point Likert scale, with items 1, 4, 7, 17, 18, 21, and 22 requiring reverse coding (Cheng, 2004). As one of the most commonly used instruments for measuring L2 writing anxiety (Rabadi & Rabadi, 2020; Sun & Fan, 2022), SLWAI demonstrates high internal consistency (α = .91) and test-retest reliability (r = .85) (Cheng, 2004). The Chinese version of SLWAI was utilized in this study, provided directly by the developer via email.

Argumentative & Narrative Essays

Two argumentative and two narrative writing prompts were selected from CET-4 writing tasks from the past five years (Appendix A). The argumentative prompts were taken from one exam set, and the narrative prompts from another. Each participant was required to complete one argumentative and one narrative task. To avoid potential topic confounding and experimental effects, the tasks were assigned randomly. Half of the participants drafted an argumentative essay first, followed by a narrative essay, while the other half completed the tasks in reverse order. Essays were collected on a digital platform under timed conditions, and participants were unfamiliar with the platform and writing prompts. Each participant was permitted a single submission.

L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer

The L2SCA (Lu, 2010) is a computational system designed to automatically analyze the syntactic complexity of written English. Frequently used in syntactic complexity research (Heng et al., 2023; Yoon, 2021), L2SCA generates 9 basic structures and 14 syntactic complexity indices, including MLC, DC/C, VP/T, W, and C, which were used in this study. L2SCA has high reliability (.83 to 1.0) for identifying indices and a high correlation (.83 to 1.0) with manual coding (Lu,

2010). Compared to other analyzers, L2SCA is more transparent and consistent in its measurement computations (Polio & Yoon, 2018). This study used L2SCA (version 4.2.2) to calculate the syntactic complexity measures MLC, DC/C, VP/T, and the fluency measures W and C.

Lexical Complexity Analyzer

The LCA (Lu, 2012) is another computational system that automates the measurement of lexical complexity in written English. The system produces 8 basic structures and 25 lexical production units. Previous studies (Hao et al., 2023; Spring & Johnson, 2022) have validated LCA as an advanced and effective lexical analyzer. Using the Part-Of-Speech (POS) tagger TagAnt (version 2.0.5) (TagAnt, 2024), this study employs LCA (version 2.0) to analyze the lexical complexity measures LD, LS2, RTTR, and CVV1.

Grammarly Premium and Polio & Shea's Guidelines for Coding Errors

To semi-automate the measurement of error-free clauses (EFC/C) for accuracy, Grammarly Premium (Grammarly, 2024) was utilized to detect general errors in each essay. Grammarly is used by L2 writers for error identification due to its reported reliability (Pfau et al., 2023; Phuoc & Barrot, 2022). In this study, Grammarly was configured with audience (knowledgeable), formality (neutral), and domain (general) settings to identify critical and advanced issues in each essay. Following this, two raters manually coded errors based on Polio & Shea's Guidelines for coding errors (Polio & Shea, 2014). The first rater coded errors in all samples, while the second rater coded errors in a randomly selected 50% of the samples. The inter-rater reliability was .96 (Pearson's *r*). Finally, all clauses containing errors were removed to calculate the ratio of error-free clauses.

Procedure

Data collection occurred in a designated classroom over two non-consecutive days. Initially, following a concise introduction to the study, all volunteer students undertook the timed OPT version 1 (Syndicate, 2001) for preliminary screening. One week subsequently, those who achieved intermediate scores on the OPT were reconvened in the same classroom. During this session, they were required to: i) complete the SLWAI via Microsoft Forms; and ii) write one argumentative and one narrative essay on an online writing platform, allocating 40 minutes for each task (Zhang, 2023). A 10-minute break was allowed between the two writing tasks to minimize fatigue. To ensure the integrity of the responses, the use of electronic devices was prohibited during the session, and students were allowed only a single submission opportunity per task. Essays were downloaded directly from the platform for complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) analyses. In total, 167 students successfully submitted both essays within the allocated time. All data were treated with strict confidentiality to protect participants' privacy.

Analysis

The objective of this study is to statistically compare the mean differences between high and low-anxiety writers across argumentative and narrative genres and to investigate the interaction between writing anxiety and genre, as well as their independent effects. Writing anxiety and genre are treated as categorical variables with two levels each, and all CAF measures serve as continuous dependent variables. Initially, a series of two-way mixed ANOVAs were conducted to evaluate the interaction effects posited in the third research hypothesis. Subsequently, independent samples

and paired-sample *t*-tests were employed to assess the main effects hypothesized for writing anxiety and genre.

To ensure robust statistical procedures, the 167 participants were grouped into three quantiles based on their SLWAI scores ($p < .001$), focusing on the high anxiety ($n = 55$) and low anxiety ($n = 56$) groups. After excluding seven outliers based on Z scores and studentized residuals (beyond ± 3.00), each group was adjusted to 52 participants ($\bar{x}_{(high)} = 84.92$; $\bar{x}_{(low)} = 55.37$). Given concerns about sample size adequacy for multivariate analysis (Young III, 2006), mixed ANOVAs were specifically structured with writing anxiety (high *vs.* low) as a between-subjects factor and genre (argumentative *vs.* narrative) as a within-subjects factor. All statistical analyses were calculated in R (version 4.3.2) and SPSS (version 27.0.1).

For normally distributed and variance-homogeneous measures (DC/C, LD, LS2, RTTR, CVV1, EFC/C, W, and C), mixed-effects ANOVA models were executed via the *lmer()* function from the *lme4* package in R, noted for its computational efficiency and flexibility (Douglas Bates et al., 2015), then main effects with effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) were determined using *t*-tests in SPSS. Measures (MLC, VP/T) that did not meet normality ($p_{(MLC)}$ = .666, .197, .000, .082; $p_{(VP/T)}$ = .045, .009, .448, .078) or homogeneity ($p_{(MLC)}$ = .466; $p_{(VP/T)}$ = .388) prerequisites were analyzed using robust methods. The *bwtrim()* function for 20% trimmed means and the *sppba()* and *sppbb()* functions for percentile bootstrap analyses were utilized to compute the interactions and main effects, adhering to recommendations for robust statistical analysis in mixed designs (Field et al., 2012; Wilcox, 2023). Effect sizes (ξ) were calculated using the Xi explanatory measure (Wilcox & Tian, 2011), with procedures from the *WRS2* package in R.

Results

The descriptive results for 10 adopted CAF measures by writing anxiety and genre are presented in Table B in Appendix B, where writing anxiety is divided into two groups: low (WA-L) and high (WA-H), and genre is divided into two types: narrative (Nar) and argumentative (Arg). The inferential results of Writing Anxiety * Genre mixed ANOVA are presented in Table 2; no significant interaction effect was observed, but prevalent main effects for both writing anxiety and genre were determined. The report of the inferential results is as follows.

The ANOVA revealed significant main effects of writing anxiety on several performance measures. The results indicated:

- Syntactic complexity, measured by the dependent clause ratio (DC/C), was significantly affected by writing anxiety ($F(1, 102) = 7.62$, $p = .007$).
- Lexical complexity, captured by the root type-token ratio (RTTR), showed notable differences ($F(1, 102) = 5.55$, $p = .02$); Corrected verb variation (CVV1) also indicated significant differences due to anxiety levels ($F(1, 102) = 5.64$, $p = .019$).
- Fluency, measured by the total number of words (W) and total number of clauses (C), was both statistically significant (W: $F(1, 102) = 14.44$, $p < .001$; C: $F(1, 102) = 6.12$, $p = .015$).

Subsequent independent samples *t*-tests compared low and high anxiety groups, revealing that the low anxiety group generally performed better across all measured indices:

- DC/C: $M = 0.3$, $SD = 0.09$ for low anxiety *vs.* $M = 0.26$, $SD = 0.11$ for high anxiety ($t(206) = 2.795$, $p = .006$, $d = .39$).
- RTTR: $M = 7.56$, $SD = 0.89$ for low anxiety *vs.* $M = 7.22$, $SD = 0.75$ for high anxiety ($t(206) = 2.953$, $p = .004$, $d = .41$).
- CVV1: $M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.47$ for low anxiety *vs.* $M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.46$ for high anxiety ($t(206)$

= 2.82, p = .005, d = .39).

- Total words (W): M = 209.13, SD = 39.51 for low anxiety *vs.* M = 184, SD = 38.42 for high anxiety (t(206) = 4.649, p < .001, d = .65).
- Total clauses (C): M = 22.93, SD = 5.08 for low anxiety *vs.* M = 20.7, SD = 5.96 for high anxiety (t(206) = 2.904, p = .004, d = .40).

The total number of words (W) reached the medium effect size (d = .65), indicating a noticeable impact of writing anxiety on fluency (Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2. *Inferential statistics of two-way mixed ANOVA (writing anxiety * genre)*

	Measure	***SS/MS***	***F***	***p***	**Measure**	***SS/MS***	***F***	***p***
WA	DC/C	0.07	7.62	.007**	EFC/C	0.00	0.18	.671
Genre		0.12	13.43	< .001***		0.12	7.92	.006**
WA*Genre		0.00	0.46	.500		0.01	0.68	.413
WA	LD	0.00	0.95	.331	W	7165.1	14.44	< .001***
Genre		0.00	2.48	.118		30168.4	60.79	< .001***
WA*Genre		0.00	0.28	.600		154.0	0.31	.579
WA	LS2	0.00	1.08	.301	C	78.66	6.12	.015*
Genre		0.13	61.71	< .001***		686.94	53.41	< .001***
WA*Genre		0.00	2.01	.159		6.23	0.48	.488
WA	RTTR	1.40	5.55	.020*	MLC		1.34	.251
Genre		4.90	19.40	< .001***			5.01	.029*
WA*Genre		0.17	0.67	.415			0.15	.695
WA	CVV1	0.65	5.64	.019*	VP/T		0.55	.462
Genre		1.85	16.20	< .001***			13.29	< .001***
WA*Genre		0.01	0.13	.722			0.01	.941

writing anxiety; SS, sum of squares; MS, Mean square.
*** p < .001. ** p < .01. * p < .05.

Table 3. *Independent samples t-tests for statistically significant CAF measures between anxiety groups*

Category	**Measure**	**Low Anxiety**	**High Anxiety**	***t***	***p***	***d***
		M(SD)	*M(SD)*			
Syntactic complexity	DC/C	0.30(0.09)	0.26(0.11)	2.795	.006**	.39
Lexical complexity	RTTR	7.56(0.89)	7.22(0.75)	2.953	.004**	.41
	CVV1	2.97(0.47)	2.78(0.46)	2.820	.005**	.39
Fluency	W	209.13(39.51)	184.00(38.42)	4.649	< .001***	**.65**
	C	22.93(5.08)	20.70(5.96)	2.904	.004**	.40

M, mean; SD, standard deviation; d, Cohen's d, |δt| = 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 represent small, medium, and large effects.
*** p < .001. ** p < .01. * p < .05.

The ANOVA showed significant genre effects on multiple performance metrics. The mean length of clause (MLC) had a main effect (F(1, 61) = 5.01, p = .029). Significant differences were also observed in the dependent clause ratio (DC/C, F(1, 102) = 13.43, p < .001), verb phrases per T-unit (VP/T, F(1, 62) = 13.29, p < .001), and several measures of lexical complexity: lexical sophistication-II (LS2, F(1, 102) = 61.71, p < .001), root type-token ratio (RTTR, F(1, 102) =

19.40, $p < .001$), and corrected verb variation (CVV1, $F(1, 102) = 16.20$, $p < .001$). Fluency measures such as total number of words (W, $F(1, 102) = 60.79$, $p < .001$) and clauses (C, $F(1, 102) = 53.41$, $p < .001$), along with error-free clause ratio (EFC/C, $F(1, 102) = 7.92$, $p = .006$), also showed significant genre-related differences (See Table 2).

Subsequent paired samples *t*-tests explored differences between argumentative and narrative essays, independent of writing anxiety. Syntactic complexity was greater in argumentative essays, with DC/C and VP/T showing higher values than in narrative essays (DC/C: $t(103) = -3.674$, $p < .001$, $d = -.36$; VP/T: $t = -2.908$, $p < .001$, $\xi = .58$). However, narrative essays scored higher on lexical complexity measures such as LS2, RTTR, and CVV1 (LS2: $t(103) = 7.817$, $p < .001$, $d = .77$; RTTR: $t(103) = 4.412$, $p < .001$, $d = .43$; CVV1: $t(103) = 4.042$, $p < .001$, $d = .40$). In terms of fluency and accuracy, argumentative essays also performed better, displaying higher numbers in word count, clauses, and error-free clause ratio (W: $t(103) = -7.823$, $p < .001$, $d = -.77$; C: $t(103) = -7.327$, $p < .001$, $d = -.72$; EFC/C: $t(103) = -2.819$, $p = .006$, $d = -.28$). These effects ranged from medium to large, showing substantial genre influences on writing performance (See Table 4).

Table 4. *Paired-sample t-tests for statistically significant CAF measures between genre types*

Category	**Measure**	**Narrative** *M(SD)*	**Argumentative** *M(SD)*	***t***	***p***	***d***
Syntactic complexity	DC/C	0.26(0.10)	0.30(0.10)	-3.674	< .001***	-.36
Lexical complexity	LS2	0.34(0.05)	0.29(0.06)	7.817	< .001***	**.77**
	RTTR	7.55(0.83)	7.24(0.82)	4.412	< .001***	.43
	CVV1	2.97(0.49)	2.78(0.44)	4.042	< .001***	.40
Accuracy	EFC/C	0.59(0.18)	0.63(0.15)	-2.819	.006**	-.28
Fluency	W	184.52(38.70)	208.61(39.57)	-7.823	< .001***	**-.77**
	C	20.00(5.51)	23.63(5.18)	-7.327	< .001***	**-.72**
Category	Measure	Narrative *Mt(Mt.se)*	Argumentative *Mt(Mt.se)*	*t*	*p*	*ξ*
Syntactic complexity	MLC	9.39(0.20)	8.87(0.16)	1.941	.048*	.29
	VP/T	1.92(0.04)	2.10(0.05)	-2.908	< .001***	**.58**

M, mean; SD, standard deviation; Mt, 20% trimmed mean; Mt.se, standard error for the 20% trimmed mean; d, Cohen's d, Values of |δt| = 0.2, 0.5, and 0.8 represent small, medium, and large effects; ξ, Values of ξˆ = 0.10, 0.30, and 0.50 represent small, medium, and large effects (Mair & Wilcox, 2020).
*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

Discussion

Main Effects of Writing Anxiety

Consistent with previous studies, this research substantiates the negative correlations between writing anxiety and L2 writing achievements; the low anxiety group outperformed the high anxiety group across all significant CAF measures (DC/C, RTTR, CVV1, W, & C) (Teimouri et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019). DC/C ($p = .007$) emerged as a critical syntactic complexity measure, where high-anxiety writers showed a significantly lower ratio of dependent clauses than their low-anxiety counterparts. Compared to the unit length (e.g., MLC) or the structure (e.g., VP/T), high anxiety writers perform worse in the subordination unit, which aligns with Norris and Ortega (2009), who theorized syntactic development through systemic functional linguistics and suggest that subordination is a key developmental stage. Thus, DC/C distinguishes between the high and low anxiety groups at this intermediate stage.

Lexical complexity analysis revealed that measures like RTTR (p = .020) and CVV1 (p = .019) significantly differed between the groups, which shows that lexical diversity, particularly verb variation, is more affected by anxiety than lexical sophistication, which is in line with Lu (2012), where lexical variation especially verb variation displayed the strongest effect on L2 quality. Findings suggest emphasizing a broader range of vocabulary and prioritizing verb learning in instructional settings. Lexical density (LD) showed no significant differences, aligning with previous studies (Eckstein & Ferris, 2018; Lu, 2012; Yang et al., 2023).

Fluency measures, specifically W and C, indicated significant differences, with W achieving a medium effect size (d = .65), which suggests that higher anxiety leads to shorter essays, corroborating earlier meta-analyses (Teimouri et al., 2019; Zhang, 2019) and indicates a strong effect of fluency on writing proficiency (Phuoc & Barrot, 2022).

Viewing complexity, accuracy, and fluency as a triad, the main disparities between the high and low anxiety groups lie in the complexity (DC/C, RTTR, CVV1) and fluency (W & C) domains. This observation is in line with MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), who have found that language anxiety negatively impacts complexity and fluency at the output stage. A possible explanation for this might be from a cognitive psychological perspective. Cognitive interference, as discussed by Eysenck et al. (2007) and Schwarzer (2013), limits available cognitive resources, particularly under timed conditions. According to Skehan's (1998, 2009) Limited Attention Capacity hypothesis, a limited processing capacity is directed to a "trade-off" within the CAF triad: enhanced one area might be associated with compromised two others, and a concern to avoid error leads to raised accuracy but lower complexity and fluency. In this study, writers' primary attention was allocated to avoiding writing errors to get good grades for credit. The more anxious students were, the more attentional resources they possibly committed to avoiding mistakes. Therefore, no significant difference was observed in accuracy between high and low anxiety groups.

The observed disparities in CAF performance between high- and low-anxiety groups underscore significant pedagogical implications for enhancing writing proficiency. On the one hand, it is essential to implement tailored instructional strategies specifically designed to mitigate the impact of writing anxiety. These strategies should be informed by a nuanced understanding of how anxiety influences writing performance, facilitating the development of interventions tailored to learners at various anxiety levels. On the other hand, it is also worth exploring unified coping strategies that motivate all students to achieve optimal writing proficiency, regardless of their individual anxiety levels. Such approaches have been empirically validated in the context of language aptitude (Payne & Whitney, 2019; Vatz et al., 2013), suggesting that similarly "unified" strategies targeting another individual difference— writing anxiety, which are effective in reducing its impact across all levels, may also be worth further investigation.

Main Effects of Genre

The results showed significant main effects of the genre on all assessed measures of complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Argumentative essays demonstrated higher syntactic complexity, accuracy, and fluency, whereas narrative essays exhibited greater lexical complexity. This divergence is in line with Biber and Conrad's (2009) assertions on genre effects— each genre has different functional demands, requiring distinct linguistic approaches.

The syntactic complexity findings align with previous research, indicating that argumentative writing incorporates more complex syntactic structures than narrative writing (Lu, 2011; Yoon, 2021; Yoon & Polio, 2017). This was evidenced by significantly higher DC/C and

VP/T scores in argumentative tasks ($p < .001$), suggesting greater use of dependent clauses and verb phrases to construct arguments and support viewpoints. Conversely, the MLC results contradicted some earlier findings, with narrative writing displaying slightly higher mean lengths (*Mt* = 9.39) compared to argumentative writing (*Mt* = 8.87), although the significance was marginal ($p = .048$). This variance echoes the mixed results in the literature (Beers & Nagy, 2009; Yoon, 2021; Yoon & Polio, 2017). Norris and Ortega (2009) suggested that MLC might be most indicative of syntactic complexity at more advanced writing levels due to its focus on subclausal and phrasal modifications.

The study's findings on syntactic complexity for intermediate L2 writers suggest a tendency to construct longer sentences by stringing together clauses rather than employing sophisticated phrasal modifications (the following excerpts highlight two examples). This performance reflects their limited proficiency and suggests a need for pedagogical approaches that enhance their ability to employ more complex grammatical structures. Thus, teaching should focus on expanding students' capabilities in creating intricate subclausal constructions, which could include utilizing writing templates featuring complex dependent clauses or engaging in challenging writing tasks that reward more sophisticated sentence construction.

Excerpts of two argumentative essays:

i. *First of all, I want to say that our library has only one exit. It is not convenient to enter into it and it will cost us more time. … Next, if we stay too long in the library, we will want to drink, but there is no water. It is not friendly to us.* (Student 39)

ii. *First, we should organize an activity named Bahe. Do this, we can organize many students. Then we can begin. … What's more, it can also strengthen the body.* (Student 50)

Contrary to syntactic complexity outcomes, narrative essays consistently demonstrated higher lexical sophistication (LS2) and diversity (RTTR, CVV1) than argumentative essays. This finding aligns partially with Yoon and Polio (2017), who noted higher lexical diversity in narratives but suggested that argumentative texts typically show greater sophistication due to prevalent nominalization. Their study involved nearly advanced students, illustrating the challenges intermediate students face in employing sophisticated vocabulary in complex writing contexts. Further analysis revealed that narrative essays contained nearly double the occurrences of nominalized suffixes (e.g., *-ty, -ance*) compared to argumentative essays (412 *vs.* 212 tokens), while transitional phrases (e.g., *first of all, last but not least*) were more common in argumentative contexts (131 *vs.* 95 tokens). This suggests that narrative writing may be less demanding, enabling the use of more sophisticated vocabulary and varied expressions. Consequently, enhancing pedagogical focus on argumentative writing could benefit students by challenging them to develop more complex linguistic structures.

Regarding accuracy and fluency, argumentative essays outperformed narratives, with higher counts of error-free clauses (EFC/C) and overall words (W). Argumentative texts averaged 24 words more than narratives ($M_{(Arg)} = 208.61$ *vs.* $M_{(Nar)} = 184.52$), reflecting a denser use of clauses. This supports the notion that argumentative writing, by its nature, requires more extensive word usage to develop and support arguments compared to the more linear, chronological structure of narrative writing. An additional hypothesis emerged from these findings: the lack of significant differences in word count across genres might suggest similar levels of accuracy, underscoring the interconnectedness of fluency and accuracy in L2 writing assessments.

Interaction Effects of Writing Anxiety and Genre

The investigation into the third hypothesis revealed no significant interaction effects between writing anxiety and genre. This outcome may be explained by several factors. The English proficiency levels of the intermediate Chinese EFL non-English majors may have played a critical role. Faigley et al. (1981) have documented an interaction effect of writing anxiety and genre on MLC among L1 first-year undergraduates. The comparative linguistic capabilities of L2 writers at the intermediate level are lower than those of L1 writers, which could diminish the likelihood of observing significant interaction effects in such contexts.

The constrained essay lengths in this study may have influenced the nonsignificant findings. Whereas other studies often allow word limits ranging from approximately 250 to 350 words (Qian, 2023; Yoon, 2021), the essays in this study averaged nearly 200 words, limiting the depth of analysis possible within the given variances. Furthermore, the sample size also posed limitations. The relatively small sample (n = 52 in 2×2 cells) under the conditions of data collection has further restricted the capacity to detect significant interactions.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of writing anxiety and genre on complexity, accuracy, and fluency measures among Chinese intermediate EFL learners. The analyses revealed that the low anxiety group outperformed the high anxiety group in significant CAF measures and identified differences between argumentative and narrative essays across all CAF dimensions. Theoretically, the findings underscore the profound impact of affective factors on L2 writing, aligning with current trends in SLA research that emphasize the interplay of identity and language learning. They also confirm that different genres, due to their varied linguistic demands, necessitate distinct writing strategies. Pedagogically, this study highlights the need for tailored instructional strategies to support intermediate L2 learners with varying levels of writing anxiety, particularly in genre-specific writing tasks.

However, the study's scope is confined to intermediate students from a single university, restricting the generality of these findings. Also, the CAF measures used might not have captured subtle linguistic features impacted by affective IDs, advocating for more granular linguistic analyses in future research. Besides, since the study focused on written outputs, further studies should consider the stages of writing anxiety to clarify its effects. Finally, expanding the scope to include various communication modalities— such as speech production and integrated oral-written tasks— could provide deeper insights into how affective factors influence multimodal language performance.

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Appendix A

WRITING PROMPTS

Argumentative Essays

i. ***Directions:*** Suppose you are going to write a proposal to your school library for improving its service. You are to write about its current problems and possible solutions to these problems. You should write at least 150 words.

ii. ***Directions:*** Suppose you are going to write a proposal to your student union for enriching students' extracurricular activities. You are to write about what activities to organize and why. You should write at least 150 words.

Narrative Essays

i. ***Directions:*** For this part, you are allowed to write a news report to your campus newspaper on a visit to a volunteer activity organized by your Student Union to assist elderly people in the neighborhood. You should write at least 150 words.

ii. ***Directions:*** For this part, you are allowed to write a news report for your campus newspaper on a visit to a Hope elementary school organized by your Student Union. You should write at least 150 words.

Appendix B

Descriptive Results of Effects of Writing Anxiety and Genre on CAF Performance

Table B. *Descriptive statistics for complexity, accuracy, and fluency measures by writing anxiety (WA-L/WA-H) and genre (Nar/Arg)*

Category	Measure	WA-L / Nar (*n* = 52)		WA-L / Arg (*n* = 52)		WA-H / Nar (*n* = 52)		WA-H / Arg (*n* = 52)	
		M(SD)	95% CI	*M(SD)*	95% CI	*M(SD)*	95% CI	*M(SD)*	95% CI
Syntactic complexity	DC/C	0.28 (0.08)	0.28-0.26	0.32 (0.10)	0.32-0.29	0.23 (0.12)	0.23-0.20	0.29 (0.09)	0.29-0.26
Lexical complexity	LD	0.51 (0.04)	0.51-0.50	0.52 (0.04)	0.52-0.51	0.52 (0.04)	0.52-0.51	0.52 (0.04)	0.52-0.51
	LS2	0.34 (0.06)	0.34-0.32	0.30 (0.06)	0.30-0.28	0.34 (0.05)	0.34-0.32	0.28 (0.06)	0.28-0.26
	RTTR	7.74 (0.85)	7.74-7.51	7.38 (0.90)	7.38-7.13	7.35 (0.78)	7.35-7.13	7.10 (0.70)	7.10-6.90
	CVV1	3.07 (0.45)	3.07-2.94	2.86 (0.48)	2.86-2.73	2.87 (0.51)	2.87-2.73	2.70 (0.40)	2.70-2.59
Accuracy	EFC/C	0.58 (0.16)	0.58-0.54	0.65 (0.13)	0.65-0.61	0.59 (0.19)	0.59-0.53	0.62 (0.16)	0.62-0.58
Fluency	W	197.94 (36.97)	197.94-187.65	220.31 (39.13)	220.31-209.41	171.10 (35.92)	171.10-161.09	196.90 (36.76)	196.90-186.67
	C	21.29 (5.23)	21.29-19.83	24.58 (4.39)	24.58-23.35	18.71 (5.53)	18.71-17.17	22.69 (5.76)	22.69-21.09
Category	Measure	WA-L / Nar (*n* = 52)		WA-L / Arg (*n* = 52)		WA-H / Nar (*n* = 52)		WA-H / Arg (*n* = 52)	
		Mt (Mt.se)		*Mt (Mt.se)*		*Mt (Mt.se)*		*Mt (Mt.se)*	
Syntactic complexity	MLC	9.61 (0.28)		9.00 (0.23)		9.18 (0.32)		8.75 (0.24)	
	VP/T	1.95 (0.05)		2.13 (0.07)		1.89 (0.06)		2.08 (0.07)	

WA-L, low writing anxiety; WA-H, high writing anxiety; Nar, narrative essay; Arg, argumentative essay; M, mean; SD, standard deviation; 95% CI, 95% confidence interval; Mt, 20% trimmed mean; Mt.se, standard error for the 20% trimmed mean.

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Investigating IBCC Factors and CLIL Principles for Designing a Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication Course for Thai EFL Students

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Abstract
Due to globalization, Thai Business English students face challenges in cross-cultural communication, as traditional education often neglects the development of Intercultural Business Communicative Competence, and fails to address the specific needs of different stakeholders. Although some empirical studies have tried to address this issue, none has touched on incorporating IBCC with Content and Language Integrated Learning, especially in Thai EFL classrooms, which are crucial elements for learning language and culture. The current mixed-method study aims to address this gap by identifying essential IBCC contents for a Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course and determining the CLIL principles needed to support its development. In this study, quantitative data was collected through questionnaires from three groups of stakeholders (84 students, 17 teachers, and 15 prospective employers) to assess key IBCC factors. For qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were used with selected participants to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the CLIL principles. The findings suggest that Cognitive Cultural Intelligence should be focused on the most of all the six IBCC factors, while Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence should be focused on the least. The findings also suggest integrating CLIL components, such as business case studies with cultural analysis, language skills for negotiating across cultures, embedded cultural norms in business simulations, and the enhancement of intercultural communication strategies. These findings provide essential knowledge about the particular language and cultural competencies needed by Thai undergraduate students to succeed in international business careers, which makes it valuable for developing CLIL-based Business English courses and curriculum for Thai EFL students.
Keywords: Business English, Content and Language Integrated Learning, Cross-Cultural Communication, Intercultural Business Communicative Competence, Thai EFL Students

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Introduction

Teaching Business English to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is a common practice in Thai universities, especially those with English majors or programs, as it is widely recognized as an essential component for their future career prospects. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and international career opportunities emerge in Thailand, it is crucial for Thai EFL learners to be equipped with the knowledge of intercultural or cross-cultural communication skills.

The research by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013) and Nickerson (2005) suggests that Business English courses enable students to acquire language skills and intercultural communication abilities needed for international business communication. The approach supports Byram's (2021) argument that intercultural communicative competence development leads to successful cross-cultural communication and understanding. Yao and Du-Babcock (2020) build on this idea by suggesting that workers need Intercultural Business Communication Competence (IBCC) to succeed in cross-cultural business environments.

When designing a Business English course that focuses on intercultural communication, incorporating Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as a framework can greatly enhance the learning experience. CLIL is an educational approach that integrates the teaching of both subject content and language skills, enabling students to develop language proficiency while learning about specific content areas. According to Coyle et al. (2010), CLIL provides a framework both language and content learning, emphasizing the integration of subject-specific content with language development.

Due to today's globalized world of business practices, Business English students, especially those in non-native countries such as Thailand, face the challenge of communicating effectively in cross-cultural contexts. The traditional approach to Business English education often neglects the development of IBCC and fails to address the specific needs of stakeholders in navigating cultural differences.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform the design of Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication courses and curricula by providing insightful information on the specific language and cultural knowledge Thai undergraduate students need for international business careers. By bridging the gap between language and content learning, the present study aims to achieve two principal objectives:

1. To identify the IBCC contents needed to be included in the Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course.

2. To identify the CLIL principles needed to support the development of the course.

As a result, this study is designed to address two central research questions, presented as follows:

1. What are the essential IBCC components to include in the Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course?

2. What CLIL principles can be applied to support the development of the course?

To effectively address the two research questions, this study first extracts relevant literature to understand the specific principles of IBCC and CLIL needed for cross-cultural communication settings. Then, the methodology of this study is presented along with the research findings and discussions. Finally, some recommendations are presented for both pedagogical application and future research.

Literature Review

Business English Education

Researchers have identified a strong correlation between proficiency in Business English and increased employability, job performance, and competitiveness in the global job market (Dudley-Evans, 2018; Kennedy & Bolitho, 1984). Mastering Business English can equip learners with the necessary language skills and cultural understanding to navigate various business contexts, negotiate effectively, engage in successful presentations, and build strong professional relationships (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). However, while this correlation with Business proficiency is evident, it raises the question of whether this includes the essential component of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), implying that specific instruction in ICC must also be incorporated into the curriculum to adequately prepare learners for diverse global interactions.

In Business English education, the importance of intercultural communication has been recognized and studied extensively. Kim and Gudykunst (2013) emphasize the importance of cultural awareness and understanding different communication styles and etiquette while promoting effective intercultural communication in business environments. However, the Thai education context often shows a significant absence of class materials that focus on these essential aspects, which leads to the need for identifying suitable content to prepare Thai EFL students for business interactions across cultures. Consequently, the current study aims to identify the most suitable content for the Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course, emphasizing the need for "a targeted syllabus distinct from general English," as suggested by Gouabi (2023).

Intercultural Business Communicative Competence (IBCC)

Intercultural Business Communicative Competence (IBCC) was introduced by Yao and Du-Babcock as a model in their study. Yao and Du-Babcock (2020) examined Chinese business professionals in China to determine which competencies are essential for successful intercultural business communication. Therefore, the findings suggest that IBCC consists of six factors that are considered essential for professionals to succeed in globalized business including Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence (individuals' awareness and understanding of their own cultural assumptions, biases, and mental processes), Motivational Cultural Intelligence (individuals' willingness and interest in engaging with people from different cultures), Behavioral Cultural Intelligence (individuals' ability to effectively engage in culturally appropriate behaviors and adapt their communication and actions to different cultural contexts), Cognitive Cultural Intelligence (individuals' knowledge and understanding of different cultural values, beliefs, practices, and

worldviews), Strategic Competence (individual's ability to employ effective communication strategies in intercultural business contexts), and Pragmatic Competence (individuals' ability to use language appropriately and effectively in intercultural business communication).

The current study applies this framework to develop a Business English course for cross-cultural communication based on the defined IBCC factors. The primary goal of this research is to determine which of the six essential factors should be prioritized in the curriculum to effectively prepare Thai EFL students for international business communication challenges and which factors require less initial attention.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

According to Coyle et al. (2010), the term CLIL—which stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning—was first used in Europe in the early 1990s. CLIL is "a dual-focused educational approach in which additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language".

One prominent framework within CLIL education is the CLIL 4Cs-Framework introduced by Coyle (1999), which encompasses four essential dimensions for successful CLIL implementation. This framework offers a strong pedagogical and methodological foundation for genuinely sustainable CLIL teaching and learning (Meyer, 2010). The dimensions of the CLIL 4Cs-Framework include content, communication, cognition, and culture. In order to effectively implement the CLIL 4Cs-Framework, Meyer (2010) developed the CLIL-Pyramid, a conceptual framework designed to support effective planning and teaching in CLIL programs. The CLIL-Pyramid provides a systematic, tried and tested sequence for planning CLIL units and materials. The pyramid is built around the following key elements: 1) Topic Selection, 2) Choice of Media, 3) Task-Design, and 4) CLIL Workout.

In this study, given CLIL's dual focus on content and language, a task-based syllabus would be highly beneficial in the design of the Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course. Task-based learning aligns with CLIL principles by emphasizing authentic tasks that promote active engagement and real-world language use, essential for developing communicative competence across disciplines. Additionally, a content-based syllabus would complement CLIL by ensuring that language learning is contextualized within the specific academic content areas relevant to the study, thereby enhancing students' ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in their chosen fields.

Relevant Previous Studies

Several studies on intercultural communication, IBCC, and Cross-Cultural Communication have been conducted to investigate and enhance intercultural communicative strategies and competence in EFL students (e.g., Inkaew, 2016; Tran & Seepho, 2016; Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020; Yao & Du-Babcock, 2020). The findings underscore the significance of cross-cultural communication in multicultural environments. Furthermore, the prominent studies of Yang (2021) and Rimkeeratikul (2022) focused on enhancing EFL learners'

skills and competencies through specific instructional approaches such as CLIL and needs analysis. Notably, Gomathy and Radhakrishnan (2022) suggested a CLIL methodology integrating content, cognition, and culture, and concluded that metacognitive strategies can significantly enhance L2 reading comprehension and analytical thinking in CLIL settings through consistent practice. These studies highlight the importance of instructional design and curriculum development methods to enhance language learning outcomes.

After conducting a comprehensive literature review, it became evident that a blend of task-based and content-based syllabi would be essential for the Business English for Cross-Cultural communication course. The current study aims to address the existing gap by integrating IBCC and CLIL into a course design, an approach rarely implemented in Thai EFL classrooms. It adopts the IBCC model introduced by Yao and Du-Babcock (2020) alongside the CLIL's 4Cs Framework developed by Coyle (1999) to guide the development of a Business English course that integrates language learning with content-based instruction, emphasizing the development of intercultural skills such as cross-cultural awareness, communication strategies, and cultural intelligence. The findings should be beneficial to Business English course designers and curriculum makers in Thailand.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design of this study follows an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, which starts with quantitative data collection through questionnaires from students, teachers, and prospective employers. The research aims to determine the essential Intercultural Business Communicative Competence (IBCC) content for a Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course designed for Thai tertiary students. The qualitative phase uses semi-structured interviews with selected stakeholders to gather detailed explanatory information about CLIL principles needed for the course, which results in a complete understanding of learner needs for syllabus design.

Participants

The participants in this study included 88 undergraduate students who were studying in the fields of English or Business English at a Thai university, 20 experienced English language teachers who had expertise in teaching Business English, intercultural communication, or related subjects, and 17 prospective employers or professionals working in multinational corporations or organizations in Thailand that required effective cross-cultural communication skills, for a total of 125 participants (N = 125). Following the recommendations of McMillan and Schumacher (2010) and Creswell (2013), purposeful and snowball sampling techniques were used to select participants with strong knowledge and valuable insights into the research topic. The purposeful sampling technique was used for students and prospective employers, whereas the snowball technique was employed for teachers, as they could recommend other teachers in the related field.

Research Instruments

Three sets of questionnaires were used to collect qualitative data. The first set of questionnaires was designed to assess the needs of university students, in terms of language skills and intercultural competencies required for effective communication in international business contexts. The second set of questionnaires was created to evaluate the language and intercultural abilities that students should possess to work in the intercultural business sector, based on the perceptions of university teachers. The third set of questionnaires was designed for prospective employers and how they perceived their employees' language skills and intercultural competencies. These questionnaires were based on Yao and Du-Babcock's (2020) IBCC model. To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaires, a comprehensive validation process was conducted, including the Index of Content Validity (IOC), which was verified by three experts.

Table 1. *Objective of each IBCC factor*

Factor	Objective
1. Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence	To assess participants' perception of an individual's cultural awareness and their ability to strategize and plan during intercultural interactions
2. Motivational Cultural Intelligence	To assess participants' perception of an individual's openness, interest, and motivation to engage with and learn from different cultures
3. Behavioral Cultural Intelligence	To assess participants' perception of an individual's ability to adapt their verbal and non-verbal communication styles in diverse cultural settings
4. Cognitive Cultural Intelligence	To assess participants' perception of an individual's knowledge and understanding of cultural norms, values, and practices across different cultures
5. Strategic Competence	To assess participants' perception of an individual's ability to develop, implement, and adjust effective communication strategies in intercultural contexts.
6. Pragmatic Competence	To assess participants' perception of an individual's practical application of language and communication skills in specific cultural contexts, focusing on effective and appropriate use in real-world situations.

Participants rated their agreement using a 5-point Likert scale, from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Alongside participant background information, the surveys included sections evaluating the six IBCC factors.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather in-depth insights into the participants' professional needs, language skills, intercultural experiences, and suggestions for

designing a Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course that integrates CLIL principles. For convenience, these interviews targeted smaller groups of participants, specifically teachers and prospective employers, with three participants randomly chosen for each group. All interviews were noted and the data were coded by themes, facilitating a systematic analysis of recurring patterns and significant findings.

The focus-group interview targeted the larger group of participants specifically students, with nine randomly selected participants. The procedures for the focus-group interviews are quite similar to those for the semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

For qualitative data, the questionnaires were collected from the three correspondent groups via Google Forms. A One-Way ANOVA test was used to compare the perceived importance of six IBCC factors among the three participants groups, with the LSD Post Hoc Test used to identify specific group differences.

For quantitative data, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the teachers and prospective employers and organized a focus-group interview with the students. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring themes related to participants' experiences and perspectives. Findings were used to explore how CLIL principles could support the development of IBCC factors.

Results

Background Information of Participants

The majority of the student participants were female (71.43%), in their fourth year (55.95%), majoring in English (59.2%), and aged between 20 and 21 years (58.33%). The majority of the teacher participants were female (76.47%), affiliated with Silpakorn University (82.35%), aged between 41 and 50 years (47.06%), and had 6 to 10 years of work experience (29.41%). The majority of the prospective employer participants were female (73.33 %), from the field of tourism and hospitality (33.33%), aged between 41 and 50 years (73.33%) and had 6 to 10 years of work experience (33.33%).

IBCC Content Components for a Business English for Cross Communication Course

To investigate the IBCC factors that should be emphasized in a Business English for Cross-Cultural course for Thai tertiary students, this study employs a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to compare the perceived importance of six IBCC factors across three respondent groups: students, teachers, and prospective employers. These factors are based on the Intercultural Business Communicative Intelligence (IBCC) model by Yao and Du-Babcock (2020).

Table Two shows the results of a One-Way ANOVA test, analyzing the variance in the six IBCC factors required for effective cross-cultural business communication in the perspectives of three different respondent groups. The factors analyzed (fac1, fac2, fac3, fac4, fac5, fac6) include both between-group and within-group comparisons.

Table 2. *Variance in IBCC factors for effective cross-cultural communication among three respondent groups*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
fac1	Between Groups	5.663	2	2.832	9.685	.000*
	Within Groups	35.669	122	.292		
	Total	41.332	124			
fac2	Between Groups	1.928	2	.964	4.489	.013**
	Within Groups	26.199	122	.215		
	Total	28.127	124			
fac3	Between Groups	11.414	2	5.707	8.579	.000*
	Within Groups	81.161	122	.665		
	Total	92.575	124			
fac4	Between Groups	1.276	2	.638	1.851	.162
	Within Groups	42.047	122	.345		
	Total	43.323	124			
fac5	Between Groups	11.847	2	5.924	12.894	.000*
	Within Groups	56.050	122	.459		
	Total	67.897	124			
fac6	Between Groups	4.096	2	2.048	5.699	.004*
	Within Groups	43.836	122	.359		
	Total	47.932	124			
total factor	Between Groups	3.976	2	1.988	13.121	.000*
	Within Groups	18.484	122	.152		
	Total	22.460	124			

** $p < 0.05$*

From Table Two, the results indicate that the significance value is less than 0.05 for all factors except fac4, which has a significance value of 0.162. This means that for fac1, fac2, fac3, fac5, and fac6, the differences between the groups are statistically significant and not due to random chance. However, the differences between the groups for fac4 are not statistically significant and could be due to random variation. Therefore, pairwise comparisons were made using the LSD (Least Significance Difference) Post Hoc Test for all the other factors, as shown in Table Three.

Table 3. *Comparison of IBCC factors using LSD Post Hoc Test*

Group	employer	teacher	student
fac1			
employer		-.778*	-.361*
teacher			.417*
student			
fac2			
employer		-.455*	-.220
teacher			.235
student			
fac3			
employer		-.447	.364
teacher			.811*
student			
fac5			
employer		-.456	.370
teacher			.827*
student			
fac6			
employer		-.596*	-.144
teacher			-.452*
student			

** $p < 0.05$*

Table Three shows the LSD (Least Significance Difference) Post Hoc Test comparing the means of the five IBCC factors among three respondent groups: prospective employers, teachers, and students. The factors analyzed are fac1, fac2, fac3, fac5, and fac6. The analysis indicates that teachers generally exhibit higher scores in the five IBCC factors compared to employers and students, with several significant differences among these groups. This finding confirms that teachers may have higher expectations regarding students' possession of the six IBCC factors necessary for effective cross-cultural communication when compared to other stakeholders.

Upon further analysis, it was found that fac2, fac3, and fac5 each have one asterisk, indicating the least level of significance among the listed factors. Next, fac6 has two asterisks, showing a moderate level of significance. Finally, fac1 has three asterisks, indicating the highest level of significance. The six IBCC factors from this study are summarized according to their significance levels as shown in Table Four.

Table 4. *Significance levels of IBCC factors for course design*

IBCC Factor	Significance Level
Factor 4 (Cognitive Cultural Intelligence)	0
Factor 2 (Motivational Cultural Intelligence)	1
Factor 3 (Behavioral Cultural Intelligence)	1
Factor 5 (Strategic Competence)	1
Factor 6 (Pragmatic Competence)	2
Factor 1 (Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence)	3

From Table Four, the six IBCC factors are prioritized based on their significance levels. Factors with the lowest significance will be emphasized as the first priority in the course content, while those with moderate to highest significance were least prioritized. Specifically, Factor 4 (Cognitive Cultural Intelligence) will be the primary focus in developing the course content, as its lowest level of significance emphasizes the importance of individuals' knowledge and understanding of diverse cultural values, beliefs, practices, and worldviews as the foundation of the course. Next, Factor 2 (Motivational Cultural Intelligence), Factor 3 (Behavioral Cultural Intelligence), and Factor 5 (Strategic Competence) will also be emphasized equally but to a slightly lesser extent than Factor 4, as they demonstrate a moderate level of significance. These factors highlight individuals' willingness and interest in engaging with people from different cultures, their ability to effectively engage in culturally appropriate behaviors and adapt their communication to various contexts, and their ability to plan and implement effective communication strategies. Moreover, Factor 6 (Pragmatic Competence) will be moderately emphasized, as their higher level of significance suggests that the differences between the groups are stronger. Lastly, Factor 1 (Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence) will receive the least priority, as this factor focuses on individuals' awareness and understanding of their own cultural assumptions, biases, and mental processes – skills that are better developed after learning the other factors. The prioritization of the six IBCC factors inform the development of the course objectives for the proposed Business English course that focuses on cross-cultural communication.

CLIL Principles for the Course

Data for CLIL principles were gathered from the semi-structured interviews (teacher and prospective employer participants) and focused-group interview (student participants). Many interviewees appreciated the relevance of the content to real-world business situations and the interactive nature of the learning activities. They also noted that the course helped them build confidence in their intercultural communication abilities. However, some challenges were identified, including the need for more individualized feedback and additional support for students with lower initial language proficiency.

To illustrate the findings from the interviews, the themes and codes extracted from the interview data are presented as follows:

Theme 1: Content Integration

- **Code:** "Integration of business case studies with cultural analysis"
- **Description:** Syllabus includes case studies that blend business concepts with cultural analysis, promoting understanding of how cultural factors influence business practices.
- **Focus:** 1. cultural experience 2. business etiquette 3. written communication 4. customer service

Feedback examples:

- **Participant 1:** "I like the case studies because I can learn from real events."
- **Participant 2:** "I would teach cultural insights to develop students' intercultural competence."

- **Participant 3:** “New employees should learn about business etiquettes from different countries.”

Theme 2: Language Development

- **Code:** "Language skills for negotiating across cultures"
- **Description:** Emphasis on developing negotiation skills in English within cross-cultural contexts, with focus on language use in business communication.
- **Focus:** 1. spoken language 2. written language 3. language for meetings 4. language for negotiations

Feedback examples:

- **Participant 1:** "Practicing negotiation skills in English across different cultures should be really helpful.”
- **Participant 2:** “I would teach my students language for negotiation and meetings.”
- **Participant 3:** “The ability to communicate effectively in English is essential in the global workplace.”

Theme 3: Cultural Integration

- **Code:** "Embedding cultural norms in business simulations"
- **Description:** Utilization of business simulations where students navigate scenarios reflecting diverse cultural norms, promoting cultural competence alongside business skills.
- **Focus:** 1. different cultural practices 2. international business conducts

Feedback examples:

- **Participant 1:** “The business simulations should be a great way to learn different cultures.”
- **Participant 2:** “Students should learn how cultural norms influence business interaction.”
- **Participant 3:** “Understanding and adapting to different cultural norms is essential for success in cross-cultural communication for business.”

Theme 4: Skill Development

- **Code:** "Enhancing intercultural communication strategies"
- **Description:** Structured activities to improve strategies for effective intercultural communication, emphasizing awareness of cultural nuances and adaptive communication approaches.
- **Focus**: 1. verbal and non-verbal communication 2. negotiation skills

Feedback examples:

- **Participant 1:** “It’s not just about speaking the language but knowing how to connect with people from different backgrounds.”
- **Participant 2:** “Learning about non-verbal clues can really make a difference in negotiations.”

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- **Participant 3:** "Employees should be able to adjust their communication style based on who they're talking to."

The integration of CLIL principles in the Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course should effectively enhance students' language skills and cultural intelligence. The course design should successfully promote the development of key cross-cultural communication competencies, equipping students to navigate through international business environments. Table Five presents the course syllabus of sixteen weeks, aligning the six IBCC factors with CLIL principles.

Table 5. *Course syllabus aligning IBCC factors with CLIL principles*

Week	Topics	IBCC Factors	CLIL Principles
1	Course Introduction and IBCC Overview	fac4 fac2	**CLIL:** Content introduction **Content:** Overview of IBCC concepts **Language Skill:** Listening/Speaking T**ask:** Icebreaker activities and course overview
2	Cultural Dimensions in Business	fac4 fac2	**CLIL:** Content integration **Content:** Hofstede's cultural dimensions and other models **Language Skill:** Reading/Writing T**ask:** Discuss and write a report on cultural differences
3	Non-Verbal Communication Across Cultures	fac6 fac3	**CLIL:** Content integration **Content:** Non-verbal cues in different cultures **Language Skill:** Listening/Speaking T**ask:** Role-playing scenarios with cultural variations
4	Business Negotiations in a Global Context	fac2 fac5	**CLIL:** Language for specific purposes **Content:** Negotiation styles in various cultural contexts **Language Skill:** Speaking T**ask:** Simulate a cross-cultural communication
5	Effective Email Writing	fac6	**CLIL:** Content integration **Content:** Email etiquette for diverse audiences **Language Skill:** Writing T**ask:** Compose professional cross-cultural emails
6	Teamwork and Leadership Styles	fac4 fac3	**CLIL:** Content integration **Content:** Leadership styles and teamwork in multicultural teams **Language Skill:** Reading/Writing T**ask:** Analyze a case study on global team dynamics
7	Cross-Cultural Meetings	fac3 fac5	**CLIL:** Language for specific purposes **Content:** Strategies for effective global meetings **Language Skill:** Listening/Speaking

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			T**ask:** Simulate a multicultural team meeting
8	Midterm Project: Case Study Analysis	fac4 fac5	**CLIL:** Content integration **Content:** Various case studies of business practices worldwide **Language Skill:** Writing/Speaking T**ask:** Analyze and present a cross-cultural case study
9	Managing Cross-Cultural Conflicts	fac3 fac6	**CLIL:** Content integration **Content:** Conflict management strategies for multicultural teams **Language Skill:** Listening/Speaking T**ask:** Role-play conflict resolution scenarios
10	Marketing and Advertising in Different Cultures	fac4	**CLIL:** Content integration **Content:** Case studies on global marketing strategies **Language Skill:** Listening/Writing T**ask:** Create a marketing plan for a product in a specific culture
11	Cross-Cultural Customer Service	fac3 fac6	**CLIL:** Content integration **Content:** Customer service strategies for an international company **Language Skill:** Speaking T**ask:** Role-play customer service scenarios
12	Social Media and Digital Communication Across Cultures	fac5	**CLIL:** Content integration **Content:** Social media campaign strategies and audience analysis **Language Skill:** Reading/Writing T**ask:** Design a social media campaign for a cross-cultural audience
13	Legal and Ethical Considerations in Cross-Cultural Business	fac4 fac6	**CLIL:** Content integration & Language for specific purposes **Content:** Legal and ethical issues in international business **Language Skill:** Reading/Speaking T**ask:** Research and present on a legal/ethical issue in cross-cultural business
14	Preparing for International Assignments	fac4 fac2 fac3	**CLIL:** Content integration & Language for specific purposes **Content:** Case studies on expatriate experiences and IBCC reviews **Language Skill:** Listening / Writing T**ask:** Write a report on preparing for an international assignment
15	Review IBCC concepts	fac4 fac2 fac3 fac5	**CLIL:** Content integration & Language for specific purposes **Content:** Comprehensive review of all course content

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		fac6 fac1	**Language Skill:** Reading/Speaking T**ask:** Review all IBCC topics and do group activities to apply learned concepts
16	Final Presentations and Course Wrap-Up	fac4 fac2 fac3 fac5 fac6 fac1	**CLIL:** Content integration & Language for specific purposes **Content:** Final review and reflections **Language Skill:** Writing/Speaking T**ask:** Write a final reflection paper on course learning

Discussion

What are the essential IBCC components to include in the Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course?

The six IBCC factors were prioritized based on their significance levels determined by the three respondent groups. Factors deemed least to no significant is emphasized as top priorities in course content development, while those of moderate to high significance receive less emphasis. The rationale behind this is to address gaps and deficiencies in students' IBCC competencies. If a particular factor is rated as low in significance, it may indicate the lack of awareness and proficiency in the area.

Specifically, fac4 (Cognitive Cultural Intelligence) emerges as a primary focus due to its zero-significance level. Following this, fac2 (Motivational Cultural Intelligence), fac3 (Behavioral Cultural Intelligence), and fac5 (Strategic Competence) receive lower emphasis, reflecting weaker and less consistent differences between groups. Moreover, fac6 (Pragmatic Competence) is emphasized, though slightly less than the previous factors, given its high significance level. Lastly, fac1 (Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence) receives the least emphasis due to its highest significance level.

The findings of this study align with Yang (2021), who found that Cognitive Cultural Intelligence improved along with Metacognitive and Behavioral Cultural Intelligence through a hospitality training course of L2 students. This similarity may be because Cognitive Cultural Intelligence involves understanding cultural norms, values, and practices, which can be directly taught through structured training. Additionally, hospitality training often includes real-world scenarios or roleplays where learners can recognize and interpret cultural differences effectively.

It is noteworthy that the current study investigated appropriate content for the Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course by developing a specialized curriculum, which differs from standard English instruction, according to Gouabi (2023). The particular characteristics of Business English and intercultural communication suggest that metacognitive strategies should be introduced after students have mastered basic communicative and cultural competencies (Gomathy & Radhakrishnan, 2022).

What CLIL principles can be applied to support the development of the course?

The course syllabus, informed by quantitative data, integrates key elements of CLIL, including content on real-world business scenarios, language objectives targeting vocabulary, grammar, and intercultural pragmatics, and active learning strategies such as role-plays, case studies, and interactive games. These components create an engaging learning environment that promotes the practical application of language skills in cross-cultural contexts. The course is also structured to develop six essential factors of IBCC, crucial for effective cross-cultural business communication.

The interviews and content analysis revealed that the course was relevant to real-world business situations, and the interactive activities helped students build their confidence in intercultural communication. These findings are consistent with the studies of Yang (2021) and Rimkeeratikul (2022), that were used to design the course and therefore the IBCC factors were integrated with the CLIL components. This improvement enhanced the course's effectiveness in developing both language skills and cultural intelligence, which is necessary for international business. The course syllabus, which includes CLIL components, should improve the course's effectiveness in developing content, cognition, and culture, as suggested by Gomathy and Radhakrishnan (2022), and thus better prepare students for international business environments.

Limitations

There are certain limitations in this study. The participant pool shows a demographic imbalance as the main limitation. The study results may not apply to all Business English students because female learners make up 71-76% of the total participants, especially when considering male learners. However, it is normal for language major students in Thai universities to be female in greater numbers than male. Moreover, the study results may face limited generalizability because teachers from Silpakorn University make up 82% of the participants, which could affect other university settings and educational institutions in Thailand. This could occur from the snowball sampling method used to select the teacher participants. Future research needs to achieve an equal gender distribution and include multiple educational institutions to improve the practical value of the research findings.

Conclusion

This study makes an essential contribution through its combination of multiple theoretical frameworks, which guide practical applications for the Business English for Cross-Cultural Communication course in Thai EFL classrooms. The research fills important gaps in Business English education because it combines language skills development with intercultural competence training, which business professionals need for successful cross-cultural communication. The study uses CLIL principles to develop a methodologically sound approach, empirically demonstrating the effective alignment of its designed syllabus and activities. Based on the findings, it is recommended that Thai Business English course designers and curriculum makers prioritize developing optimal methods for curriculum development and teaching methodologies and cultural intelligence. The approach will substantially improve Business English education by providing learners with the global competencies required for today's interconnected world.

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Impact of Flipped Classroom on Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Chinese EFL Undergraduates' Argumentative Essays: A Pilot Study

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Abstract
This research adopts a quantitative-qualitative mixed-methods approach to examine the role of flipped classroom pedagogy in fostering critical thinking skills in English argumentative essays among Chinese EFL undergraduates. Specifically, the pilot study compares the mean scores of the pretest and posttest, focusing on the performance in English argumentative essays between the experimental group (N=32) and the control group (N=28). It investigates the impact of the flipped classroom on developing critical thinking skills in argumentative essays. It explores the experiences and perceptions of Chinese EFL learners regarding how the flipped classroom enhances their critical thinking skills in such essays. The ultimate goal is to assist these students in improving their writing quality, achieving better academic outcomes, and enhancing their competitiveness in future job markets. The significance of this research lies in its potential to promote the adoption of the flipped classroom as an effective pedagogical tool for supporting Chinese EFL undergraduates. The findings indicate that the experimental group's mean scores steadily increased throughout the intervention, providing robust evidence of the effectiveness of the flipped classroom approach in fostering critical thinking skills in Chinese EFL undergraduates' argumentative essays writing. We hope this study will inspire more researchers to propose meaningful pedagogical implications and recommendations to improve teaching and learning processes within EFL contexts.

Keywords: Argumentative essay writing, critical thinking skills, Chinese EFL undergraduates, flipped classroom, mixed-method research
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Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected and competitive global landscape, proficiency in the English language has emerged as an essential skill, particularly for non-native speakers residing in countries such as China. For Chinese undergraduates, critically analysing information and articulating coherent arguments in English is crucial for achieving academic excellence and securing promising career opportunities within today's globally integrated workforce (Zhang & Kim, 2018). However, the traditional approach to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) prevalent throughout China tends to emphasize rote memorization techniques alongside exam-oriented instruction (Ren & Wang, 2018). This methodology fails to foster the fundamental proficiency required for advanced scholarly pursuits or professional endeavours that require astute critical thinking and persuasive written communication skills.

As the demand for effective language instruction continues to rise, it becomes necessary to investigate innovative pedagogical methods. The flipped classroom (FC) model, defined by a reversed learning structure—transforming traditional approaches both upside down and inside out (Fulton, 2012)—presents a distinctive opportunity to enhance students' critical thinking skills (CTS). Specifically, teachers have transitioned conventional in-class activities to home-based tasks and transferred typical homework assignments to engaging classroom activities (Ma, 2023). Despite the growing global popularity of the FC model, its implementation in Chinese EFL contexts remains insufficiently examined. It is particularly pertinent given the ongoing academic discourse regarding the effectiveness of traditional versus innovative teaching methods in fostering CTS (Alsaleh, 2020). Moreover, there is a pressing need to address the challenges Chinese EFL students encounter in enhancing their critical thinking abilities and English proficiency in argumentative essays, both essential for academic institutions and employers.

Literature Review

"When Chinese students in the foreign language department encounter arguments and need to reason, they often experience cognitive inertia and struggle with articulation while writing articles, listening to lectures, and asking questions" (Huang, 1998, as cited in Wu, 2011, p.15). It is uncommon to find one or two commendable papers among a pool of twenty or thirty papers; most of these papers exhibit various issues, and frequently their titles reveal substantial deficiencies in critical thinking (Huang, 2010). Wu (2011) underscored that the absence of critical thinking directly engenders a multitude of drawbacks, thereby impeding the progress of a nation in the era of globalisation.

The curriculum in China emphasises improving language skills through imitation, memorisation, and repetitive drilling rather than developing a systematic understanding of the English language and promoting critical thinking and innovative abilities. There are defects concerning the content of writing teaching. What students receive from their teachers is general instructions about English language writing, or specific genre-based guidance, like narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. The education they receive in university primarily focuses on test-taking strategies for writing, which falls short of adequately preparing them to meet the demands of the job market or future competition in their professional careers.

A fundamental goal of education is to cultivate students' independent thinking ability to distinguish right from wrong, which is the essence of critical thinking. Argumentative essay writing is closely related to critical thinking and is regarded as the highest form of critical thinking because it requires expressing views, supporting arguments, and forming conclusions. The results of

Sharadgah et al.'s study underscore the significance of utilizing argumentative essays as an effective tool for both instructing and evaluating CTS (2019). Therefore, argumentative essay writing is also called critical writing. To get rid of the test-oriented English teaching and learning (Jin & Fan, 2011) as well as being away from writing an introduction of personal feelings or experience sharing due to the lack of critical thinking (Tian, 2021), Chinese EFL undergraduate students need comprehensive and sound instruction from teachers to improve argumentative essay writing capabilities.

Technology changes life and also changes people's ways of learning. Students born in 2000 and beyond are digital natives exposed to technology from an early age. Therefore, educators must keep up with technological advancements to effectively teach in this tech-savvy environment (Ahmad et al., 2019). Under these circumstances, the most urgent task is to use mobile technology properly in English instruction. Integrating the new mobile technology with a novel teaching design is a good solution. Moreover, as technology advances into the era of artificial intelligence, researchers and educators are increasingly inquiring into how it can facilitate or impede language learning, independent writing abilities and CTS (Avsheniuk et al., 2024; Pitychoutis, 2024).

As one of the learning innovations, people regard FC as a preeminent learning model (Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020). It enables students to preview the lesson at home beforehand and do homework in class the day after (Fulton, 2012). Many Chinese university and college faculty members advocated FC in their online instruction to replace the traditional teaching approach. They like to adopt it specifically due to its innovative operation and accessibility compared with other methods. In comparison to conventional teaching methods, the FC approach has been widely appreciated by students (Ramnanan & Pound, 2017; Ramirez et al., 2022; Balasubramanian et al., 2022), as it is expected to enhance and foster students' intrinsic motivation (Howell, 2021) while also being believed to have the potential for promoting students' CTS development (Nugraheni et al., 2022). However, it remains in an underdeveloped state (Wang, Huang, Schunn, Zou & Ai, 2019).

Current English language teaching in China prioritizes language mechanics over CTS, leading to EFL undergraduates' academic writing deficiencies. While much research emphasizes the importance of CTS, few studies investigate how to specifically develop these skills within the context of English argumentative essay writing for Chinese EFL undergraduates. As a result of the inadequacy of traditional teaching methods in Chinese EFL education, as mentioned above and the underutilisation of FC in Chinese EFL classrooms, this research aims to address the gap by examining the effectiveness of implementing the FC approach in fostering CTS in Chinese EFL undergraduates' argumentative essays.

Method

The present study employed a quasi-experimental design (Bond, 2020; Junianti et al., 2020; Atwa et al., 2022) in its quantitative investigation, followed by conducting interviews in the qualitative research phase, thus adopting a mixed-methods approach (Liao & Li, 2017; Ahmed, 2019). This study lies in "QUAN→qual Capital letters indicate theoretical drive or priority (core methods) given in a study; lower case indicates (supplemental methods)" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 57) .

The research team designed the study to evaluate the effectiveness of FC in developing CTS of Chinese EFL students in argumentative essay writing at the undergraduate level. The subjects of

this study were undergraduates in the same grade to fulfil the purpose of homogeneity (Adhami & Taghizadeh, 2022). The research team divided them into two groups, experimental and control group (CG) (Sharadgah et al., 2019; Nejmaoui, 2019; Song & Wang, 2022; Hassan et al., 2023). Although instructed using distinct methodologies, both groups completed identical assessments. The research team systematically designed and administered a pretest and posttest (Atwa et al., 2022) and structured interviews (Abrami et al., 2015).

Both groups participated in the pretest and posttest, while only the experimental group (EG) received the intervention (Creswell, 2003). The research team conducted the pretest and posttest to collect data from Chinese EFL undergraduates' practice essays and assess the students' progress before and after the research. The research was going to study FC and CTS within the paradigm. The purpose of the pretest was to assess students' original CTS in argumentative essay writing, and the posttest was to determine undergraduates' CTS after the treatment teaching process. Each test would involve two groups completing an identical writing task. In total, the pilot study comprised three tests.

The writing tests had been administered and assessed, with each argumentative essay receiving a score ranging from one to thirteen marks based on its academic writing quality in both groups. Student participants should write the essays in paragraphs. Its requirements include a title, an introductory paragraph, two to three body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. The research aims to evaluate student participants' writing speed and language proficiency. Therefore, the word count should fall within the range of 150 to 350 (Xie, 2023) while adhering to a time limitation of forty minutes. Then, two qualified and experienced teachers will grade these written essays to ensure validity. Plagiarism was strictly prohibited.

After the posttest, the team conducted structured individual interviews to gather qualitative data. In the pilot study, the researcher interviewed six students from two groups representing different language competencies separately to learn their views about the treatment and traditional teaching method. This approach allowed the researcher to comprehensively comprehend the experiences and perspectives regarding FC among student participants with varying language proficiency and CTS.

Instruments

The VQGOIP Teaching Guideline and Lesson Plan were utilized in the instructional process to enhance undergraduate students' CTS by implementing FC within the context of argumentative essays—a panel of three experts recruited by the research team before the study had validated the materials. The research objectives were pursued by collecting quantitative and qualitative data, enabling a comprehensive analysis of multiple facets. The research team used the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 29 to obtain quantitative data. The team primarily obtained qualitative data through a structured individual interview with student participants from both groups.

The delivery and assessment within an FC necessitate addressing three key aspects: "the educational platform, content organization, and planned assessments" (Zappe & Litzinger, 2017, as cited in Petre, 2020, p.8). The research utilized "Xuexitong" as the learning platform, employed the FC Teaching Guideline for content organization in teaching, and incorporated pretest and

posttest assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of FC in enhancing CTS of English argumentative essay writing among Chinese EFL undergraduates. Apart from that, the research team compared the mean scores of the EG with those of the CG to assess any disparities in their learning outcomes.

The researcher developed the VQGOIP teaching guideline, drawing on extensive references. Figure 1 illustrates the VQGOIP teaching guideline. To ensure the credibility of this teaching guideline, which the researcher designed, validation was obtained from an English lecturer with over a decade of experience in higher education prior to the pilot study, following which the research phase would commence. The researcher designed this teaching guideline for the FC approach, and its associated lesson plans were tailored explicitly for two distinct groups. Only the EG was involved in the FC teaching intervention, whereas the CG used traditional teaching methods.

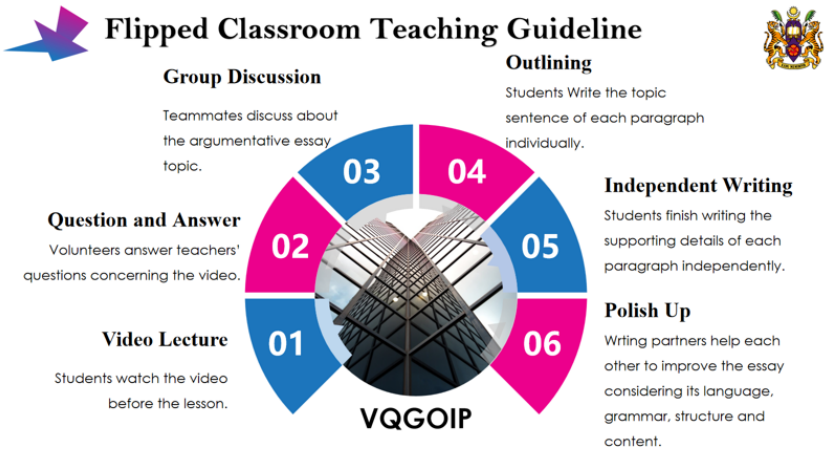


Figure 1. The FC VQGOIP Teaching Guideline

CG utilized lesson plans specifically designed for the traditional lecturing method, using the textbook edited by Zou (2019). Both groups employed distinct lesson plans for instruction. Table 1 illustrates the differential interventions in the two groups.

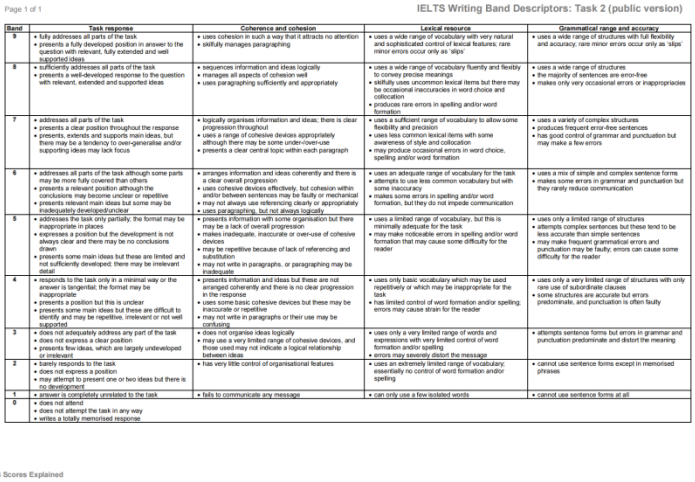
Table 1. *Differential Interventions in the Two Groups*

Group	Teaching Methods	Lesson Plan
EG	FC Utilizing the VQGOIP Teaching Guideline	LP for EG
CG	Traditional Lecturing Method and a textbook	LP for CG

Rating Rubrics for the Pilot Study

The assessment criteria for the argumentative essays had integrated elements from the *IELTS Writing Band Descriptors: Task 2 (public version)* and *The Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric* (HCTSR) developed by Facione and Facione (1994). Given that writing skills encompass two dimensions—students' English language proficiency and their CTS—the rating

process consisted of two sequential stages. Initially, raters evaluated students' argumentative essays based on the IELTS Writing Band Descriptors to assess their language proficiency. Subsequently, they evaluated the essays using the *HCTSR* (Facione & Facione, 1994) to analyze CTS. Consequently, students' total scores range from one to thirteen. The maximum score for academic argumentative writing is nine, reflecting their English language proficiency, with an additional four points awarded based on their CTS level. Within this process, the CTS grade served as an additive component. The minimum score for English proficiency in writing is zero, with additional points granted according to the CTS level. Raters were required to sum the scores from both evaluation stages. *The IELTS Writing Band Descriptors: Task 2 (public version)* are illustrated in Figure 2, while Figure 3 presents the *HCTSR*.



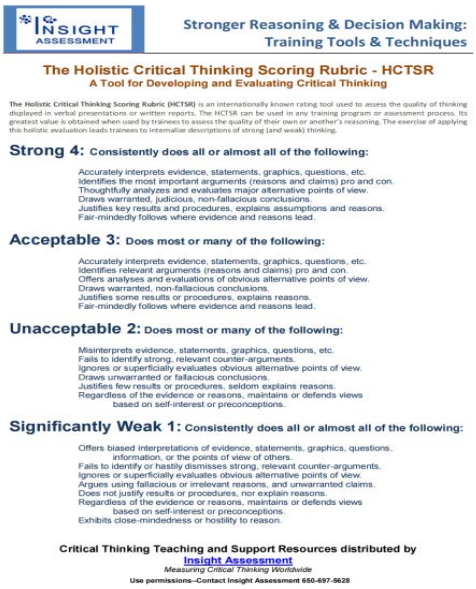
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IELTS Writing Band Descriptors: Task 2 (public version)

Band	Task response	Coherence and cohesion	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy
9	• fully addresses all parts of the task • presents a fully developed position in answer to the question with relevant, fully extended and well supported ideas	• uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention • skilfully manages paragraphing	• uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'	• uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'
8	• sufficiently addresses all parts of the task • presents a well-developed response to the question with relevant, extended and supported ideas	• sequences information and ideas logically • manages all aspects of cohesion well • uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately	• uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings • skilfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation • produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation	• uses a wide range of structures • the majority of sentences are error-free • makes only very occasional errors or inappropriacies
7	• addresses all parts of the task • presents a clear position throughout the response • presents, extends and supports main ideas, but there may be a tendency to over-generalise and/or supporting ideas may lack focus	• logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout • uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use • presents a clear central topic within each paragraph	• uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision • uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation • may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation	• uses a variety of complex structures • produces frequent error-free sentences • has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors
6	• addresses all parts of the task although some parts may be more fully covered than others • presents a relevant position although the conclusions may become unclear or repetitive • presents relevant main ideas but some may be inadequately developed/unclear	• arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression • uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical • may not always use referencing clearly or appropriately • uses paragraphing, but not always logically	• uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task • attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy • makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication	• uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms • makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication
5	• addresses the task only partially; the format may be inappropriate in places • expresses a position but the development is not always clear and there may be no conclusions drawn • presents some main ideas but these are limited and not sufficiently developed; there may be irrelevant detail	• presents information with some organisation but there may be a lack of overall progression • makes inadequate, inaccurate or over-use of cohesive devices • may be repetitive because of lack of referencing and substitution • may not write in paragraphs, or paragraphing may be inadequate	• uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task • may make noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may cause some difficulty for the reader	• uses only a limited range of structures • attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences • may make frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty; errors can cause some difficulty for the reader
4	• responds to the task only in a minimal way or the answer is tangential; the format may be inappropriate • presents a position but this is unclear • presents some main ideas but these are difficult to identify and may be repetitive, irrelevant or not well supported	• presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response • uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive • may not write in paragraphs or their use may be confusing	• uses only basic vocabulary which may be used repetitively or which may be inappropriate for the task • has limited control of word formation and/or spelling; errors may cause strain for the reader	• uses only a very limited range of structures with only rare use of subordinate clauses • some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty
3	• does not adequately address any part of the task • does not express a clear position • presents few ideas, which are largely undeveloped or irrelevant	• does not organise ideas logically • may use a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas	• uses only a very limited range of words and expressions with very limited control of word formation and/or spelling • errors may severely distort the message	• attempts sentence forms but errors in grammar and punctuation predominate and distort the meaning
2	• barely responds to the task • does not express a position • may attempt to present one or two ideas but there is no development	• has very little control of organisational features	• uses an extremely limited range of vocabulary; essentially no control of word formation and/or spelling	• cannot use sentence forms except in memorised phrases
1	• answer is completely unrelated to the task	• fails to communicate any message	• can only use a few isolated words	• cannot use sentence forms at all
0	• does not attend • does not attempt the task in any way • writes a totally memorised response			

IELTS Scores Explained

Figure 2. IELTS Writing Band Descriptors: Task 2 (public version)



INSIGHT ASSESSMENT

Stronger Reasoning & Decision Making:
Training Tools & Techniques

The Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric - HCTSR
A Tool for Developing and Evaluating Critical Thinking

The Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric (HCTSR) is an internationally known rating tool used to assess the quality of thinking displayed in verbal presentations or written reports. The HCTSR can be used in any training program or assessment process. Its greatest value is obtained when used by trainees to assess the quality of their own or another's reasoning. The exercise of applying this holistic evaluation leads trainees to internalize descriptions of strong (and weak) thinking.

Strong 4: Consistently does all or almost all of the following:

Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
Identifies the most important arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con.
Thoughtfully analyzes and evaluates major alternative points of view.
Draws warranted, judicious, non-fallacious conclusions.
Justifies key results and procedures, explains assumptions and reasons.
Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead.

Acceptable 3: Does most or many of the following:

Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
Identifies relevant arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con.
Offers analyses and evaluations of obvious alternative points of view.
Draws warranted, non-fallacious conclusions.
Justifies some results or procedures, explains reasons.
Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead.

Unacceptable 2: Does most or many of the following:

Misinterprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.
Fails to identify strong, relevant counter-arguments.
Ignores or superficially evaluates obvious alternative points of view.
Draws unwarranted or fallacious conclusions.
Justifies few results or procedures, seldom explains reasons.
Regardless of the evidence or reasons, maintains or defends views based on self-interest or preconceptions.

Significantly Weak 1: Consistently does all or almost all of the following:

Offers biased interpretations of evidence, statements, graphics, questions, information, or the points of view of others.
Fails to identify or hastily dismisses strong, relevant counter-arguments.
Ignores or superficially evaluates obvious alternative points of view.
Argues using fallacious or irrelevant reasons, and unwarranted claims.
Does not justify results or procedures, nor explain reasons.
Regardless of the evidence or reasons, maintains or defends views based on self-interest or preconceptions.
Exhibits close-mindedness or hostility to reason.

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Figure 3. The Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric - HCTSR

Participants

Sample Selection

Sampling Technique for the Quantitative Study

We have previously noted the challenges associated with academic English writing courses and critical thinking in English. Consequently, the research team selected English majors as the sample group. The team employed a purposive sampling technique among English majors at the institution. Only student participants who demonstrate fluency in English are eligible for inclusion. Furthermore, the class with a higher mean pretest score was designated as the EG, whereas the class with a lower mean pretest score was the CG.

Sampling Technique for the Qualitative Study

The selection of student participants for the interviews reflects the representative nature of the sample, thereby ensuring a typical case in qualitative studies. Participants were chosen based on their posttest scores, with two students selected from the advanced level, two from the intermediate level, and two from the basic level within the designated group. The research team conducted the interviews, during which participants needed to respond to a series of specifically designed questions in sequential order. Appendix A has outlined the interview questions.

The student participants comprised thirty-two and twenty-eight members (Fatemipour & Jafari, 2015), respectively, from each cohort. The teacher participants had two individuals assigned as raters while the remaining two served as instructors in their respective groups. None had previously resided in countries where English is the primary language (Alpat, 2019). The participants had enrolled in a one-semester English writing course, with their ages ranging from 18 to 21 (Sharadgah et al., 2019).

Procedures

Data Collection Procedures

Collecting quantitative data involved conducting a pretest, evaluating one additional argumentative essay, and administering a posttest. As previously mentioned, the class with a higher mean score in the pretest within the two formed the EG (Female=27; Male=5). Conversely, students of the other class with a lower mean score in the pretest, also participating in academic English writing courses, constituted the CG (Female=24; Male=4). In this study, Teacher A provided intervention instruction to the EG, whereas Teacher B conducted instruction for the CG. The procedure was maintained consistently for both groups, with the sole difference lying in their instructional methods. Despite the distinct methodologies employed for instruction, both groups had experienced identical assessments.

The face-to-face structured individual interview involved the researcher conducting interviews with the student participants. The session included a minimum of six respondents and one interviewer. These respondents were student participants responsible for responding to the upcoming inquiries, while the interviewer was the researcher who assumed the role of posing questions. The inquiries were open-ended, and the interviewer made utmost efforts to elicit the interviewees' genuine thoughts. The two parties strove to complete the task through interactive communication. Data saturation would determine the sample size of the individual interview. The data collection was discontinued upon reaching the point of data saturation, as no additional information could be obtained once it had been achieved. In the interview, the team instructed participants to capture photographs or record audio (i.e., engage in photo elicitation) (Creswell,

2003). The researcher would utilize these photographs or recordings for subsequent transcription and analysis.

The Quantitative Study

Results of the Quantitative Study

The pilot study lasted three weeks, during which the research team organized a weekly test to assess student participants' progress. Both groups conducted identical tests throughout the study. Table 2 and Figure 4 present the mean scores of both groups during the pilot study. In Figure 4, the blue line represents the EG, while the red line indicates the CG. In summary, the mean scores for both groups fell within the range of 4.9 to 6.9. According to the graphs, the mean scores consistently exhibit an upward trend throughout the study, particularly for EG. In contrast, CG's mean scores initially show an increase followed by a subsequent decrease. Despite greater fluctuations observed in the latter group, EG consistently outperforms CG.

Table 2. *Mean Score of the Pilot Study*

Group	Mean Score of the Pretest	Mean Score of Argumentative Essay Writing Practice	Mean Score of the Posttest
EG	5.59	6.606	6.844
CG	4.95	6.586	6.071

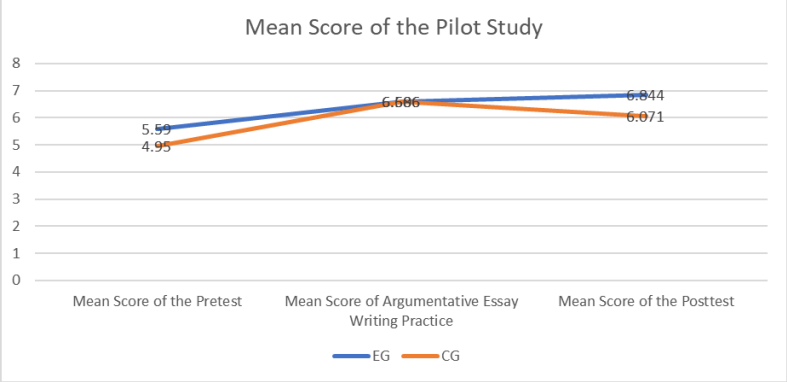


Figure 4. Line Graph Depicting Mean Scores from the Pilot Study

Discussion for the Quantitative Study

The research team employed a paired-samples t-test to assess the efficacy of the intervention on students' scores for English argumentative essays. The results, as detailed in Tables 3 and 4, revealed a statistically significant difference in the EG's scores before ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.66$) and after the intervention ($M = 6.84$, $SD = 1.04$), with $t(31) = -4.902$, $p < 0.05$ (Hinton et al., 2014). It indicates that the intervention was associated with a substantial improvement in scores. According to Tables 3 and 5, during the pilot study, the mean score of the EG increased by 1.25 points (from

5.594 to 6.844), while the mean score of the CG increased by 1.125 points (from 4.946 to 6.071). Moreover, the mean scores for the EG were consistently higher than those of the CG in both the pretest (M = 4.95, SD = 1.72) and posttest (M = 6.07, SD = 1.50). Given that no intervention was administered to the CG, this comparison provides further evidence supporting the effectiveness of the intervention in the EG.

Table 3. *Output of EG*

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	pretest	5.594	32	1.6580	.2931
	posttest	6.844	32	1.0429	.1844

Table 4. *Output of the Paired Samples T-Test*

Paired Samples Test										
		Paired Differences					t	df	Significance	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	pretest - posttest	-1.2500	1.4424	.2550	-1.7701	-.7299	-4.902	31	<.001	<.001

Table 5. *Output of CG*

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	pretest	4.946	28	1.7178	.3246
	posttest	6.071	28	1.5013	.2837

Results and Discussion of the Qualitative Study

Through structured face-to-face individual interviews, we gained insights into the perceptions and experiences of student participants regarding the cultivation of CTS via English argumentative essays in an FC setting. We will analyze the data from the following three perspectives:

Misconceptions Regarding FC and CTS

The misunderstanding of FC is significant. Four of the six student participants expressed erroneous concepts, while the remaining two were unfamiliar with the precise definition. Misconceptions often stem from prior experiences or perceptions, which implies that instructors may misinform individuals during their previous learning experiences. Some teachers have misunderstood the concept of FC, leading to students' misguidance. It is advantageous for educators to transition from traditional instructional methods to innovative approaches; however, it is imperative to implement these changes appropriately to prevent misleading students.

During the interview with N1, he mentioned, "My friends believe that critical thinking can sometimes be perceived as overly assertive or unwelcoming, leading to feelings of being targeted." This perception reflects a stereotype that may contribute to the current limited acceptance of CTS among some Chinese people. They believed that the individual utilizing CTS was targeting them. CTS is merely discussing and analyzing the issue reasonably; it does not pertain to any individual involved. We should evaluate numerous matters on their merits from multiple perspectives, independent of personal factors. Prejudice misleads. Therefore, the primary objective of our future main study is to emphasize the objectivity and scientific rigour of CTS.

Attitudes Toward Challenging Learning Contents

The learning attitudes of student participants correlate with their English proficiency levels and interest in learning. Specifically, students with higher proficiency levels, such as N1 and N4, tend to exhibit more positive attitudes. Additionally, students with a strong interest in learning English, like N2, demonstrate a more active approach to their studies. Although most students prefer active learning, those with lower proficiency levels, such as N3, may become overly reliant on their partners in pair work or teammates in teamwork. This dependence arises from the need for classmates' support, encouragement, and even teachers' stimulation. It aligns with Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development. The ZPD refers to the gap between students' ability to perform tasks with adult guidance or collaboration with peers and their capacity to solve problems independently (Ganapathy, 2011). Cooperative learning and collaborative writing (Doyin & Femiti, 2025) significantly benefit these students.

Nevertheless, there are also counterexamples, such as N6. Despite her struggling English proficiency in the posttest, her attitude remains exemplary. She dedicates significant time to practising specific language skills to improve, which exemplifies her persistence and tenacity. It highlights a strong will's crucial role in overcoming academic challenges. Active learning can address students' deficiencies in English proficiency.

Habits in Utilizing Technology

During the interview, N1 noted that his roommates were unfamiliar with the operating procedures for viewing micro-videos. Specifically, they did not know how to pause the videos when necessary, making it difficult to understand the content thoroughly. Although most interviewees were familiar with the operating procedures, N1's sharing highlighted the necessity for training student participants in the main study to enhance their comprehension of the videos. Moreover, student participants faced challenges adapting to the FC approach, as they had recently transitioned from high school and had not become accustomed to using smartphones and tablets for learning purposes. Previously, students used these devices for entertainment rather than academic study. Therefore, a three-week period is insufficient for participants to acclimate fully. The research team consequently decided to extend the duration of the main study to three months.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing discussion, the performance of English argumentative essays in the EG is superior to that of the CG. This superiority was due to the EG's participation in a teaching intervention designed to enhance CTS through the FC approach during the academic English writing course. Therefore, implementing FC pedagogy has proven effective in developing CTS among Chinese EFL undergraduates, as evidenced by their improved performance in English argumentative essays and students' experiences within the interviews. Future research could explore the integration of CTS with FC across various genres of English writing.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Number	Question
1	Do you know what Critical Thinking Skills are? What is the Flipped Classroom? Have you ever experienced these two before the instruction of the academic English writing course?
2	Do you like writing an English argumentative essay before attending the course? Then, after studying the course, have your opinions changed yet? Why or why not?

3	Do you agree with the saying that the Flipped Classroom has enhanced your Critical Thinking Skills concerning argumentative essay writing? Why said so? Or why not? Can you talk me through how the teacher went about using that?
4	Are you interested in the teacher's inquiries regarding video comprehension? Why or why not?
5	Which micro-video lesson is your favourite? Why?
6	Have you accomplished Critical Thinking Skills after the course? Which skill impresses you most: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation? Which one is the most difficult to utilise in your writing?
7	Which one do you prefer, individual work, pair work, or teamwork? How often do you usually cooperate with your classmates during the semester? What is your opinion about cooperative learning?
8	Do you think that Critical Thinking Skills are important? How about decision-making? Is it necessary for us to learn CTS at university? Why or why not?
9	How do you feel about group discussion in the class? Is it helpful to improve your Critical Thinking Skills? Why or why not?
10	What do you think of your teacher's instruction? Is it easy to understand? If the teaching content is difficult, how will you make it learnable? Active learning or passive learning, which way do you prefer?
11	How do you develop your Critical Thinking Skills in daily life? Can you give me some examples?
12	As regards the interview today, how do you perceive it? What are your thoughts on the questions asked during the interview? Is it easy, so-so, or difficult to answer these questions?
13	In general, would you have preferred an increased/decreased amount of lecture time from the teacher?
14	Can you share some positive/negative experiences of the flipped classroom to learn CTS? Why do you call these experiences positive or negative?

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Researching Chinese Doctoral Students' Experiences in English Academic Writing: A Metaphor Analysis

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Abstract
In writing and publishing English academic papers, EFL doctoral students face many challenges, especially in meeting rigorous standards and overcoming language barriers. There are increasing relevant studies on academic writing pedagogy in the EFL context, but research from the emic perspective of students' cognition in this process remains insufficient. With metaphor as a powerful tool to reflect psychological representation, metaphor analysis is frequently used in educational contexts to reflect students' and teachers' inner thoughts. Therefore, this study, using metaphor analysis, aims to explore EFL doctoral students' metaphor representations of their English academic writing (EAW) experiences. There are two research questions: what kind of metaphors students use to characterize their EAW experience, and what cognitive, emotive, and behavioral features can be found. Eighty-eight Chinese doctoral students from one of China's top universities participated in a questionnaire survey, where metaphors were collected through the elicited question: "English academic writing is like……because……". Five source domains were found to characterize the target domain: CONSTRUCTION, MOVEMENT, NOURISHMENT, ACTIVITY, and WORK. Some common features were found despite individuals' different expressions. The present study offers a new perspective for understanding students' cognitions and feelings in EAW potentially contributing to EAP pedagogy.

Keywords: Chinese doctoral students, conceptual metaphor analysis, English academic writing, questionnaire survey, writing experience

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Introduction

To communicate with professional peers and establish their academic status, doctoral students are expected to contribute to their specialized fields in an internationally accepted way, that is, in English as a global academic language. However, English academic writing might be a struggle for most doctoral students, especially students from English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Although non-native English-speaking doctoral students are required to achieve specific English proficiency before being admitted to PhD programs, those test scores do not guarantee that the students have adequate English writing competence (Lax, 2014), as they have typically not had formal training in academic writing before they enter their degree program (Hyland, 2018). Bronson (2004) stated that the demand to meet the rigors of discipline-based writing is a struggle for many students. Consequently, extensive writing requirements of academic texts mean a burden for students who also suffer from an English language barrier (Brown, 2007). Despite the desperate demand, the perspectives of NNES doctoral students are still understudied, since much research studies students of higher education but few focus on doctoral students (Wan, 2014; Kaufhold, 2015; Phyo, 2023; Li, 2024). Thus, the emic perspective of doctoral students in this journey requires more attention.

Some research on writing links students' writing development with their conceptualizations. It was proved that students' beliefs about learning and their conceptualizations about themselves as learners have long been associated with levels of academic success (Bandura, 1997; Vacca, 2000). Therefore, to help students achieve academic success, it is necessary to understand the underlying cognitive responses during their writing process. In this complex and time-consuming process, doctoral students show some typical characteristics of emotions and cognitions. Some relevant research demonstrated that on the emotional level, postgraduate students experience anxiety as they develop their writing skills. On the cognitive level, doctoral students struggle to self-regulate their writing, reconceptualize the text as a process rather than a product, and construct their identity as writers (Negretti & McGrath, 2020). These pieces of information contribute to an in-depth understanding of students themselves.

As a powerful tool to reflect psychological representation, metaphor analysis is frequently used in educational contexts to reflect students' and teachers' inner thoughts (Asmali & Celik, 2017). Traditional qualitative methods, such as interviews and surveys, have been instrumental in capturing students' explicit beliefs and self-reported strategies. However, these methods often elicit responses that are consciously filtered, influenced by social desirability biases, or constrained by the participants' ability to articulate tacit knowledge. As noted by Barcelos (2003a), such approaches may analyze beliefs out of context, limiting the depth of insight into students' genuine perspectives. In contrast, metaphor analysis facilitates the exploration of students' inner thoughts by allowing them to express complex ideas in a more accessible and relatable manner. As highlighted by Wan and Turner (2018), metaphor analysis has been effectively utilized in academic literacy research to reveal students' conceptualizations of writing and learning, providing insights that might remain hidden through direct questioning. This method enables the capture of emic perspectives, offering a more authentic representation of students' experiences and beliefs.

The present study aims to explore Chinese doctoral students' conceptualizations of their English academic writing experiences. We have two research questions, that is, (1) what kinds of metaphors students use to characterize their English academic writing experiences; and (2) what cognitive, emotional, and behavioral features these metaphors reveal. To our knowledge, few previous studies have used a "small lens" to zoom in on doctoral students' cognitions and emotions

expressed in metaphors and tapped into EFL students' EAW experiences. The present study has theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it fills a gap in published research, as there is insufficient research into doctoral students' emic perspectives on their lived experiences as writers in academic English. Practically, the major findings obtained from this study will contribute to an in-depth understanding of the EAW process for doctoral students. These insights can inform tutors, students and their peers of how they can help NNES candidates.

Literature Review

English Academic Writing

English Academic Writing (EAW), one of the main branches of EAP, is characterized by a formal structure, adherence to specific rules, citation practices, and objective, logical reasoning. It is designed to convey knowledge persuasively and rigorously (Chyzhykova, 2024). It mainly focuses on students' linguistic skills, genre mastery, disciplinary knowledge, and reasoning/argumentative strategies (Snow & Uccelli, 2009:118). English academic writing is a significant challenge for EFL students, involving not only language proficiency but also mastery of academic conventions, critical thinking, and confidence (Ma, 2020). Research highlights a range of linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical factors that influence EFL students' academic writing performance and development. EFL students frequently experience anxiety related to academic writing, stemming from both external pressures (such as grading and environment) and internal factors (like low confidence and difficulty generating ideas). Insecurity and emotional stress are common, especially under time constraints or when facing complex writing patterns (Sa'adah et.al, 2024). Guo et al. (2025) also pointed out that writing anxiety has become a significant trend. Syntactic errors, punctuation, and morphological mistakes are prevalent, often due to native language interference and insufficient knowledge of academic writing conventions (Pasaribu, 2022). Moreover, many EFL students lack critical thinking skills and tend to undervalue their own perspectives, leading to overreliance on quoting others. Olson (2023) synthesized relevant studies and summarized that students struggle with higher-order writing tasks, such as constructing arguments and meeting linguistic demands. There is also limited control over the schematic structure and linguistic features of academic genres (Aunurrahman et.al, 2017). Since the 1980s, international academia has gradually paid more attention to studying the process and cognitive features of academic writing (Xu Fang, 2013). Despite numerous studies, the cognitive characteristic of English writing is a complex and multidimensional topic, and continued research can further deepen our understanding of these cognitive features to reveal more subtle information.

Metaphor as a Research Instrument of Self-reflection

In the implicit processing of cognitive exploration, metaphor plays a significant role. In the book *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) showed the pervasiveness of metaphor in our daily lives and its importance in our language and cognitive systems. Gibbs (2008) said metaphor is "a fundamental scheme by which people conceptualize the world and their activities." Generating metaphor is an important analogical thinking where an abstract or complex "target" concept/domain is structured and talked about in terms of a more concrete and familiar "source" concept/domain. This structuring usually implies a series of systematic correspondences between the constituent elements of target and source domains, which can be subsumed by the conceptual metaphor (Gibbs, 2017; Cortazzi & Jin, 2020). For instance, in the conceptual metaphor of LEARNING IS A JOURNEY, the mappings between the target (aspects of learning) and the source

(features of a journey) are outlined (Cortazzi & Jin, 2018), including conceiving studying as traveling, envisaged movements *forward/upwards* as learning success or progress, on different paths as different courses or choices in studying. The source-target pairings in these analogies can help see how participants describe and make inferences in their own words about the target concept under investigation (Cortazzi & Jin, 2020). CMT suggests that by drawing parallels between complex ideas and more tangible experiences, the comprehension of these ideas is enhanced, thus improving learning across various fields, such as mathematics and language education (Vo & Huynh, 2024). And the key role of metaphorical thinking in educational contexts for conceptualizing the learning process is highlighted by Elliott (1980): metaphors are widely used in educational discussions and fulfill a variety of functions, such as introducing fresh perspectives, making illuminating comparisons and contrasts, picking out kinds of phenomena not yet named, emphasis, illustration, enlivening dull writing, and many others. As such, metaphors are an integral part of education, and analyzing the elicited metaphors may enhance the comprehension of English academic writing.

Metaphor analysis, as a qualitative research instrument, allows researchers to examine the conceptual metaphors invoked by metaphoric linguistic expressions (MLEs) articulated by speakers, to provide some insights into their thoughts (Cameron & Low, 1999; de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002). The goal of metaphor analysis is to capture a glimpse of participants' conceptual processing, which consists of the cognitive connections that enable them to relate one concept to another, through detailed analysis of the systematically interrelated linguistic expressions. Metaphor analysis procedures for uncovering participant conceptualizations have been well-established in qualitative research since the 1980s (Cameron & Low, 1999; Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Low, 2003; Steen et al., 2010b). Generally, metaphor analysis studies include the following aspects: (1) Gather metaphorical linguistic expressions from participants; (2) Identify source and target domains; (3) Identify source features; (4) Map source features onto the target; (5) Develop conceptual metaphors based on the resulting mappings; (6) Identify entailments of the conceptual metaphor source; (7) Identify hidden features of the conceptual metaphor source; (8) Identify themes in patterns of conceptual metaphors (Armstrong, 2011). In the present study, we also followed this protocol to identify and analyze metaphors.

Gaps in Research of English Academic Writing through Metaphor Analysis

Metaphor analysis has been used to explore students' experiences with English academic writing, shedding light on the conceptual frameworks they use to characterize their writing experiences. Here, we included studies about writing in academic contexts. The target participants are students at or above the university level due to their access to academic writing.

Armstrong (2007) investigated seven first-year college students' conceptualizations of academic writing to explore how they changed over a course in a United States university. He analyzed the metaphor "Academic writing is like ….." The result showed that students had personal models of academic writing, confirming conceptual diversity and degrees for conceptual change during their coursework. The source domains collected were categorized into five types: Construction Metaphors, Movement Metaphors, Object/Transmission Metaphors, Vision Metaphors, and Speech Metaphors. Wan (2014) examined how metaphors can uncover students' writing beliefs and whether sharing with peers can change individuals' writing beliefs and practices. Seven Chinese students from a British university took part in the study, and they were asked to use metaphors in "Writing is … because … ..." Through interviews, observations, notes,

and students' written comments, it was found that students' writing beliefs could be successfully uncovered through their metaphoric expressions. Sharing personal metaphors was found to be helpful for synthesizing writing concepts, increasing self-confidence, improving critical thinking, and formulating writing plans. Gülnur Aydın (2018) studied postgraduate's perceptions of academic writing skills by descriptive analysis. Participants were asked to complete the sentences "Academic writing is like.....; because....." The metaphors associated with academic writing varied, and nine categories of source domains emerged. The categories include "a long/challenging/difficult process," "a process of producing/discovering new things," "an action that requires composition / analysis-synthesis /interpretation skill," "an action that requires expert support," "a multi-threaded action," "an action requires care in language and expression," "an unpleasant action," "an action that gives joy" and "other" titles. It was also found that students of upper academic level with academic writing experience reflect mostly positive attitudes towards academic writing. Phyo (2023) surveyed the conceptions of English academic writing experiences among 255 non-native English-speaking doctoral students. Metaphors were elicited by a question: "Writing an academic paper in English is like…...". Ten conceptual domains were found in more detail, that is WORK, TEXT, PRODUCTION, CHALLENGE, STRUGGLE, CHANGING PLACES, ACTIVITY, NOURISMENT, EASY TASK, CONSTRUCTION, and COMPLEX PROCESS. By analysis, most students remain positive, even though they implied various demanding features of English academic writing. Despite different educational contexts, these categories overlap in some ways. For example, MOVEMENT metaphors (like "Writing is a journey") and CONSTRUCTION metaphors are almost found in these studies.

All the above studies used the same or very similar task to elicit students' metaphors at the university level. Those findings indicate that metaphor analysis offers new insights into how students experienced writing from their emic perspective, and the results can be applied to writing pedagogy. However, there is little research conducted in educational contexts and few studies examine cultural influences. Moreover, most prior work is on undergraduates or mixed-level cohorts but few focuses on doctoral students who have higher requirements for academic writing.

Methodology

Participants

As the study looks into doctoral students' cognitions of their experiences of English academic writing, the recruitment began with filtering potential participants who have relevant experience, to ensure that they have prior knowledge of English academic writing. Therefore, all of the selected participants have published at least one English thesis or have taken formal English academic writing courses before.

The participants were 88 Chinese doctoral students (24 females; 60 males; and 4 non-stated) studying at Dalian University of Technology, China. The students studied in 41 different PhD programs. All of them were selected from an English academic writing course and thus were in the first year of their PhD. Their age distribution was as follows: 23–25 (25%), 26–30 (61.4%), 31–35 (11.3%), 41–45 (2.3%) years. The average age is 27 years old. These doctoral students are native Chinese speakers and learn English as their second language. They have all passed CET-6 (College English Test-6), which ensures their certain English proficiency.

Research instrument and procedure

All the participants volunteered to participate in the survey anonymously. Each participant

was required to fill out a written questionnaire in Chinese, with some questions about their basic information and an open-item elicited metaphor. Respondents were asked to finish the sentence: "English academic writing is like …. because …." Therefore, participants' responses included two aspects for each statement: the prompt part and the explanation part. All of these data were coded in their authentic form, without other modifications of content. The questionnaire followed Phyo's research (2023). To make the question understood well, we added an example to illustrate the question, that is, " English academic writing is like climbing a mountain because it is strenuous". The questionnaires were collected for three months.

Data analysis

The results are analyzed following the theoretical framework of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980). Based on this, target domain (A) is English academic writing, and source domain (B) is coded and grouped into respective categories emerging from the dataset. Following the metaphor-analysis research protocols, these raw data were carefully examined and all three authors did the triangulation of the metaphor analysis to ensure reliability. First of all, we examined how many valid metaphors were collected. Twenty-seven responses were invalid because those students misunderstood the question or failed to describe the experience. These results were deleted from the dataset.

A total of 61 responses comprising metaphors were then examined. The metaphors were coded and categorized in terms of two aspects, that is semantic or thematic similarities, and emotive categorization, following Paulson's (2011) research. In the step of thematic organization, the conceptually similar metaphors were merged into the same themes. The detailed procedure is as follows: the dataset of metaphors was broken down into discrete parts to look for similar themes before coding them. According to Saldana (2011), a code is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data." After identifying the keywords, we agreed on the ones corresponding to the main themes. In the step of thematic organization, we reviewed the codes identified in the previous step whenever necessary and re-arranged some codes because these "advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing" can allow researchers to discover "more accurate words or phrases" (Saldana, 2016: p3). By doing so, "conceptually similar codes" can be merged, and "infrequent codes can also be assessed for their utility in the overall coding scheme". Once again, we put similar things under the same themes. At this stage, specific codes that seemed good keywords in the first round were dropped, as they seemed redundant after the whole dataset was fully interpreted.

Except for the basic semantic categorization, it is essential to know whether students' conceptualization revealed a general positive or negative attitude in English academic writing. In this analysis, we examined each MLE and explanation individually to determine whether there were overtly negative implications in the language. Rather than presenting this as a simply negative/positive dichotomy, we opted to consider all the metaphors as negative and non-negative because students' feelings are complex. Apart from overtly negative adjectives and expressions, the rest of the metaphors were classified into the non-negative type.

Findings

Metaphor types of students' perceptions of EAW

To analyze participants' cognitions of their lived experiences, the 61 conceptual metaphors were grouped into five themes that emerged: WORK, CONSTRUCTION, MOVEMENT, NOURISHMENT, and ACTIVITY. Among all metaphors, most of the metaphors were coded as non-negative, while only six metaphors were coded as evidently negative. The frequencies of metaphors in the five conceptual domains are shown in Table One. The analyzed conceptual domains are presented in Table Two and we analyze each accordingly.

Table 1 *Five conceptual domains of metaphorical perceptions of English academic writing*

Conceptual domains	Frequency	%
WORK	21	34.4
ACTIVITY	14	22.9
MOVEMENT	12	19.7
CONSTRUCTION	11	18.1
NOURISHMENT	3	4.9

According to Table Two, twenty-one doctoral students (34.4%) used WORK (Table Two) as the source domain to characterize their English academic writing experience although their perspectives about work varied. Seven students thought it was like CAREFUL WORK because the whole process needed elaboration. Seven students thought it was like HARD WORK that requires sustained effort. Six students thought it was like RULE-BASED WORK. As can be seen, students regard EAW as rule-disciplined and they all focus on learning regular academic writing formats. Another thing that should be mentioned is that only one of them (the metaphor "a small horse pulling the big cart" expresses the idea that the author was not competent to accomplish the writing tasks) thought that the experience was negative or impossible to achieve. Others all believed that it was doable even when the work was "stressful," "hard," or "difficult," as long as being careful, persistent, and having a command of the strict disciplines.

We can find from Table Three that fourteen students (22.9%) characterized it as ACTIVITY (Table Three). In most of these responses, they used quite different metaphors to describe their experience. Most of the activities are engaging and enjoyable, which implies that it is a joyful process for students, even if it requires concentration and effort in academic writing. However, two students expressed their evidently negative feelings in their explanations, like "tension" and "hopelessness".

Eleven students (18.1%) interpreted their English academic writing experience as CONSTRUCTION (Table Four). It comprises four students' metaphors comparing their experiences to building something by following a clear blueprint. Seven students clearly stated the desirable result of their building process: a stable building.

Table Five presents twelve metaphors of two types comprising the conceptual domain of MOVEMENT (19.7%). Even though the adjectives they used to modify meaning were different (e.g., "dark," "long and high," "wide," "hard but opposed to," "never be crossed"), they all implied that the process would take time or effort and they had to work hard. Six students wrote that writing an academic paper in English was like moving from one place to another, toward a clear goal from their current point. Six students' metaphors included not only moving forward but also moving upward, like an uphill struggle. They interpreted their experience as a process of going upward and the final destination as rewarding, even though it might be tiring. One student indicated that he not only chased for the goal but also appreciated the beautiful side of the experience.

Three students (4.9%) compared their experience to NOURISHMENT (Table Six), eating and drinking something and nourishing their bodies. However, these three metaphors "hot rice", "bitter coffee" and "bitter melon" are not typical delicious food. They indicated that students already knew that it was a nutrient but hard to eat, just like the situation where they knew it was hard but they had to persist and gradually found its value.

Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral features demonstrated by metaphors

Based on the analysis of the collected metaphors, some cognitive, emotive, and behavioral characteristics of these conceptual metaphors can be found. From the cognitive perspective, most students see EAW as a long process instead of a product, and they may construct their identity as active knowledge constructors and active authors. Most respondents hold specific determined goals, and thus they have high motives to achieve them. The second cognitive feature is, that all of the students regard EAW as requiring hard work and persistent efforts. The process itself is described as long, slow, and labor-intensive, and often accompanied by physical fatigue as reflected in themes such as "adventure", "swimming" and "climbing". The reason why there exist individual differences in metaphors might be that students pay attention to different aspects of academic English, including writing-language competence, genre knowledge, professional knowledge, and logic competence. According to the collected metaphors, some participants regarded language competence as essential and complex (e.g., "Two-gun agents performing on a mission," "A spiritual self-confrontation"), and they especially pay attention to the training of language, while others considered EAW as the whole structure (e.g., "carefully constructing every brick and stone of the theoretical edifice") to show that they consider these four aspects as a conglomerate.

Emotions in this process are diverse and complex. Most doctoral students, especially non-native English speakers, are often considered disadvantaged because of the language barrier. Nevertheless, they do not seem to avoid the unpleasant feelings they must experience but rather savor the difficult experiences to gain strength and progress. The process is filled with unpleasant feelings (e.g., tension and anxiety) when encountering difficulties and challenges. Still, they are counter-balanced with pleasant feelings (e.g., interest, enjoyment) when progress is felt to be made (e.g. "hiking for sunrise", "drinking bitter coffee"). And their emotions gradually changed from negativity to non-negativity or even positivity.

Among the cognitive perceptions of EAW with associated emotional connotations are two key behavioral characteristics. Firstly, the most salient quality is persistence. This is because most respondents believed that the whole process is long, requiring learners to retain their hope, confidence, and courage, to continue despite the difficulties. The second behavioral feature is elaboration, that is, not only English writing should be elaborately designed in advance, but also the whole diction should be meticulously crafted throughout the process (e.g. in one student's explanation, "English academic writing is like building a house because it needs an explicit and detailed blueprint as well as the carefully selected tools and materials.")

Discussion

Overall, all of these five domains above can be categorized together into one conceptual domain, PROCESS. The reason why we form such a categorization is based on the standard that "any language in the metaphor suggesting an analogy to an action or activity was categorized as 'process'," whereas any language in the metaphor suggesting an analogy to an object, event,

person, or experience was categorized as "product" (Paulson, 2010). Viewing participants' metaphors, we relate this dichotomy to the work of Schraw and Bruning (1996) and their emphasis on the epistemology of text. For doctoral students, who have finished their academic literacy transitions during their college life, their conceptualizations have changed from literacy as the passively transmitted product to literacy as the process. In other words, many of the participants in this study seem to understand English academic writing in terms of the active construction of knowledge rather than a transmission model in which they are merely recipients of information.

From the conceptual domain of WORK, it can be learned that students treat English academic writing as rigorous and systematic and they need to rack their heads to finish the writing task, but it is not undoable. Three of these expressions "two-gun agents performing a mission", "English translation" and "spiritual self-confrontation", reflect that these students pay more attention to or struggle with the language barrier. Interestingly, one student conceptualized the construct of EAW as "babies learning to speak" and thinks learning how to write a qualified academic essay is similar to learning a new language. Therefore, we can also apply some ideas of second language acquisition to explain that. English academic writing requires a lot of inputs and outputs; that is, students need to read plenty of documents and imitate and learn from their writing styles, structures, and presentations. Although academic English writing is a one-way representation of ideas, writers also need to take into account the feedback of their readers to better communicate with them. As children learn how to speak, they are usually curious and willing to practice despite their mistakes. Academic English writing similarly requires writers to have a positive attitude towards learning and a spirit of discovery and to constantly strive for academic excellence and innovation.

As the data in the domain of ACTIVITY indicate, it is thought-provoking to explore students' perceptions of their EAW experience closely: they reveal their beliefs about their own and others' roles in EAW. For example, one student mentioned that writing was like telling an interesting but rigorous story to others. Therefore, they must have a good command of the storyline, whereas another one said it is like communicating with unfamiliar strangers, which is an interactive process (Table Three). Their perceptions about their roles and those of their audience (committee members of their dissertation) are different: in the first example, authors are responsible for explaining everything in detail; in the second, authors should consider the reader factor more and constantly change their strategies to make themselves understood.

We analyzed the reason why students produce the CONSTRUCTION metaphor. Construction is often featured with a foundation and a well-built stable structure. With a solid foundation, the structure will be stable. Thus, the accumulation of relevant knowledge in pre-writing is essential. English academic writing is like building something by elaborately designing in advance and following a relatively clear blueprint. And in this process, every discrete part should be exquisitely designed and coherent.

Also, conceptual metaphors seem to show certain distinctiveness among different educational contexts. Thus, we compare our study with the previous studies in other educational contexts in several aspects. Firstly, although overall conceptual domains have been found in earlier studies, they display some differences. "English translating", "Two-gun agents performing on a mission" and "A spiritual self-confrontation", these three metaphors explicitly show that English academic language processing is involved largely with the process of translation for Chinese students. Combined with their following explanations, we could find that they are struggling to overcome the language barrier. Secondly, according to Wegner and Elisabeth (2020), metaphors

can be categorized into two types, self-referential and study-oriented metaphors, which might reflect two learning approaches of students, that is, the surface and deep approach. Self-referential metaphors focused only on some motivational and emotional aspects and did not contain any learning-oriented content and no learning goals besides achieving certain goals. In contrast to self-referential metaphors, learning-oriented metaphors give information on the process or a possible learning goal on a conceptual level. So, we categorized our collected data into self-referential metaphors (57.4%) and study-oriented metaphors (42.6%) based on the definitions provided (Wegner & Elisabeth, 2020), and the categorization complies with previous results, reporting metaphors mainly focusing on motivational and emotional aspects of learning. These metaphors about learning can reflect whether students are concerned with learning itself or whether they are fulfilling a duty that happens to be learning. Thirdly, specific metaphors also can reflect Chinese doctoral students' distinct mental models because of cultural factors. For example, the metaphor "embroidering a fine piece of Su embroidery" assigns the delicate and complex features of Chinese traditional Su embroidery (Renowned for its subtle and refined needlework, it is praised for its use of the finest threads, balanced compositions, dense stitching, and smooth finish) to English academic writing. It reflects not only the author's rigorous attitude toward EAP but also his behavioral features. The metaphor "fighting the college entrance exam under high pressure" vividly describes the stress and tension the author faced, because, in China, the college entrance exam is often referred to as the most important examination in students' school life. Chinese doctoral students attach great importance to their academic theses as they are closely aligned with their academic careers. Interestingly, "A Hungry Man Meets Hot Rice" reflects the importance of rice as the maple food for the Chinese. Therefore, even though many conceptual metaphors are used similarly across cultures, there are also cultural differences in their specific use. However, we acknowledge that these findings of the study may not generalize to all Chinese doctoral students as the limit of capacity and we suggest that in future research, there are multiple universities or longitudinal tracking of metaphor evaluation involved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we found that most students' metaphors offered insights into their experiences related to EAW. From what we have discussed, Chinese doctoral students' conceptions of English academic writing are categorized into five domains, WORK, ACTIVITY, CONSTRUCTION, MOVEMENT, and NOURISHMENT. These findings in the present study align with previous inquiries conducted in other educational contexts (Armstrong, 2007; Tatiana Utkina, 2021; Phyo, 2023). Moreover, different from previous studies, the study interpreted the cognitive, emotive, and behavioral features behind the metaphors. Some exceptional metaphors are also found because of cultural factors, for example, "fetching the moon out of the sea", which is a traditional Chinese idiom. The results represent the complexity of students' perceptions, ranging from positive, creative, and humorous images to more demanding and challenging aspects of the EAW process for EFL doctoral students. These revealed features are helpful for supervisors and students to form some metacognitive strategies in writing. Rather than dismissing those negative metaphors as purely subjective or overly critical, instructors can use them as entry points for pedagogical reflection and responsive instruction. Negative metaphors often signal underlying struggles with confidence, identity, or perceived expectations. Instructors can address these concerns by gradually scaffolding tasks, offering clear models and feedback, and normalizing the challenges of academic writing. When students feel that their difficulties are understood and supported, their metaphors

and attitudes may shift accordingly.

The implications of this exploratory research are multiple. Understanding how students cognitively approach academic writing can inform teachers of the need to provide explicit instruction on writing processes and help students develop effective strategies for tackling complex writing tasks. It can be also used as an effective feedback mechanism. Understanding cognitive processes related to feedback can guide teachers in providing constructive, specific, and actionable feedback that helps students make meaningful revisions and improve their writing skills.

Despite enough capacity compared with other studies, the capacity of metaphors in this study is still insufficient to represent the conceptualization of Chinese EFL doctoral students or unable to reveal how students' conceptions developed over time. More longitudinal studies are very needed to examine students' EAW experiences through metaphors in more educational settings.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table 2 *Findings of the analysis of the WORK metaphor*

Conceptual domain	participants' response
CAREFUL WORK	embroidering a fine piece of Suzhou embroidery pruning branches and trimming leaves painting cooking an exquisite dish learning classical Chinese decorating a piece of art making a piece of art
HARD WORK	squeezing the water out of the sponge English translation two-gun agents performing a mission. peeling an onion a spiritual self-confrontation a small horse pulling the big cart smoothing out stray balls of wool babies learning to speak
RULE-BASED WORK	writing several formulas observing norms all the time proving mathematical theorems measuring somebody's size and tailoring the clothes solving math problems finishing clozes

Appendix B

Table 3 *Findings of the analysis of the ACTIVITY metaphor*

Conceptual domain	participants' response
ACTIVITY	reading an unfamiliar but interesting book

	communicating about him to people you don't know. fighting the college entrance exam under high pressure communicating with unfamiliar strangers telling a rigorous and interesting story playing hide-and-seek traveling a well-planned adventure a competition fetching the moon out of the sea planting trees navigating organizing a trip in a planned and targeted manner exploring the Galaxy

Appendix C

Table 4 *Findings of the analysis of the CONSTRUCTION metaphor*

Conceptual domain	students' response
CONSTRUCTION	building a scientific building building a house carefully constructing every brick and stone of the theoretical edifice. building a pyramid building blocks building a house playing with Lego blocks constructing buildings constructing a building building a big house building a tense and tall building

Appendix D

Table 5 *Findings of the analysis of the MOVEMENT metaphor*

Conceptual domain	participants' response
MOVEMENT	sailing in the sea of knowledge climbing a mountain that is hard to climb but has to be climbed sailing in the sea climbing a mountain whose slope is long and flat walking on a beach covered with rocky stones groping in the darkness hiking for sunrise climbing a mountain that is hard to climb climbing the rolling mountains

	A river that can never be crossed going on a march climbing mountains

Appendix E

Table 6 *Findings of the analysis of the NOURISHMENT metaphor*

Conceptual domain	participants' response
NOURISHMENT	drinking bitter melon juice A hungry man meets hot rice. drinking bitter coffee

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Motivational Impact of 'Face2Face' Coursebook in a University Language Preparatory Program

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Abstract
In this study, the opinions of students at the language preparatory school of Tishk University, a private educational institution in Iraq, regarding the Face2Face coursebook were collected through Google Forms and examined. The primary purpose of this study is to assess the utility of the Face2Face book, which students studied in the preparatory course they took before enrolling in the first course, on their academic development. In addition to these, the advantages and challenges of the workbook's usefulness and functionality, as well as its activities, teacher resources, and I-tools, are examined for students and teachers. As a result of all the studies and when the questionnaire data were examined, 83% of the students were satisfied with the book, and it was recommended that the face2face book be taught in future preparation courses.

Keywords: Coursebook, Face2Face book, language preparatory school, motivation, textbook
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Introduction

The significance of English coursebooks in contemporary foreign language instruction is widely acknowledged, as they play a crucial role in education by systematically and comprehensively equipping students with the requisite knowledge for language acquisition. The development of the coursebooks involved careful study of four fundamental principles of language acquisition. The core components encompassed within this framework are reading, listening, writing, as well as vocabulary and grammar. Tsiplakides (2011) asserts that textbooks are ubiquitous throughout several domains of education. These encompass various educational establishments such as schools, language centers, universities, and other academic institutes. Additionally, coursebooks have been the primary focus of research and have been utilized in academic studies by numerous scholars (Kucuk, 2023; Senowarsito et al., 2023).

People often believe that coursebooks play a crucial role in learning a language. Textbooks are used because they provide both students and teachers with a structured and organized education. Textbooks include detailed lesson plans, clearly explain learning goals, and, most importantly, provide teachers with the tools they need to teach (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Bilgin et al., 2022a, 2022b). There are various ways teachers can utilize coursebooks. A painstakingly constructed coursebook provides educators with a methodical roadmap for delivering lessons effectively, encompassing thorough instructional methodologies and incorporating evaluative instruments for post-lesson assessment. In schools, when there are many teachers, their combined efforts make a big difference in how well the organization works together and how well it is coordinated.

Coursebooks are generally regarded as positive, but some educators also criticize them. One reason for this is that they do not meet the specific learning needs of some students. In recent years, academics have argued that coursebooks lack linguistic and cultural inclusiveness. Scholars have argued that coursebooks can overwhelm non-native speakers of English with unnecessary information, disconnecting them from their own culture (Saeed, 2022; Kara & Kucuk, 2023). Critics have also argued that English coursebooks create a different world, one in which students are not exposed to the realities of real life. As a solution to this problem, it is suggested that real-life should be taught in synchronization with what the students learn in the books, and in which area of life the knowledge learned should be applied (Gray, 2010; Çelik & Yıldız, 2019)

In response to these complaints, teachers have offered various suggestions on how the coursebooks should be compiled and what they should cover. Nunan (1991) states that "coursebooks should be student-centered and student-oriented, putting the wants, interests, and needs of students first" (p. 7). It was emphasised that this kind of study would not only make learning fun but also help students do better in school. Tomlinson (2021), who agrees with this method, suggests that when teachers choose coursebooks, they should consider what students want and what they believe is most important to them. They should also pay close attention to the content of the books.

Researchers are interested in new online coursebooks that are being widely used. This is because online platforms offer a wide range of useful tools, including games, images, digital vocabulary, and more. They also have textbooks for students. Of course, along with these benefits, some problems have also come up. The way teachers have adapted to keep up with new technology, the disparity in technology between students and teachers, and the shift from traditional methods, such as books, to the internet (Son, 2018; Yıldız, 2022).

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Literature Review

English Coursebooks

Coursebooks used in foreign language education are very helpful for learning English. They are an important tool for both individuals learning English as a second language and those who do not speak English as their first language, seeking to improve their language skills. The primary goal of language acquisition classes is to help students develop proficiency in reading, listening, writing, and speaking, including the fundamental aspects of the English language. In addition to the language areas already mentioned, these programs also aim to facilitate achieving a certain level of vocabulary and grammar proficiency. According to Demir and Ertas (2014) and Kucuk (2024), English coursebooks are of great importance in the field of language teaching and have consistently garnered significant attention.

A key goal for many teachers is to incorporate English skills into their lessons. Adding extra activities to coursebooks makes it easier for students to discuss their academic success and helps them achieve their goals. All the tasks in a coursebook are connected; for example, reading a passage indirectly helps students improve their speaking, vocabulary, and grammar. Scholars such as Harmer (2001) and Kucuk (2023) have emphasized the importance of compatibility in language learning and achieving a certain skill level.

One thing that makes Coursebooks stand out is that they include real material. Audio recordings, real pictures, and information from various media sources, such as newspaper stories, sports games, and TV news shows, are often used in textbooks. Including real-life examples in textbooks helps students understand what they are learning and makes it easier for them to draw connections between their academic studies and events in their real lives (Sertdemir et al., 2025). This helps them learn more and for a longer time. Each stage is crucial for helping children understand what is happening in the real world and providing them with the tools they need to be involved (Harmer, 2001; Kara, 2023).

Different approaches to teaching English may also influence the creation of English training books. For example, the grammar textbook employs a logical approach. Real-life tools are used in some coursebooks to help students develop their communication skills. Cozma (2015) says that, "the choice of teaching methods used in coursebooks greatly affects how well students understand the material and helps teachers get their ideas across by making the right connections" (p. 11).

Some experts are concerned about this issue, despite the importance of English course books in education. Some people are concerned that coursebooks may hinder students' ability to think critically and be independent by requiring them to follow a set of rules (Tomlinson, 2012; Vo & Tran, 2025). According to McDonough et al. (2013), "if teachers only follow the content score of textbooks, they might not pay enough attention to the needs of individual students, which could lead to neglecting those needs" (p.8).

Some coursebooks employ a task-based approach to help students enhance their language skills. This method addresses the various problems and issues that students encounter. Students who use task-based coursebooks can create a more effective learning environment and feel more comfortable expressing themselves. Several high-quality studies have investigated the impact of the task-based method on students' language skills and motivation (Abdulrahman & Kara, 2023; Willis, 2007).

Coursebooks play a crucial role in accelerating the process of learning and teaching a language. Küçük (2025) states that "language learning programs offer a more organized and

thorough method by using real-life examples and materials" (p. 9). Coursebooks designed to cater to different types of students and their needs may have both advantages and disadvantages for them. Although they are said to have problems, textbooks remain important tools for students and teachers.

Some Features of Coursebooks

Many people agree that coursebooks are beneficial for both teachers and students when learning a language. Coursebooks offer students a thoroughly organized learning path and play a significant role in helping them enhance their language skills.

One important thing about coursebooks is that they are unique. To fully assess the originality of the book designs, it is necessary to examine how they function in real-life situations. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), incorporating the idea of originality into educational materials may help students make connections between what they have learned and their real-life experiences, making it easier for them to apply their knowledge in practical situations. Since newspapers, news, and advertisements are so prevalent in many aspects of daily life, they can serve as examples. Recent studies by McDonough et al. (2013) and Doughty and Williams (1998) demonstrate that using real objects can enhance students' motivation, interest in learning, and language skills.

It is known that cultural awareness is another important quality of coursebooks. The level to which a coursebook demonstrates respect for the beliefs and cultural ideals of students from diverse backgrounds is referred to as cultural sensitivity. In addition to teaching language, coursebooks need to include material that is inclusive and takes into account the cultural values of the language being taught (Aprilianti,2025). This study by Swales and Feak (2004) suggests that teaching cultural values in English for academic purposes facilitates students' learning and enables them to access the necessary information. Self-discovery is a more lasting way to learn because it has a longer-lasting impact on students. While doing these things, it is crucial not to introduce bias and stereotypes into the mix. Failure to do so may result in misconceptions and harm the cultural values and beliefs of the pupils.

A student-centered approach should be incorporated into coursebooks, a feature often recommended. With the idea of student-centredness in mind, textbooks are made with each student's hobbies, preferences, and cognitive abilities in mind. According to Nunan (1991), coursebooks incorporate a range of tasks that enable students to learn in multiple ways, such as through hearing, seeing, or doing. Personalised learning can be implemented in several ways, such as through task-based and project-based methods, but not limited to those.

Additionally, the coursebooks must be easy to understand and have a clear organizational framework. The way the topics in the book fit together and make sense will help students learn more effectively and provide teachers with useful information. At the same time, it is essential to consider what the children already know and can do (Kucuk, 2025). Tomlinson (2012) states that "coursebooks should have clear goals for each unit and subject, along with a variety of tasks that are directly related to these goals" (p. 21). This will make it easier for students to reach their learning goals. To achieve this goal, coursebooks must incorporate a structured approach to teaching grammar and vocabulary, accompanied by clear explanations and visual aids (Harmer, 2001; Kara & Yıldız, 2022).

Ultimately, it is beneficial for coursebooks to offer students a means of receiving immediate feedback after completing assignments and tests. Feedback and review are essential for

students' learning and growth because they help them reflect on their mistakes and identify areas for improvement, which ultimately leads to personal growth (Masuhara, 1998). Formative and final tests included in coursebooks make it easier to grade students' work and track their progress throughout the school year. Formative assessments have been praised by Black and William (2004) as a way to engage students more in learning, motivate them, and improve their speaking skills. To summarize, coursebooks must meet specific criteria to be successful. Authenticity, cultural sensitivity, student-centredness, effective and logical design, and making it easy for feedback and evaluation are the most important things in this situation.

Design of the Coursebook "Face2face"

Providing kids with a dynamic and active learning environment is one of the primary goals of the Face2Face book. Cambridge University Press's Face2Face books are designed to support students from other countries. The books are divided into levels designed to help students develop various speaking skills. The Face2face coursebook series features a wealth of digital materials, including audio files, short videos, and interactive tasks, which can be accessed through the internet and other media. Redston et al. (2013) stated that "using multimedia in lessons makes the learning setting more interesting and helps students improve their language skills" (p. 19).

The coursebooks are written clearly and straightforwardly, making them easy for students to understand. They were also written to give students the most useful information. Additionally, the textbooks featured bright pictures to make studying easy and enjoyable for the students. To put it another way, coursebooks were designed to help students develop all their language skills by utilizing the four fundamental skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The Face2Face coursebook is not only a great textbook, but it also contains a wealth of useful papers. Workbooks, i-tools, and teaching resources are a few examples. It has been observed that the primary purpose of these tools is to assist students and teachers more effectively (Redston & Cunningham, 2012).

The primary objective of the Face2face course materials is to enhance students' speaking skills, with a focus on enabling them to use language effectively in real-life situations. The more challenging tasks in the book are designed to help students improve their speaking and listening comprehension. Students who use the Face2face textbook not only follow the required textbook material and grammar rules, but they also stress the importance of developing personal independence. The book offers various ways for students to express themselves, providing them with opportunities to be actively involved in the learning process. This helps them become more independent. According to Zeinep and Meruyert (2016) and Yildiz and Yucedal (2020), this provides students with the opportunity to set their own goals and monitor the plans they use to achieve those goals.

Face2Face I-Tools

Using the i-tools in the face-to-face guide, along with digital extras, can be helpful for people learning English and enhance their learning experience. I-Tools and smartboards work together seamlessly, creating better and more engaging learning spaces for students. Online tests and quizzes, audio files, mini-games, songs, short videos, and a digital copy of the book displayed on the smartboard are all types of educational tools. Additional tools, such as those listed above, have been suggested as ways to enhance traditional classroom learning. Students are expected to apply what they have learned in the classroom and further explore the topics they are studying

(Nistor, 2013). These additional tools have been introduced to support traditional classroom learning.

Face2Face i-Tools, with their attractive and interactive structure, provide a fun and advantageous learning environment for students. Davidovitch and Yavich (2017) claimed that using a smartboard in lessons supports the retention of learned information with visuals, making it more permanent and yielding more effective results. By using i-tools effectively in the classroom, teachers can attract students' interest in the lesson and provide a more dynamic learning environment.

Face2face I-tools' adaptability in both curriculum development and delivery is an additional perk. Teachers now have the means to tailor lessons to their pupils' strengths and weaknesses because of advancements in educational technology. Furthermore, these technologies have the potential to enhance conventional methods of instruction by providing students with more opportunities to practice the language in various contexts.

It is very helpful for teachers to have extra materials, such as Face2Face i-Tools, that are both curriculum-appropriate and easy to incorporate into classes. Thanks to modern technology, teachers can tailor lessons to each student's level and shape them to address each student's specific needs and weaknesses. Not only that, but these technological tools have also helped students learn more by allowing them to use the language in various situations. Numerous studies have demonstrated that i-Tools facilitate faster language acquisition in students while also enhancing their academic skills. Higgins (2007) demonstrated that using interactive whiteboards (IWBs) is similar to using smartboards, as they engage more students and motivate them. Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) said that digital games and films can help students learn while having fun.

Overall, the I-tools in the Face2face book make things a lot easier and better for both students and teachers. Research findings indicate that using these tools effectively is associated with a significant improvement in students' academic performance and the creation of an engaging and interactive learning environment. By using I-tools, teachers can effectively meet the diverse needs of their students, regardless of the students' backgrounds. According to Kucuk (2023), the use of i-tools in schools has been linked to increased student enthusiasm and interest in learning in many studies.

Face2Face Workbook

Workbooks serve as key components of coursebooks by reinforcing knowledge gained from lessons, including supplemental materials, increasing student self-assurance, and enhancing comprehension through illustrative examples. Gaver (2011) posits that workbooks are intentionally crafted to enhance the retention of acquired knowledge and offer a conducive setting for the application of learnt concepts. These products possess a significant potential for enhancing students' communication competence. The efficacy of Face2face coursebooks as supplementary resources for students and their ability to enhance the pace of learning is well acknowledged.

Face2face workbooks have been specially designed to provide learning-promoting and helpful materials in courses and schools. These helpful materials help put the learned knowledge into practice and consolidate it. Some of the specific functions of the workbooks include grammar exercises, vocabulary instruction, activities that improve listening and reading skills, and exercises that enhance speaking skills. The primary purpose of these helpful materials is to elevate students' language skills to a certain level. Students' sense of success after completing each task gives them a sense of pleasure and progress in foreign language learning, which ensures the continuity of their

learning. According to Tims et al. (2013), face-to-face workbooks include self-assessment and review areas, allowing students to track their progress and identify areas where they need improvement.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, we examined the effects of the Face2Face book, which language preparatory school students read before progressing to the first level of university, on the academic development of the students. Two research questions were formulated in this context.

1. What is the contribution of the Face2Face book to the academic development of students?
2. What are the difficulties that students face while studying the book Face2Face?

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, a mixed-methodology approach was employed to analyze student opinions and the resulting data. First, a detailed analysis of Face2Face books was conducted, and a thorough study was made on how students and their benefits perceived them. In the second stage, a questionnaire was applied to the students via Google Forms. The purpose of this questionnaire is to combine the obtained data with the students' opinions and reach a conclusion.

Participants

A total of 30 students, 16 males and 14 females, from Language Preparatory School, participated in this study. The level of the students participating in the study is at the A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and the students can express themselves comfortably in English. The language preparatory school, where the study was conducted, provides education under Tishk International University.

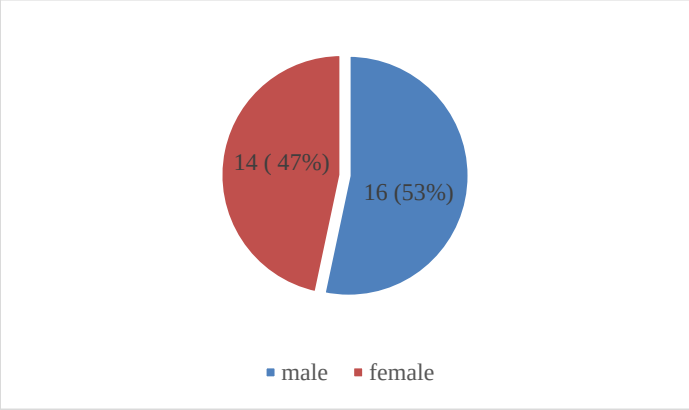


Figure 1. Participants` Number in Terms of Gend

Findings

The findings are presented in two chapters in this section. The form was created using Google Forms, and the face-to-face interview was conducted with the students. Detailed analyses and data obtained in both sections are as follows.

Table 1. *Which part of the book do you like the most?*

Variable(s)	**F**	**%**
Speaking	15	50
Grammar	10	33
Vocabulary	5	17
Writing	0	0

As shown in the table above, the students were asked to indicate which part of the book they liked the most. Half of the students said that 50% of them were speaking. Here, the speaking activities applied by the teachers are of great importance. In the normal education period, speaking activities are the classes in which the students are the happiest and attend at a higher rate. These data showed themselves in the results.

Ten of the students who participated in the study provided a grammatically correct answer, with a rate of 33%. It is not surprising at all that students give the grammar answer second. According to previous studies and survey results, Grammar has great importance in Iraq. This may be from the university entrance exams in the country (Amin, 2017).

Although a lack of vocabulary is one of the factors that affect communication, five of the students selected the vocabulary option. This information suggests that pupils have a greater impact on speaking and grammar than on the written word.

None of the students chose the writing option. This indicates that the writing sections are not well-liked by the students. In the study, questions were asked about the writing sections in the book. However, in the preparatory school, students receive writing lessons in addition to the normal course book. If they were asked about this course, a more positive answer could have been obtained.

Table 2. *Students' responses related to the Face2Face Course Book*

ITEMS	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1. The Face2Face Students Book was useful for my language learning.	10	33	16	53	4	14	0	0	0	0
2.Face2Face Workbook helped me to revise(repeat) the topics.	9	30	20	67	0	0	0	0	1	3
3. I like the activities in the Face2Face book.	14	47	16	53	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. The vocabulary in the book was easy to understand.	10	33	14	47	2	7	4	13	0	0
5. The digital book on the smartboard was helpful for my understanding.	10	33	18	60	2	7	0	0	0	0

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6. The language of the Face2Face book was appropriate for my level.	12	40	16	53	2	7	0	0	0	0
7. The grammar parts were easy to understand	10	33	13	43	4	13	0	0	3	4
8. The tests in this book were very difficult.	0	0	16	53	2	7	12	40	0	0
9. I recommend this book for next year's Prep Students	10	33	14	47	3	10	3	10	0	0

In Item one, students were given the statement "The Face2Face Students Book was useful for my language learning." Ten students chose the "strongly agree" option at 33%. Sixteen students, 53%, chose the "agree" option, and 4 students remained neutral. These results indicate that the majority of students are satisfied with the Face2Face book, which has a positive impact on their academic development. It is a pleasing point that no student gave a negative response to the given statement.

In item two, "Face2Face Workbook helped me to revise (repeat) the topics" was presented to students. Nine of the students chose the 30% " strongly agree" option, and 20 students chose the 67% "agree" option. These results have shown us that apart from the course book, the workbook is beneficial for students and offers students the opportunity to review what they have learned in the course later. Only 1 of the students chose the "strongly disagree" option. Upon examining the general results, 97% of the students expressed positive opinions about the workbook, stating that it was useful.

In Item three, the statement "I like the activities in the Face2face book" was presented to the students, and an attempt was made to determine whether they were satisfied with the activities. Fourteen students chose the "strongly agree" option, representing a rate of 47%. Sixteen of them determined the 53% "agree" option. When these results are examined, the activities included in the course book and implemented by the teachers are appreciated by the students and contribute to their learning. In this section, no negative answer was received from the students.

In the four statements, the students were asked whether the words in the book were suitable for their level, and their answers were received in this context. A total of 24 students determined "strongly agree and agree" options for this section. This makes up 81% of the total. Two students chose the neutral option, and 4 of them chose the "disagree" option. When the data is examined in general, it is revealed that the Face2Face book uses simple and understandable language, which the students easily understand. These results are reflected as a positive factor in the students' success.

In Statement five, students were asked what they thought of the Face2Face book I-tools (digital book). A total of 28 out of 30 students gave a positive answer to this statement. Since today's students closely follow technology, they greatly appreciate the digital versions of books and find them useful. Face2Face and other books, in addition to the digital book, feature games related to the subject, listening pieces, and videos that enrich students' learning and make the classroom environment more engaging.

In item six, students were asked whether the language level of the book was suitable for them. 40% of 12 students chose "strongly agree," and 53% of 16 students chose "agree." With a rate of 93%, the majority of the students emphasized that the language of the book was suitable and understandable for them. Only 2 students chose the "neutral" option on this subject.

In item seven, the students were given the statement, "The grammar parts were easy to understand." 76% of 23 students chose "strongly agree and agree" answers. Three students chose the "strongly disagree" option. These results indicate that students generally understand the grammar sections, but a small number of students, albeit a minority, have difficulties with grammar. However, when you look at the overall picture, a positive picture emerges.

It was inquired whether the tests included in the book, as listed in item 8, Face2Face, were challenging for the students, and their opinions were solicited in this context. 53% of the students chose the "agree" option. 40% chose the "disagree" option. As teachers, we believe that the test levels in the book are easy for students; however, according to the study results, students generally find the tests difficult.

In the last item, the students were given the statement "I recommend this book for next year's Prep Students". Twenty-four of the adolescents, 81%, recommended this book to the language preparation classes that will study at the university next year. Three students chose the "disagree" option at a rate of 10%. When the general results are considered, the students' satisfaction with the book is evident, and positive outcomes were obtained.

Discussion

To examine the impressions of the Face2face books on the students and gather their opinions, a form was created using Google Forms. Students' opinions were gathered through a total of 9 statements, and according to the general answers, it was revealed that the students' satisfaction with the book was quite high, which contributed to their academic development.

Examining the results, the students generally seem pleased, as understood in the previous statement. The majority of the students recommend the Face2Face book to the preparatory class students who will read it next year. Besides the Face2Face book, the book also offers tests and quizzes. These tests and quizzes are administered to students on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, tailored to their individual needs. The general exam results are very satisfactory. However, some students stated that the tests were difficult. It would be helpful to consider this issue. These results are similar to those of Kalay's (2017) study. In his study, Kalay (2017) stated that the Face2Face coursebook appeals to different nations and is exemplary in terms of multiculturalism.

When we examine the levels of the books, we see that they are suitable for students who are just starting to learn English. In addition to these positive features, the book's content is well-suited for university students and provides a solid foundation in English education. Additionally, during the studies, the students reported that they found the Face2Face book activities entertaining. This data revealed common results with the studies of Celik (2019) and Kucuk (2023); it was observed that the activities in the book were suitable for the student levels.

Conclusion

Coursebooks are one of the most important elements of foreign language education and should be selected according to students' levels, needs, and cultural backgrounds. Coursebooks have a profound impact on the delivery of effective language education for both students and teachers. The coursebooks' clear and understandable preparation of the subjects is a significant factor in helping students understand the annotations, and they also facilitate the transfer of the desired message to teachers. Of course, teachers can enrich the lesson with various activities, but they cannot exceed the syllabus outlined in the coursebook. Therefore, both selecting the right book and its content are important for all elements of education.

The Face2Face book has been determined to be helpful for students' language learning after a thorough examination of the application forms and results. This is evident from the students' positive responses to statements regarding workbooks, grammar, activities, examinations, and I-tools. The instructors will discuss and adjust the difficulty levels of the tests presented in the book to suit the students' abilities, aiming to bring them up to the students' level.

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EFL Learners' Perspectives on the Use of Vietnamese for Brainstorming in English Writing Classes

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Abstract
In the era of globalization, language contact is inevitable, necessitating guidance on using a learner's native language to support second language acquisition effectively while minimizing drawbacks that could hinder progress. This study aims to investigate how Vietnamese university students perceive the use of their native language during the brainstorming phase of English essay writing classes. To do that, it is necessary to understand what makes second language learners employ their mother tongue in their study and their perception of doing so. The study participants included 42 university students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam who learned English as their major. A survey and in-depth interviews were the research instruments used to analyze their attitudes toward using their first language for idea brainstorming during their writing lessons. The findings showed that English-major students had positive attitudes toward the roles of both Vietnamese and English brainstorming in improving writing performance. However, their Vietnamese use depended on the complexity and difficulties of the topics they had to deal with to support them with necessary ideas. Therefore, the first language could be a supporting method for developing second language essay writing.
Key words: Brainstorming, Native Language, Second Language, English writing, Vietnamese Learners

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Introduction

English has become a global language in the last century. It has opened opportunities for young people to challenge themselves in international environments. That is the reason why English has been a top concern in many countries worldwide nowadays, especially for those who speak English as a foreign language. For example, China has expanded and improved the English program since the mid-1980s, including innovations in textbooks, syllabuses, teachers' self-development and testing systems (Hu, 2003). Similarly, according to Kirkgöz (2014), English is an integral part of social, economic and political life in Turkey because the country is a "*physical and cultural bridge*" between Asia and Europe.

Language transfer occurs when learners use their first language (L1) while learning a second language (L2), often influencing each other's development (Gass, 1997). Specifically, employing the first language is a common strategy among learners of English as a foreign language during second language acquisition. (Lado, 1957) first defined the first language in the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, suggesting it can either facilitate or hinder second language learning success. Consequently, while the first language is often unavoidable in second language classrooms to some extent, its use remains controversial, with extensive research highlighting both its benefits (Cook, 2001) and drawbacks (Turnbull, 2007) in second language learning. The transfer of the first language can occur across all language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—but its role in writing has garnered significant attention, as second language writing is often considered the most challenging skill (Silva, 1992). Despite evidence that students with strong first language writing skills, such as planning and organizing ideas, may transfer these abilities to their second language (Cumming, 1989), a critical gap remains: there is limited understanding of how using the first language during the pre-writing stage, particularly in brainstorming, affects English writing performance among Vietnamese learners (Nguyen, 2015). This lack of clarity poses a problem for educators seeking effective strategies to support English as a foreign language writing, especially in contexts where the first language is frequently used, such as Vietnam, where English is a compulsory subject from primary to tertiary education (MOET, 2018).

Brainstorming is a pre-writing activity which provides learners with essential preparation, including generating, developing, and organizing ideas (Rashtchi & Porkar, 2020). Such planning steps create flows of ideas with related vocabulary, grammatical structures and other linguistic elements for the composing process. However, in specific EFL contexts, learners do not fully perceive the role of brainstorming. Instead of discussing ideas, they spend time chatting, telling jokes or prefer working on their own. In addition, most students may have difficulties generating ideas, which is a significant obstacle to start writing. Therefore, brainstorming in writing classes, individually or in groups, can support them with the necessary flow of information and motivate them to write.

Hence, L1 brainstorming expects to bring certain benefits. Researchers believe that when students activate their L1 background knowledge to generate ideas, they prepare and present the concepts better in L2 (Ismail & Ahsheikh, 2012). L1 knowledge can also act as motivation for L2 writing by allowing learners to think in their language without limitation in vocabulary and structures of the target language, therefore increasing their confidence, especially for L2 low level students. L1 brainstorming is especially beneficial for unfamiliar and complex topics because learners can explore ideas before transferring them into L2.

This research paper aims to investigate the effects of using Vietnamese during the brainstorming stage in English writing lessons for learners of English as a foreign language. The significance of

this study lies in its potential to inform educators about effective strategies for integrating the native language in second language writing instruction, thereby enhancing writing performance and addressing the challenges faced by Vietnamese learners in English essay writing. To achieve this aim, the study pursues the following objectives: (a) to explore the attitudes of Vietnamese English-major students toward using their native language for brainstorming in English writing classes, (b) to identify the factors influencing their use of Vietnamese during the brainstorming process, and (c) to assess the perceived impact of native language brainstorming on their English writing performance. The guiding research question is: How do Vietnamese learners of English perceive the use of Vietnamese for brainstorming in English writing classes?

Literature review

Language transfer

In linguistics, language transfer is the process during which a language is affected by another. Selinker (1983) defined transfer as a cognitive process in language learning. According to him, L1 could positively facilitate the L2 acquisition process; however, L1 might interfere the L2 learning process and therefore might negatively affect L2 learning. The study addressed the benefits and drawbacks of language transfer due to the consideration of the similarities and differences between languages, which shed light on the study of transfer. Similarly, according to Faerch & Kasper (1987), transfer was a communicative process during which L2 learners activated their L1 background knowledge to develop their interlanguage skills. Both studies emphasized transfer as a cognitive process, suggesting further investigation in the field.

The use of L1 in L2 contexts has always been controversial. While some researchers believed that L1 could bring adverse effects on the learning process; others appreciated L1 use because of several significant roles. Firstly, Cook (2001) emphasized the role of bilingualism in language learning, which suggested that the collaboration of L1 and L2 could be more beneficial than in a monolingual context. Hall and Cook (2012) added that the use of the students' first language in L2 classrooms became a social and economic trend due to the "optimal" benefits. Both studies encouraged the integration of native language in teaching and learning for the overall advantages. On the other hand, regarding negative perspectives, the transfer from mother tongue to second language may slow down and prevent the development of L2 acquisition. The claim was particularly true because many languages had more differences than similarities, causing L1-related errors in the target language (Tran et al., 2024). People also believed that in a particular language classroom, the more L1 there was, the less L2 was used (Moafa, 2023). The two studies implied that although the native language was undeniably advantageous, it should be used with caution and under control to reduce errors and provide more L2 exposure.

The way that a language could influence another language may depend on various factors such as the different contexts, the distance between the languages, cultural identity, language proficiency or some psychological issues. In fact, many studies contributed to the literature. Worth being considered, Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) suggested a conceptual framework of Cross-linguistic Influence (CLI) with five categories of factors, including: (1) linguistic and psycholinguistic factors such as the similarity between languages; (2) cognitive, mental, and developmental factors such as L2 proficiency; (3) age, the language exposure, residence time, language proficiency, and the number and order of acquired languages; (4) factors from the language learning environment which could be formal or natural contexts; and (5) the language use factors depending on social and situational contexts. The model seemed complicated; however,

it suggested promising research on what might cause the use of native language in foreign language learning to evaluate and support language learners.

First language use and Second language writing

Language transfer plays an important role in second language acquisition. For example, a study by Smagul (2024) revealed that teachers at a Kazakhstani secondary school allowed their students to translate from their first language to English, depending on students' English proficiency and class size. Although they prioritized English-only instruction, they believed it was effective to let learners translate from their first language.

Regarding to L2 writing, educators and researchers were concerned about how to help learners develop their writing performance. Ellis (2003) suggested two distinct methods: divergent thinking which welcomed different answers for a question; and convergent thinking which accepted only one possible solution to a problem. Both styles of thinking encouraged writers to be critical in different ways and had specific pros and cons. The study emphasized the idea generation process in the planning stage. On the other hand, some researchers provided clearer guidelines for the writing process including several stages: brainstorming, drafting, peer reviewing, draft revising, teacher submission, teacher feedback, revising and writing up the final first draft (Do, 2023; W. Zhang et al., 2020). The studies approved the process of conducting a writing lesson, including learners' activities before writing, techniques for while-writing and steps to take after finishing writing. During the process, L1 could occur at any stage and benefit L2 writing. As a result, L1 could be a strategy that was worth considering.

Brainstorming and its roles in writing

Brainstorming is one of the most popular activities in the pre-stage to get students involved in and well-prepared for writing. The first definition of brainstorming was by Osborn (1953) as a way to "think up." Many studies in the following century were affected by Osborn's theory. For example, Göğüş (2012) confirmed that brainstorming was a good technique that generated ideas among group members to find the best solutions. The definition seemed to be simple with no guidelines on how to conduct the brainstorming process. Therefore, Alrubaie et al. (2014) argued that brainstorming was a cognitive process with two stages: creative thinking for idea generation and critical thinking for idea evaluation. Adapting some theories, they introduced a brainstorming model including three stages: (1) Problem identification; (2) Idea generation - a phase in creative thinking; and (3) Idea evaluation - the critical thinking phase. In the final phase learners must think to decide whether the ideas are helpful, interesting, not applicable or excluded. As a result, they could have the suitable ideas for their writing.

Brainstorming could bring a lot of benefits to students' writing. For instance, Rao (2007) conducted research with Chinese students and found that the brainstorming process showed positive results on their writing performance. He believed that learners should take many steps to produce a good writing text. Hence, he emphasized the role of process-based learning because it could encourage creative thinking for writing ideas. The study supported the fact that language learners often face lots of obstacles in writing such as the lack of ideas and brainstorming activities might help them overcome those (Abd Karim et al., 2016).

L1 brainstorming in writing

Language transfer generally has specific effects and is vital in improving different aspects of language, especially developing writing skills. According to Cumming (1990), if students already had specific L1 writing skills such as planning, outlining, developing ideas, proofreading, editing, etc., they might have similar abilities in L2 writing. In line with that, Pathey et al. (2009) argued that those who had "*better academic literacy, even in another language, are more likely to acquire the written communication skills they need and succeed in college coursework.*" The two studies explained that in writing, language learners tended to apply L1 to suggest and confirm hypotheses to convey what they wanted to write in L2 (Minh Hung, 2023). By discussing in their native language, learners could simplify their ideas and manage the writing tasks effectively. Therefore, L1 transfer was considered as both a tool and a strategy to develop writing.

Studies particularly focused on the roles of L1 in different stages of L2 writing, especially at the first steps of the process. An experimental study by Tanış et al. (2020) examined the effectiveness of L1 in the pre-writing stage of the writing process. According to these authors, the students who planned in L1 received higher scores in L2 writing. The study also emphasized the role of the warm-up activities before writing, including generating ideas, organizing thoughts and planning for writing. This study was particularly true for L2 low-level students. Therefore, it raised the question of whether the finding applied to other groups of students. To answer the question, Zheng and Drybrough (2023) investigated translanguaging practice in thesis writing by Chinese postgraduate students in England, who had higher level of English proficiency. The findings showed that the students mostly used Chinese to activate their background knowledge, prepare the content and analyze the relationship between the received information. From the two studies, L1 seemed to be beneficial in the planning stage of writing, regardless of L2 proficiency level.

Previous studies

The roles of L1 brainstorming in the writing process include two aspects: the first one refers to brainstorming activities in writing performance, and the second is the use of the first language in the brainstorming process.

Regarding brainstorming, there could be some positive and negative effects on writing. According to an experimental study by Abedianpour and Omidvari (2018), thirty participants who received brainstorming practice got considerable improvement in writing in comparison with thirty other students who did not brainstorm before writing. Therefore, they believed it was a helpful technique in pre-writing. In line with the study, Shirvani and Porkar (2021) observed 16 learners brainstorming in their writing class and interviewed them afterwards. They added that although the students might be confused with different viewpoints, they could learn to be open-minded to generate more ideas, boost their writing motivation and create closed relationship with partners. Similarly, in the Vietnam context, Do (2023) conducted a qualitative study on the role of pre-writing tasks in developing writing performance. He interviewed 3 Vietnamese university students and found that the participants were positive about pre-task activities because they believed their writing quality was enhanced in both content and text organization. In general, the three studies shared the same findings, that brainstorming was a helpful technique supporting the writing process, except for the confusion that brainstorming might cause too many ideas.

Regarding L1 use during the brainstorming process, research has achieved significant findings. Zhang (2018) compared co-constructed English essays of 35 pairs of students using L1 and L2 for discussion and composing. He aimed to investigate the effects of language use on the complexity,

fluency, accuracy, and quality of the essays. The findings indicated that although there was no difference in fluency, accuracy and quality, L1 groups received more positive results in complexity. On the other hand, Gao and Min (2021) conducted an experimental study with 66 university students in China, divided into L1 groups using L1 during pre-writing discussion and an L2 group discussing in L2. The findings showed that L1 planning was more efficient in generating ideas while the other students found L2 discussion challenging to explain themselves due to their low level of L2 proficiency.

In conclusion, studies have focused on the L2 writing procedure in which brainstorming in the pre-writing was particularly concerned. L1 brainstorming was also noticeable because learners seemed to prefer spending time discussing in their mother tongue. This study is therefore significant to contribute to the literature on language transfer.

Methodology

Participants

The research took place at the Faculty of Foreign Languages (FFL), Saigon University (SGU), Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The university is one of the two public research and pedagogical institutions in Ho Chi Minh City that provide educational and training programs in the city. The FFL, where the participants were engaged, offers two majors of training: English Linguistics and English Pedagogy Training. Although the two programs have different career orientations, they include several common language skill modules during the first two academic years, such as English speaking, listening, reading and writing.

The author contacted a class of 42 EFL junior students at Sai Gon University during the first semester of the academic year 2024-2025 for the research, based on the convenience sampling method (Creswell, 2014). At the time of conducting the research, the students were taking their 15-week Writing Module 4 – the highest Module in their writing curriculum in which they learned how to write argumentative essays with a Vietnamese teacher of English. They were consented to complete a questionnaire including 40 items.

The participants ages ranged from 19 to 22. Nearly two thirds of them were female. All of them were born and grew up in Vietnam, using Vietnamese as their mother language. Moreover, all of them could write in at least two languages, including Vietnamese and another foreign language such as English and/or Korean. In terms of educational background, as their major at the university, English was taught in most subjects within at least 2 years of learning from the **time they attended** the survey, except for a few Vietnamese basic subjects. The special point was that Vietnamese teachers of English were in charge of all subjects, and the students had no experience learning with foreign teachers. In terms of L1 background, table 1 shows the participants' ability to use Vietnamese. In general, the students found it easy to speak, read and write in their mother language, either formally or informally. There were insignificant differences between the Mean values of the first three skills. Formal writing was the most challenging skill that received the lowest mean (*Mean = 3.14*) and the most significant variation in the data with *SD = 0.83*, higher than other skills, though there was not a considerable difference. While most of the students believed they could complete L1 formal writing essays easily or even with specific difficulties, one participant found it impossible to write such topics with supporting arguments such as politics, technology, etc.

Table 1. *L1 background*

	Mean	SD
L1 informal speaking	3.81	0.55
L1 formal speaking	3.38	0.69
L1 informal reading	3.83	0.48
L1 formal reading	3.69	0.56
L1 informal writing	3.74	0.66
L1 formal writing	3.14	0.83

After the survey, five of the students who volunteered to join further interviews shared more opinions on the issue.

Research instruments

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods under a survey and interviews.

Survey

The survey adapted items from questionnaires by Joyce et al. (2021) and Slocum (2013) on L1, brainstorming, and its roles in writing. The survey included 40 items with six sections: (1) **Background information** including seven questions about their age, gender, country born, country growing up, languages used formally, informally and for writing; (2) **Education background** including five items for the students to write the number of years they experienced their study at university; (3) **L1 background** having six 4-scale items scaling the ability to perform several skills, ranging from *impossible* to *easy*, with two speaking and listening items: how easy/difficult for the person to speak or listen to some given activities in L1, such as introducing, talking about jobs, studies, or plans in the future; and two reading and writing skills items: how easy/difficult for the person to read about or write about some given activities in L1, such as textbooks, novels, stories, articles, letters, notes, or notices; (4) **L1 use and causes that affect students' choice of L1 in the L2 classroom** included six 7-point Likert scale items about students' perception of L1 use, ranging from totally agree to totally disagree; one open-ended question about factors affecting their L1 use; (5) **Benefits of brainstorming in L2 writing** included ten 7-point Likert scale items, ranging from totally agree to totally disagree; (6) **Benefits of L1 brainstorming in developing L2 writing** included six 7-point Likert scale items, ranging from totally agree to totally disagree.

In-depth interviews

Semi-structured interviews supported the data from the survey and analyzed further reasons behind the participants' choices in the survey. The questions were modified and differed from student to student, depending on their survey's feedback. The list of interview questions had three main parts: the reasons why L1 was employed; the benefits of brainstorming; and the benefits of L1 brainstorming.

Research procedure

The survey data was collected and transferred into charts according to the research questions and themes for evaluation, including the students' perception in the use of L1 in their L2 learning, the benefits of brainstorming generally and L1 brainstorming particularly. IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0 was used to calculate the values of Means and Standard Deviations to quantitatively measure the extent to which the students perceived L1 use. On the other hand, the item about the factors

affecting L1 use was transferred into a table of percentages to analyze the highest and the lowest elements.

The interview data was qualitatively analyzed in themes, with coded keywords found from the scripts transferred. The findings were to confirm and explain the quantitative data.

Results

Survey

The data from the survey was collected and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings are as follows:

L1 use in L2 classroom

The results from Table Two showed slight preference but did not emphasize strong favor for the use of Vietnamese in EFL classrooms by English-major students. In terms of teachers' use of L1, items 1 and 2 showed that students slightly approved of L1 teaching (*Mean = 3.93*) and explanations (*Mean = 3.12*). Item 4 and 6, presenting classroom interactions, also received similar results (*Mean = 3.76; Mean = 3.98 respectively*), suggesting that learners somehow appreciated the chances to communicate and raise questions in Vietnamese with peers and tutors. The SD values, ranging from *1.32* to *1.66,* illustrated that there were moderate variations in the students' attitudes. Hence, some students might agree with Vietnamese use in their lesson while some other students might not. In addition, the students preferred to use an English-English dictionary rather than an English-Vietnamese dictionary (item 5, *Mean = 4.62, SD = 1.5*). Nevertheless, in terms of having an English-only classroom (item 3), students showed negative perspectives with *Mean = 4.29* and the highest variation with *SD = 1.67,* which means that although they did not strongly encourage Vietnamese use, the 100% English environment seemed unfavorable.

Table 2. *L1 use in L2 classroom*

	Responses	Mean	SD
1. My teachers should use Vietnamese in every lesson	*42*	*3.93*	*1.32*
2. My teachers should be able to give explanations in Vietnamese	*42*	*3.12*	*1.5*
3. I believe that an English-only classroom is the best way to learn English	*42*	*4.29*	*1.67*
4. The use of Vietnamese with my partners and/or group helps me learn English	*42*	*3.98*	*1.49*
5. I think it's better to use English-Vietnamese dictionaries than English-English dictionaries	*42*	*4.62*	*1.5*
6. It's important to me that I can ask questions in Vietnamese to my teachers	*41*	*3.76*	*1.66*

Factors that affect students' use of L1 in the L2 classroom

Table three illustrates the main factors of using Vietnamese when learning English. The two most popular reasons that fostered the learners to use L1 included: (1) Vietnamese was necessary when the students had problem explaining in English, and (2) Vietnamese made it easier for them to explain some ideas with approximately three-thirds of the options for each. English exposure

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was also a significant factor (31%) because even with English-major students, 100% English in the classroom could be challenging. The environment was the least influential factor, with only nine students choosing to speak Vietnamese because their teachers and friends also did it.

This part included a semi-ended question, which encouraged other ideas from the students. Two additional reasons, referring to the environmental and cognitive factors, were added by the students, including (1) some of the members in class were too shy to speak English so Vietnamese was preferred and (2) thinking in Vietnamese helped them have better ideas in English.

Table 3. *Factor affecting the use of L1 in L2 classroom*

Factors	Responses *(n=42)*	Percentage
1. I use Vietnamese when I don't know how to express an idea in English.	33	78,6%
2. I believe that Vietnamese and English are somewhat similar (vocab, structures, pronunciation…)	6	14,3%
3. 100% English lessons are difficult for me.	13	31%
4. I think I can express my ideas more easily in Vietnamese.	27	64,3%
5. I use Vietnamese because my teachers and friends do.	9	21,4%
Other ideas:	2	4,8%

Benefits of brainstorming in L2 writing

Table four presents the participants' attitude toward applying brainstorming in writing skill. Overall, the data showed a positive perception of the roles of brainstorming. The Mean values, ranging from *2.48* to *3.38*, indicated that the students particularly enjoyed brainstorming activities when interacting with mates, generating new ideas and having fun. They also agreed that such activities supported their L2 writing. In contrast, items 8 and 9 illustrated strong disagreement from the participants (Mean = 4.29 and 4.00 respectively). The SD values from *1.20* to *1.53* meant that the variation was not considerable, suggesting that only a few students found brainstorming challenging and uncomfortable. The results supported the overall findings.

Table 4. *Perception towards brainstorming*

	Responses	Mean	SD
1. I enjoy brainstorming activities	42	3.02	1.20
2. I enjoy talking with classmates during brainstorming activities	42	3.38	1.23
3. I'm interested in finding different ideas during brainstorming activities	42	3.00	1.32
4. It's more fun to brainstorm for writing than to write without any planning	42	3.02	1.44
5. Brainstorming is a valuable technique in writing	42	2.48	1.30
6. I could improve my writing when I was doing brainstorming activities	42	2.74	1.53
7. Brainstorming should be considered as a tool to promote learners' English writing ability.	42	2.69	1.45
8. I feel uncomfortable when doing brainstorming.	42	4.29	1.51
9. I find it challenging to work with classmates during brainstorming activities.	42	4.00	1.50

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Benefits of L1 brainstorming in developing L2 writing

As shown in Table five, there was slight agreement in the students' perception of L1 use for brainstorming. Items 1, 2, 3, and 4, showing positive attitude toward L1 brainstorming, received Mean scores from *3.07* to *3.86*, showing L1 preference for its ease and usefulness. Meanwhile items 5 and 6, showing negative perspectives, had Mean scores of *4.21* and *5.07*; the SD values were from *1.14* to *1.44*. The results consistently proved that the students preferred L1 for brainstorming because of potential advantages for their writing.

Table 5. *Perception of L1 brainstorming in L2 writing*

	Responses	Mean	SD
1. I enjoy brainstorming activities in L1	42	3.24	1.44
2. I enjoy talking with classmates in L1 during brainstorming activities	42	3.07	1.35
3. Using L1 for brainstorming is a helpful technique in writing.	42	3.48	1.28
4. I could improve my L2 writing when I was doing brainstorming activities in L1	42	3.86	1.23
5. I feel uncomfortable when brainstorming in L1.	42	5.07	1.14
6. I would choose L2 if the teacher didn't request me to brainstorm in L1	42	4.21	1.20

Interviews

Five participants from the survey consented to join in-depth interviews to further explain their insights and attitudes toward L1 use in brainstorming. Their responses were recorded and qualitatively analyzed under the following themes. Findings from the interviews were used to support conclusions of from the survey.

The roles of brainstorming in writing skill

Brainstorming activities helped to generate ideas. As presented from the survey's data, different ideas were constructed during the discussions. The students modified that after coming up with the ideas, they had to review, analyze and evaluate them to select the most supportive ones to use in the essays. The process was defined as critical thinking which encouraged the students to decide the suitable ideas they needed among a vast number of ideas.

> Student 1: *Brainstorming helps me have more ideas thanks to discussions with friends, so I think my essay writing skill gradually enhanced.*
>
> Student 2: *Brainstorming can give me many ideas, but I have to evaluate and edit them before use.*

The use of L1 in L2 classroom

The preference of Vietnamese

All of the participants agreed that Vietnamese was more useful for two reasons. Firstly, as a mother language, Vietnamese could be used to communicate with friends informally. Secondly, the use of Vietnamese especially supported ideas for the students when they had difficulty in English. These responses also aligned with the data from the survey. To clarify their answers, they explained that L1 was friendlier and more suitable for beginners. Therefore, it could prove that as

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English-majored students, they did not use L1 regularly.

Student 3: I*n my study, I only use Vietnamese when I don't know how to say it in English.*

Student 4: *I think the level of English proficiency decides the use of first language. Vietnamese can be integrated in English lessons to make sure low-level students understand the knowledge.*

Student 5: *oh, I love using Vietnamese to tell jokes with friends, or to discuss abstract or complex terms, such as methodology in my pedagogical lessons.*

The limitation of using Vietnamese

The interview also reflected the students' hesitation of overusing Vietnamese in English lessons. In their opinion, more English exposure was better for second language learning. Therefore, they used as much English as possible in the lessons with the aim to be more fluent in English. They even used English-English dictionaries to check for the meanings of a new word because that could help them avoid direct translation. The result matched the survey's data about the students' preference for monolingual dictionaries.

Student 1: *I try not to use Vietnamese as much as possible. I think more English is better.*

The roles of L1 brainstorming in L2 writing

The comfort of thinking and discussing in Vietnamese

With the seen perspectives on L1 use generally, the participants believed that brainstorming in Vietnamese was more comfortable, easier, and unavoidable. Thinking in Vietnamese also helped them have more ideas, especially with complex topics. They explained that they had used Vietnamese since they were little, making them more confident to discuss ideas with friends in Vietnamese. The finding clarified the survey that EFL learners preferred L1 to solve English difficulties easily and comfortably.

Student 1: *Vietnamese is undoubtedly easier and more comfortable to use.*

The use of Vietnamese in unfamiliar topics

However, the participants showed different viewpoints on using Vietnamese for brainstorming in writing. In general, they tried to think and discuss in English whenever possible. Vietnamese students would only apply their mother tongue if they could not generate ideas in English, especially with unfamiliar and complex topics. Brainstorming in English could save time and energy because there was no translation. Moreover, they were concerned that if students overused Vietnamese, it would prevent L2 acquisition.

Student 1: *I only use Vietnamese with too complicated topics.*

Student 2: *I major in English, so I think more English is better. I brainstorm in English to save time because I don't have to translate.*

Student 4: *I often think and discuss in English, except when it's too complicated. I guess I have more ideas for writing in Vietnamese. But I don't think we should do that regularly.*

Discussion

The study was to answer the research question: *"How do Vietnamese learners of English perceive the use of Vietnamese for brainstorming in English writing classes?"* Findings from the survey and the in-depth interviews supported each other showing that the students had a positive attitude but with cautious use when applying their mother tongue.

Firstly, there was a slight preference for using Vietnamese in English writing lessons by English-majored students at Saigon University. The students preferred Vietnamese for two reasons: classroom interaction and academic achievement. The first reason allowed them to communicate with their tutor and friends whereas the second one helped them get ideas for their essays. The attitude was not strong but emphasized the outstanding role of bilingual context over a monolingual environment as discussed by Cook (2001) and Hall and Cook (2012). That was to explain the next finding that although more English exposure, such as the use of an English-English dictionary, was recommended by the SGU English-majored learners, English-only lessons were not feasible.

In terms of causes that motivated them to use L1, the findings showed that it happened when the students failed to express themselves in English, which was the biggest reason. The findings deeply confirmed the theories. As discussed by Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008), L2 proficiency was one of the factors affecting L1 use. Accordingly, the English-majored students with higher level of English proficiency appreciated more chances to use English as the target language rather than employing the mother tongue regularly. The participants had no problems exchanging their ideas within the familiar topics. Therefore, they only conveyed their ideas in Vietnamese when they failed to do that in English. The least affected factor of L1 use was the assumption of the similarities between English and Vietnamese, which belonged to the linguistic factor. The finding aligns with the arguments by Tran et al. (2024) about the problems Vietnamese learners of English had due to the differences between the two languages. At this point, the participants were aware of the nature of the two languages.

The subsequent findings referred to the learners' perception of brainstorming in writing practice. It showed that the participants enjoyed brainstorming activities as a fun and effective way to generate different ideas supporting the writing process, as reviewed by Abd Karim et al. (2016) and Rao (2007). However, to have logical and well-organized ideas, they needed to take a vital step to analyze and evaluate the items carefully before use. The findings satisfied the literature that brainstorming was a cognitive process that included two basic stages: the first one was creative thinking generating ideas and the second was critical thinking evaluating the ideas (Alrubaie et al., 2014). The finding was significant because it suggested students' awareness that different ideas might be confusing without being reviewed, analyzed, and evaluated.

Finally, regarding the roles of brainstorming in L1, the findings illustrated and proved that L1 pre-stage discussion produced better idea productivity (Gao & Min, 2021; Tanış et al., 2020) According to the survey and the interviews, L1 brainstorming was enjoyable and helped improve L2 writing by providing more ideas than L2 brainstorming, especially with unfamiliar topics. However, the findings didn't emphasize a strong preference by indicating the concern of overusing Vietnamese with English-major students. They argued that although Vietnamese was helpful to some extent, English was their priority. This result explained the role of language exposure in second language learning (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). However, different from arguments by Zheng and Drybrough (2023) and Tanış et al. (2020) which showed that both low-level and high-level students used L1 to plan their writing, the finding from this study emphasized the cautious attitude

of first language use by English-majored students whose English level of proficiency was definitely high. The difference did not mean a negation, but a supplement to contribute to the literature of the language transfer study.

Conclusion

The research aimed to explore the EFL students' perspectives on L1 brainstorming in L2 essay writing. Conducted under a mixed-method survey with 42 English-major students at Saigon University and qualitative interviews with 5 of them; the research showed that although there was just a slight preference, Vietnamese was a helpful tool to support L2 learners in some instances. In addition, brainstorming proved to play a significant role in the writing process. By generating, analyzing, and evaluating ideas, brainstorming could enhance essay writing performance. As a result, L1 brainstorming was considered a comfortable, easy, and fun process that brought back better idea productivity. On the other hand, the research highlighted that English was a priority of the English-major students. While Vietnamese could be a supporting tool with unfamiliar topics, English should be exposed as much as possible.

The findings from the research suggested further study to explore non-English major students' attitudes toward using L1 in L2 writing. From that, a critical comparison can be made to evaluate the role of L1 on different groups of language learners.

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Translanguaging and Metacognitive Instruction: Effects on Listening and Metacognitive Awareness in CFL Learners

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction on Thai university students' listening comprehension, metacognitive awareness, and attitudes in Chinese as a Foreign Language classroom. It investigates how multilingual scaffolding, particularly English, can support strategic listening when teachers and students do not share a first language. The study aims to enhance comprehension and learner autonomy through structured multilingual scaffolding. It also highlights the potential of English as a pedagogical bridge to foster comprehension and self-regulation in multilingual settings. An eight-week intervention was conducted with 36 second-year Thai students in an International Business Chinese program, using a framework informed by Lin's Multimodalities-Entextualization Cycle and Vandergrift's Metacognitive Pedagogical Sequence. A mixed-methods design was employed, with data collected through parallel Chinese listening tests, the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire, attitudinal questionnaires, and interviews. Findings showed significant gains in listening performance and metacognitive awareness. Most students found translanguaging beneficial for understanding and applying strategies, though some expressed concerns about over-reliance on English and emphasized the need for balance. This study contributes to the pedagogy of Chinese as a foreign language by providing empirical support for the strategic integration of pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction. It recommends the balanced use of multilingual scaffolding to enhance listening development and foster learner autonomy in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Keywords: listening comprehension, metacognitive instruction, metacognitive pedagogical sequence, multilingual classrooms of Chinese as a foreign language, pedagogical translanguaging

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Introduction

With globalization and increased population mobility, multilingualism has become increasingly prevalent globally. English, often recognized as the first global language (Crystal, 2006), is pivotal in cross-cultural communication. As a lingua franca (ELF), it facilitates interaction in diverse linguistic environments, especially in higher education, where English frequently serves as the medium of instruction (Cenoz, 2017b; Bowles & Murphy, 2020).

In Thailand, English has long served as the primary foreign language and was designated the ASEAN lingua franca in 1967 (Kirkpatrick, 2010). It became a compulsory subject in the national curriculum from primary school in 2001 (Phothongsunan, 2019). In addition to the longstanding prominence of English in Thailand, the global rise of Chinese has positioned Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL), making it an increasingly important alternative in the country's education system (Kanoksilapatham, 2011). However, Thai CFL learners often struggle with listening comprehension due to the complexity of spoken Chinese and the lack of effective listening strategies (Sukjairungwattana, 2024). This raises a critical pedagogical problem regarding how instructional design can effectively support listening strategy use and metacognitive awareness development in multilingual classrooms where teachers and students do not share a common first language.

Metacognitive instruction (MI) has emerged as a proven strategy for improving listening skills. By encouraging learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening processes, MI enhances strategy use and metacognitive awareness (Shamsi & Bozorgian, 2024). However, MI's effectiveness depends in part on the instructional language. Traditional "Chinese-only" policies may restrict learners' cognitive engagement by excluding their broader linguistic resources (Wang, 2019). Although several studies have demonstrated MI's benefits (Tanewong, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022), few have examined how translanguaging, the dynamic use of multiple languages, can complement MI in CFL contexts.

Pedagogical translanguaging enables learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires to connect prior knowledge with new input, thereby enhancing comprehension and participation (García & Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2015). However, many existing studies are based on classrooms where teachers and students share a common L1 (Muguruza et al., 2023), a condition often absent in Thai CFL classrooms. In multilingual educational contexts, English frequently acts as a shared second language. However, its strategic use in listening instruction, particularly when integrated with metacognitive instruction (MI), remains critically underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by introducing the notion of pedagogical English as a Lingua Franca (pedagogical ELF), the planned use of English within translanguaging to support listening strategy instruction. Drawing on Lin's (2016) Multimodalities-Entextualization Cycle (MEC) and Vandergrift's (2007) Metacognitive Pedagogical Sequence (MPS), the study examines how pedagogical translanguaging can be integrated with metacognitive instruction (MI) to support listening comprehension and metacognitive growth. It also investigates learners' attitudes toward

translanguaging in multilingual CFL classrooms where the teacher and students do not share a first language.

This study is significant in offering empirical evidence for integrating multilingual scaffolding, especially using English to support strategic listening development. It highlights how planned translanguaging can enhance comprehension and learner autonomy and provides practical implications for multilingual classrooms where traditional monolingual approaches may fall short.

Objectives of this study are to:

1. Explore the effects of integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction on Thai CFL learners' listening comprehension;

2. Explore the effects of this integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction on learners' metacognitive awareness;

3. Investigate learners' attitudes toward translanguaging in CFL listening instruction.

To achieve these aims, the study poses the following research questions:

1. To what extent does integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction affect Thai CFL learners' listening comprehension?

2. To what extent does integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction affect Thai CFL learners' metacognitive awareness?

3. What are learners' attitudes toward translanguaging in CFL listening instruction?

Literature Review

Metacognitive Instruction

Metacognitive instruction is pivotal in second and foreign language pedagogy, particularly in enhancing listening comprehension. Learners do not always transfer L1 listening strategies to L2 or L3 tasks (Wilson, 2008), and thus explicit strategy instruction is necessary to support self-regulated learning and comprehension monitoring. As a form of strategy training, metacognitive instruction fosters learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension of input (Peng et al. 2024).

Recent studies confirm the effectiveness of metacognitive instruction across diverse language contexts (Shamsi & Bozorgian, 2024; Vellanki et al., 2024; Robillos & Bustos, 2022;). While existing studies have primarily on instructional outcomes and procedures, limited attention has been given to the role of instructional language in multilingual classrooms. Particularly in CFL contexts, strategic mediation using English as a shared language could potentially enhance learners' uptake of metacognitive strategies, warranting further investigation.

Metacognitive awareness

Metacognitive awareness refers to an individual's ability to monitor and regulate learning processes. In the context of listening comprehension, metacognitive awareness allows learners to identify, apply, and adjust strategies based on contextual demands (Goh & Vandergrift, 2022). Strong metacognitive awareness fosters problem-solving, strategic engagement, and learner autonomy. The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) developed by Vandergrift et al. (2006) assesses five factors: planning and evaluation, problem-solving, directed attention, personal knowledge, and mental translation.

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Research demonstrates that metacognitive instruction can enhance these subskills (Vellanki et al., 2024), although empirical findings regarding its effectiveness remain inconsistent. For example, Graham and Macaro (2008) reported limited improvement in planning, and Tanewong (2019) found no significant change in personal knowledge. These inconsistencies suggest that affective and contextual factors, such as language anxiety or unfamiliarity with instructional language, may mediate the effectiveness of strategy training (Mubarok & Nurindah, 2023; Harold et al., 2025)

Several scholars argue that translanguaging may mitigate these affective barriers by lowering anxiety and enhancing learner confidence (Dryden & Dovchin, 2021; Zam et al., 2025), particularly among lower-proficiency learners. In doing so, translanguaging may indirectly foster greater metacognitive engagement, especially in dimensions such as personal knowledge and mental translation, which are sensitive to learners' affective and linguistic comfort.

Listening strategies

Listening strategies are conscious and intentional actions learners use comprehend, interpret, and respond to spoken input. These include cognitive strategies (e.g., inference, summarizing), metacognitive strategies (e.g., planning, monitoring), and socio-affective strategies (Bao & Guan, 2025; Goh & Vandergrift, 2022). Adequate listening comprehension often depends on the ability to coordinate multiple strategies in real-time flexibly.

While the effectiveness of individual strategy types is well established in the literature, few studies have examined how instructional mediation, including the language of strategy instruction, influences learners' real-time strategy deployment. This is a crucial consideration in CFL contexts, where learners and teachers lack a common L1, and a shared L2, such as English, often serves as the medium of instruction. The current study addresses this gap by exploring whether pedagogical translanguaging using English can activate and support the strategic use of listening strategies during L3 Chinese listening tasks.

Metacognitive pedagogical sequence

As a concrete implementation of metacognitive instruction, the metacognitive pedagogical sequence (MPS) was developed by Vandergrift (2007), building on four key metacognitive processes: planning**,** monitoring**,** problem-solving, and evaluation. These recursive and interrelated processes guide learners to actively manage their listening comprehension and help them integrate multiple strategies while focusing on the process of listening. Research supports the effectiveness of MPS in enhancing both listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness (Echalico-Bermillo & Aradilla, 2024; Tan & Samad, 2024).

Despite evidence of its effectiveness, few studies examine MPS in multilingual classrooms, particularly with integrated translanguaging. The present study investigates how embedding translanguaging practices, primarily through English within MPS, can support learners' reflection, strategy use, and comprehension of complex Chinese input.

Pedagogical translanguaging

The concept of pedagogical translanguaging was introduced by Williams (1994) and later defined by Cenoz (2017a) as a teacher-planned integration of multiple languages to support learning. Li (2023) emphasizes its strategic function in reinforcing target language development by leveraging learners' full linguistic repertoires.

While prior research has shown its benefits in literacy and classroom interaction (García & Lin, 2014), most studies assume a shared L1 between teachers and students. In CFL contexts like Thailand, English often functions as a shared L2, yet few studies have explored how translanguaging via L2 interacts with listening instruction or strategic learning approaches.

Translanguaging has been associated with affective benefits such as increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and greater participation, particularly for lower-proficiency learners (Dryden & Dovchin, 2021; Robillos, 2023). Nevertheless, concerns persist that excessive reliance on translanguaging may impede target language development (Lin, 2016; Raja et al., 2022). Lin (2016) emphasizes that translanguaging practices should gradually decrease as learners' proficiency improves, yet remain strategically advantageous when dealing with complex concepts. Given that prior studies primarily examine translanguaging using learners' L1, little is known about learners' attitudes or cognitive engagement when translanguaging is mediated through a shared L2. The current study specifically investigates explicitly learners' perceptions and metacognitive engagement when translanguaging is facilitated through English in multilingual CFL listening instruction.

Translanguaging may enhance metacognitive functioning by allowing learners to articulate strategies, plan for input, monitor understanding, and evaluate comprehension across linguistic boundaries. By facilitating these metacognitive processes, translanguaging contributes to the development of higher-order cognitive control, particularly when combined with explicit instruction.

Multimodalities-Entextualization Cycle (MEC)

Drawing on a multilingual and multimodal perspective, the multimodalities-entextualization cycle (MEC) was developed by Lin (2015) with an emphasis on levering students' whole linguistic repertoire to enhance learning. The original design of MEC emphasizes supporting content learning by encouraging learners to strategically draw on their full linguistic and multimodal repertoires. These processes provide a recursive and scaffolded instructional cycle grounded in translanguaging and multimodal input. Although MEC was initially developed for CLIL and subject-based instruction, its structured stages provide valuable pedagogical guidance for strategy-based listening instruction. These stages are especially effective when integrated with metacognitive processes, as they draw on learners' linguistic and multimodal resources.

In the first stage, learners are introduced to the listening topic through multimodal inputs (e.g., images, videos, spoken discourse), often in English. They are encouraged to use languages they are most comfortable with, typically Thai or English, to activate prior knowledge through discussion. This stage aligns with the planning phase of the metacognitive pedagogical sequence, as translanguaging helps clarify task goals, activate schemata, and set listening intentions. It also allows teachers to model planning strategies and cognitively prepare learners for Chinese input.

In the second stage, learners process the listening material collaboratively. This stage corresponds to monitoring and problem-solving, where learners draw on Chinese, Thai, and English to comprehend, interpret, and organize input. Translanguaging is a scaffold for clarifying meaning, asking questions, and co-constructing understanding. These interactions support metacognitive behaviors such as checking comprehension, resolving difficulties, and adjusting strategies. Learners annotate, discuss, and reorganize ideas using their preferred languages to strengthen listening monitoring.

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In the third stage, learners synthesize and recontextualize their understanding using the language they feel most comfortable with. This corresponds to the evaluation phase, during which learners summarize, reflect on, and reconstruct their understanding. Translanguaging supports self-evaluation by helping the learner express reflections and clarify listening strategies used or adapted, reinforcing strategic awareness.

Overall, MEC provides a theoretical and practical framework that parallels the phases of metacognitive pedagogical sequence (planning, monitoring, evaluating), while offering a structured way to integrate pedagogical translanguaging to support learners' listening comprehension and self-regulation. This study applies MEC to CFL listening to scaffold students' metacognitive engagement through multilingual support across each stage of instruction.

While both metacognitive instruction and pedagogical translanguaging have shown substantial individual impacts on language learning, their combined use in CFL listening instruction remains underexplored, particularly in settings where a shared L2 (English) is leveraged as a teaching scaffold. Moreover, existing studies have not sufficiently addressed how translanguaging supports metacognitive processes, such as planning or self-monitoring in L3 (Chinese) listening. Nor have they comprehensively examined learner perspectives on such integration. This study seeks to fill these gaps by investigating the strategic use of English as a lingua franca to enhance listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness among Thai CFL learners, within a structured PTMI (pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction) framework.

Methods

This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design with a quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest approach to investigate the effects of integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction on Chinese listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness. Quantitative data were collected first, followed by qualitative data for further explanation. Listening performance was measured using pre- and post-tests, as well as metacognitive awareness with the MALQ. Attitudes toward translanguaging were explored through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Participants

A total of 36 second-year students majoring in Business Chinese at a private university in Thailand were selected using a convenience sampling technique. All participants were native Thai speakers, with English as their second language and Chinese as their third. They were enrolled in the "Effective Chinese Listening" course at the time of the study. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), all students had attained B1-level proficiency in Chinese. As part of an international program, the participants had prior experience attending courses conducted in English, demonstrating sufficient proficiency in English to follow instructional content.

Research instruments

HSK Chinese proficiency test

To assess listening comprehension, two parallel versions of the HSK Level IV listening test were administered before and after the intervention. These equivalent-form tests include 45

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items (10 true/false, 35 multiple-choice) and are scored out of 100. HSK IV corresponds to the CEFR B2 level (Teng, 2017).

Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ)

The MALQ (Vandergrift et al., 2006) measures listeners' awareness and regulation of comprehension through 21 items on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). It captures five factors: problem-solving, planning and evaluation, mental translation, personal knowledge, and directed attention. Six negatively worded items were reverse-scored. A validated Thai version (Khiewsod, 2016) was used, and pilot testing with 31 students yielded high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .892$).

Attitude questionnaire

The questionnaire included 32 items: 5 demographic, 25 Likert-scale questions adapted from Moody et al. (2019) and Fang & Liu (2020), and two open-ended questions probing students' views on pedagogical translanguaging. It was administered post-intervention and translated into Thai to ensure participants' complete comprehension.

Semi-structured interview

Individual online interviews were conducted to explore students' attitudes toward pedagogical translanguaging. Six participants were purposively selected: two high scorers, two low scorers, and two with distinctive questionnaire responses. Interviews followed an open-ended protocol and were recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded for qualitative analysis.

Lesson plans

An eight-week lesson plan was designed using an instructional framework integrating the Metacognitive Pedagogical Sequence (MPS) and the Multimodalities-Entextualization Cycle (MEC). The MPS includes five stages: (1) pre-listening planning, (2) first listening and initial verification, (3) second listening and verification, (4) third listening and final verification, and (5) reflection and goal setting. These stages align with standard listening phases- pre-, during-, and post-listening and promote planning, monitoring, evaluation, and problem-solving to enhance metacognitive awareness.

The MEC component structured multilingual and multimodal scaffolds across these phases. Rather than introducing new theoretical content, it was a planning tool to embed pedagogical translanguaging consistently throughout instruction. Bilingual Chinese-English worksheets were integrated across all phases to support strategy use and comprehension. In the pre-listening phase, students activated background knowledge and planned strategies using multimodal input (text, images, video) and bilingual materials. This allowed them to set goals and make predictions in their preferred language. During listening, translanguaging and worksheet prompts supported real-time monitoring, verification of forecasts, and collaborative meaning-making. In post-listening, students engaged with incomplete and complete transcripts to cross-check their understanding and used their multilingual resources to reflect on challenges, evaluate strategies, and consolidate comprehension.

Procedures

The study was conducted over eight weeks in a Chinese Listening course during the first semester of the 2023 academic year. It involved five stages: a pilot study, pre-intervention assessments, pedagogical translanguaging intervention, post-intervention assessments, and qualitative data collection.

Pilot study and instrument refinement

A pilot study was conducted with 31 students who shared characteristics with the target participants. It tested the feasibility of the intervention and identified potential issues with the instruments. Based on the findings, necessary revisions were made to ensure validity and suitability for the main study.

Pre-Intervention Assessments

During the first class, students completed a listening proficiency test and the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) to establish baseline scores for comparison with post-test results.

Pedagogical translanguaging intervention

The eight-week intervention followed a structured pedagogical sequence comprising pre-, while-, and post-listening activities. Bilingual materials and translanguaging strategies were consistently integrated throughout all stages of instruction.

In the pre-listening stage, students engaged with English-Chinese annotated texts, videos, or images to activate background knowledge, discussed content in their preferred language, and answered related questions in Chinese. During the listening phase, the students completed bilingual worksheets to confirm their predictions and interpret contextual cues. In the post-listening stage, students reflected on their listening process, re-listened for deeper understanding, and filled in Chinese transcripts using English annotations as support. This phase emphasized strategy evaluation and reinforced learning through translanguaging.

Post-intervention assessments

Upon completion, students took post-tests on listening proficiency and the MALQ. Additionally, students completed an attitude questionnaire to capture their attitudes toward the translanguaging experience.

Qualitative Data Collection

To complement the quantitative data, six online semi-structured interviews were conducted post-testing to explore students' attitudes toward translanguaging.

Data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the quantitative data. For HSK IV listening scores and MALQ, mean, standard deviation, and paired-sample t-tests assessed the intervention's impact. Attitude questionnaire results were summarized using mean, standard deviation, and percentages. Qualitative data were thematically coded to identify attitudes toward translanguaging.

Findings

This study examined the effects of integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction on listening comprehension, metacognitive awareness, and student attitudes. Results are presented in three parts using both quantitative and qualitative data.

HSK Listening Test Results

The pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed to evaluate changes in listening proficiency following the intervention. According to Table One, the mean score increased from 67.89 (SD = 16.59) on the pre-test to 77.41 (SD = 14.79) on the post-test. The gain score of 9.52 points and a statistically significant p-value (p = 0.000, < 0.05) confirm a substantial improvement in students' listening comprehension.

Table 1. *Listening test scores (Pre- and Post-test)*

Students' Scores in the Listening Test	Total	Mean	SD	t	ρ (Sig.)
Pre-test	100	67.89	16.59	-6.48	.000
Post-test	100	77.41	14.79		
Gain Scores =9.52					

*p < .05

Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire Results

Table Two compares participants' pre-test and post-test scores on the overall MALQ. The mean score increased from 86.94 (SD = 7.79) in the pre-test to 90.77 (SD = 7.84) in the post-test. The statistically significant p-value (p = 0.000, < 0.05) indicates a meaningful improvement. These findings suggest that integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction effectively enhances metacognitive awareness among Thai tertiary students.

Table 2. *MALQ overall scores (Pre- and Post-test)*

Students' Scores in the Listening Test	Total ($\bar{X}$)	Mean	SD	t	ρ (Sig.)
Pre-MALQ	126	86.94	7.79	-6.33	.000
Post-MALQ	126	90.77	7.84		
Gain Scores =3.83					

*p < .05

To evaluate the impact of the intervention, the study analyzed and compared results across the five factors of the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ). Table Three compares participants' pre-test and post-test scores in the problem-solving factor of the MALQ. An improvement was observed in the problem-solving factor of the MALQ, with mean scores rising from 29.08 (SD = 2.84) pre-intervention to 30.13 (SD = 2.56) post-intervention. With a

statistically significant p-value of 0.011 ($p < 0.05$), the results indicate a meaningful improvement in participants' problem-solving abilities.

Table 3. *MALQ Problem-solving scores (Pre- and Post-test)*

Students' Scores in the Listening Test	Total	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	t	ρ (Sig.)
Pre-MALQ	36	29.08	2.84	-2.69	.011
Post-MALQ	36	30.13	2.56		
Gain Scores =1.05					

*p < .05

Table Four compares participants' pre-test and post-test scores in the planning-evaluation factor of the MALQ. While the mean score increased from 23.19 (SD = 2.96) to 23.86 (SD = 3.44), the p-value of 0.060 ($p > 0.05$) indicates that this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 4. *MALQ planning-evaluation scores (Pre- and Post-test)*

Students' Scores in the Listening Test	Total	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	t	ρ (Sig.)
Pre-MALQ	30	23.19	2.96	-1.94	.060
Post-MALQ	30	23.86	3.44		
Gain Scores =.666					

*p < .05

Table Five compares participants' pre-test and post-test scores in the mental-translation factor of the MALQ. The mean score increased slightly from 6.77 (SD = 1.83) to 6.94 (SD = 1.85); however, the p-value of 0.404 ($p > 0.05$) indicates that this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 5. *MALQ Mental translation scores (Pre- and Post-test)*

Students' Scores in the Listening Test	Total	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	t	ρ (Sig.)
Pre-MALQ	18	6.77	1.83	-.845	.404
Post-MALQ	18	6.94	1.85		
Gain Scores =.166					

*p < .05

Table Six compares participants' pre-test and post-test scores in the person-knowledge factor of the MALQ. The mean score increased from 9.05 (SD = 2.31) to 10.11 (SD = 1.99) after the intervention. A p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) indicates a statistically significant improvement.

Table 6. *MALQ person knowledge scores (Pre- and Post-test)*

Students' Scores in the Listening Test	Total	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	t	ρ (Sig.)
Pre-MALQ	18	9.05	2.31	-5.012	.000
Post-MALQ	18	10.11	1.99		
Gain Scores =1.055					

*p < .05

Table Seven compares participants' pre-test and post-test scores in the directed-attention factor of the MALQ. The mean score increased from 18.83 (SD = 2.69) to 19.72 (SD = 2.54) after the intervention. A p-value of 0.002 (p < 0.05) indicates a statistically significant improvement.

Table 7. *MALQ directed attention scores (Pre- and Post-test)*

Students' Scores in the Listening Test	Total	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	t	ρ (Sig.)
Pre-MALQ	24	18.83	2.69	-3.372	.002
Post-MALQ	24	19.72	2.54		
Gain Scores =.888					

*p < .05

Attitudinal Questionnaire Results

Students' attitudes toward translanguaging were explored through closed- and open-ended questionnaire responses, supported by interviews. Closed-ended results indicated generally positive attitudes. Most students strongly agreed that translanguaging was common in their Chinese listening class. They viewed it as a helpful tool for understanding listening materials and completing tasks (M = 4.468).

Regarding teachers' use of translanguaging, students reported strong support (M = 4.407), especially in assisting low-proficiency learners and giving clear instructions (M = 4.628). They also expressed positive views on their use of translanguaging, particularly in supporting participation (M = 4.657) and facilitating group discussions (M = 4.485). The open-ended responses echoed these positive perceptions. The most cited benefit was improved comprehension (47.76%), followed by support for multilingual development (17.91%) and smoother communication (8.96%). A few students also mentioned reduced anxiety (4.48%) and increased accessibility for less proficient peers (2.99%).

Despite the generally positive attitudes, the findings also identified some concerns. A minority of students expressed apprehensions that translanguaging could limit Chinese language development (10.45%), cause confusion in language usage (2.99%), or pose challenges for students with low English proficiency (2.99%).

Semi-structured Interview Results

To complement the questionnaire findings and gain deeper insights into students' attitudes toward translanguaging, six individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. The findings

largely confirmed the positive views expressed in the open-ended questionnaire, though some differences revealed more nuanced perspectives. After thematic analysis of the transcripts, key themes were identified and are presented below in detail.

Regarding positive attitudes, all responses highlighted the benefits of translanguaging in enhancing a deeper understanding of content and instruction:

"*Sometimes I don't understand everything in Chinese, so it's helpful to have English support… seeing the English meaning of unfamiliar Chinese characters helps me keep up with the lesson.*" (S4)

The participant expressed a preference for translanguaging, noting how it supported the simultaneous development of both Chinese and English proficiency:

"It helps us practice both English and Chinese at the same time. In our group, we naturally switch between Thai, Chinese, and English, which makes using English in class feel comfortable." (S5)

One participant expressed that using translanguaging reduces learning stress:

"Having materials in English makes me feel more comfortable and less pressured." (S2)

Some participants reported that translanguaging significantly enhanced their learning confidence by making the instructional content more accessible and easier to follow.

"Using English boosts my confidence by helping me confirm my understanding and identify any misunderstandings." (S3)

Although participants recognized the benefits of translanguaging, they also expressed negative attitudes toward its use in specific contexts. From the excerpt, almost all participants indicated a desire to transition to exclusive use of Chinese as their proficiency improved.

The excerpt that includes expressed that they would like to shift to exclusively using Chinese as their Chinese proficiency gradually increases:

"I don't want to use too much English because I'm afraid it won't be good. This is a Chinese class... If the goal is to develop Chinese proficiency, it's better to use only Chinese. In the future, when my Chinese is stronger, I would prefer to learn entirely in Chinese." (S6)

Discussion

This study investigated the effects of integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction (PTMI) on Thai CFL learners' listening comprehension, metacognitive awareness, and attitudes. The findings indicate that PTMI offers cognitive and emotional benefits in multilingual classrooms where teachers and learners do not share a first language.

Effects on Listening Comprehension

The significant improvement in HSK listening scores demonstrates that PTMI effectively supports listening comprehension. This reinforces findings from Robillos (2023), Yuzlu and Dikilitas (2022), and Zhang and Jocuns (2022), who emphasized translanguaging's role in facilitating meaning-making. However, this study extends previous work by employing English as

a shared L2, rather than a common L1, showing that multilingual scaffolding can remain effective even without L1 support**.** This highlights translanguaging's adaptability in diverse linguistic contexts.

Furthermore, by integrating translanguaging with metacognitive instruction, the study contributes new evidence that strategic multilingual scaffolding not only aids comprehension but also promotes learner autonomy. This study shows that using a shared L2 within MI can effectively support comprehension of complex Chinese input. This aligns with Shamsi and Bozorgian's (2024) assertion that MI improves listening outcomes. The findings confirm that translanguaging, when integrated into MI, offers a viable alternative to monolingual CFL instruction, particularly in contexts where L1-based scaffolding is not feasible.

Effects on Metacognitive Awareness

Students demonstrated significant improved in overall metacognitive awareness, particularly in problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed attention. These findings are in line with those of Shamsi and Bozorgian (2024) as well as Echalico-Bermillo and Aradilla (2024), providing further evidence for the effectiveness of metacognitive instruction in enhancing learners' ability to plan, monitor, and manage their listening comprehension. The improvement in problem-solving suggests that translanguaging helped learners access additional linguistic resources to interpret complex input, reinforcing the strategic use of comprehension strategies.

Directed attention also showed a significant improvement, consistent with the findings of Cenoz and Gorter (2022), suggesting that translanguaging may have supported learners in refocusing their attention when distracted. Additionally, personal knowledge was associated with reduced listening anxiety and enhanced self-confidence. In contrast to Tanewong's (2019) findings, which reported no such improvement, the present study revealed notable gains in this area. This divergence may be attributed to the practical support offered through translanguaging, whereby learners could draw upon familiar linguistic resources, fostering a greater sense of security and competence in managing listening tasks.

However, the planning and evaluation did not significantly improve, which is consistent with Graham and Macaro (2008), who argue that higher-level cognitive strategies require prolonged training. Similarly, mental translation showed no significant gains, reflecting prior research (Rivera et al., 2021) that suggests proficient listeners gradually rely less on translation. This also implies that translanguaging facilitated comprehension without reinforcing dependency on translation. Although this contrasts with Al-Khresheh and Alruwaili's (2021) recommendation to emphasize direct target-language interaction, it suggests that pedagogical translanguaging supported comprehension without hindering acquisition.

Students Attitudes Toward Translanguaging

Overall, students reported positive attitudes toward translanguaging, particularly valuing the use of English for input comprehension, task completion, and peer collaboration. Many

reported increased confidence and reduced anxiety, which not only supports Dryden and Dovchin's (2021) findings on enhanced participation among lower-proficiency learners but also aligns with Alzahrani (2019), who emphasized translanguaging's role in deepening comprehension and supporting learner autonomy in multilingual classrooms.

Building on these results, this study demonstrates that the emotional and cognitive benefits of translanguaging extend to L2-based scaffolding, not only L1 contexts. English functioned as a shared linguistic resource that enhanced inclusivity and engagement. These results align with Gabrys-Barker (2012) and Cenoz and Gorter (2021), who emphasize the dynamic interplay of multiple languages in third-language acquisition and highlight the value of leveraging learners' full repertoires.

Nevertheless, as learners' proficiency improved, some expressed concerns that excessive reliance on English could hinder their Chinese development. Yuksel et al. (2025) similarly observed a decline in students' use of English translanguaging as their Chinese proficiency increased. In EMI contexts, they further noted that higher-proficiency students tended to prefer direct engagement in the instructional language. These patterns are consistent with Raja et al. (2022) and Lin (2016), who caution that while overreliance on translanguaging may impede long-term development, its strategic use, particularly when dealing with abstract or complex content, remains pedagogically valuable as learners progress.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that integrating pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction (PTMI) significantly improves Chinese listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness among Thai tertiary students. Students generally held positive attitudes toward translanguaging, recognizing its role in enhancing comprehension, supporting multilingual development, and reducing learning stress. However, challenges remain in multilingual classrooms where teachers and students lack a shared first language. Instruction via a shared second language requires sensitivity to students' proficiency levels, and it is essential to identify when translanguaging is beneficial or unnecessary for learning the target language.

Recommendation

Despite careful preparation, this study has several limitations. The one-group pretest-posttest design lacked a control group, limiting causal interpretation. The eight-week intervention may have been too brief for students to internalize metacognitive strategies fully. Although a mixed-methods approach was used, the qualitative data relied mainly on interviews, which may have constrained deeper insights into learning processes. Additionally, the study was conducted within a single private university, which may limit generalizability.

Future research should include control groups, extend the intervention period, and adopt more varied qualitative methods. Broader sampling across institutions and proficiency levels

would enhance validity and expand understanding of how pedagogical translanguaging and metacognitive instruction support language learning.

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Examining the Effectiveness of Sketch Engine for Verb-noun Collocation Learning among Chinese Low-Proficiency Learners

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Abstract
Developing collocational competence is essential for Second Language proficiency, yet low-proficiency learners often struggle with verb-noun collocations due to the arbitrary nature of collocational patterns. While influential corpus tools such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English and the British National Corpus serve as valuable resources for collocation learning, they also pose significant cognitive challenges for low-proficiency learners. Therefore, this study investigated the effectiveness of corpus tools integrated with pedagogical practices in facilitating verb-noun collocation learning among Chinese low-proficiency learners, to identify the most suitable tool tailored to their specific learning needs. A quantitative research method was employed, utilizing an intervention design with pre-and post-tests to compare the impact of using Sketch Engine for Language Learning (SkELL) and COCA in enhancing learners' verb-noun collocation proficiency. Furthermore, the eight-week intervention integrated SkELL and COCA into collocation lessons respectively, each designed within the framework of Corpus-Based Language Pedagogy (CBLP), presenting how strategic instruction maximized the potential of corpus tools in facilitating learners' improvement in verb-noun collocation proficiency. The findings of the study revealed that SkELL significantly improved verb-noun collocation proficiency among Chinese low-proficiency EFL learners, attributed to its intuitive interface, simplified search functions, and scaffolded learning environment. Moreover, this study offers valuable contributions to the design of corpus-based instruction by demonstrating the effectiveness of SkELL as a corpus tool tailored to the needs of Chinese low-proficiency EFL learners. The study concluded with insights on pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research.

Keywords: Corpus-Based Language Pedagogy, Corpus of Contemporary American English, Low-proficiency EFL learners, Sketch Engine for Language Learning, verb-noun collocation
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Introduction

Collocational competence is a crucial aspect of Second Language (L2) proficiency, particularly in academic and professional communication. Among various types of collocations, verb-noun collocations, with highly frequent use, play a central role in shaping fluency and accuracy in L2 writing and speaking. However, research indicates that L2 learners, especially low-proficiency learners, frequently struggle with acquiring and using verb-noun collocations correctly due to the opaque and arbitrary nature of collocational patterns (Wray, 2002).

To address these challenges, corpus tools have been increasingly integrated into collocation instruction, providing learners with access to authentic language use and empirical linguistic patterns (Boulton & Cobb, 2017). Tools such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC) have been widely adopted to support collocation learning, particularly within data-driven learning (DDL) field (Akıncı & Yıldız, 2017; Al-Mahbashi et al., 2015; Altun, 2021; Daskalovska, 2015; Durmuş & Kilimci, 2020; Girgin, 2019; Jafarpour et al., 2013; Li, 2017; Łuszcz, 2016; Ma & Mei, 2021; Men, 2020; Satake, 2023; Ucar & Yükselir, 2015; Wu, 2021). However, the complexity of their interfaces, coupled with intricate data retrieval processes, may hinder learners' ability to effectively analyse and apply collocational patterns. While research consistently demonstrates that corpus tools enhance collocational proficiency, findings suggest that their effectiveness is often more pronounced among higher-proficiency learners than among low-proficiency learners (Boulton & Cobb, 2017; Daskalovska, 2015; Wu, 2015). Such debate raises concerns about whether corpus-based learning is equally beneficial for all learner groups and how instructional interventions can be designed to support low-proficiency learners in leveraging corpus resources effectively.

Undeniably, while exposure to authentic texts that naturally incorporate collocations enhances learners' understanding, low-proficiency English learners may struggle with acquiring collocations. The overwhelming amount of fragmented sentences presented in a short period can make the learning process more challenging for them (Boers et al., 2014; Daskalovska, 2015). Recently, a new corpus tool for English language learning, known as Sketch Engine for Language Learning (SkELL), has been introduced as an alternative resource. Unlike the previously mentioned corpora, SkELL provides a sufficient number of complete sentences, enabling students to learn multiple patterns in context. Regrettably, little research has been conducted to examine its effectiveness, compared with COCA as a long-influential tool in China, on collocation knowledge among low-proficiency learners.

There is a growing trend toward integrating corpus tools into collocation learning, with promising yet varied results across proficiency levels. Despite advancements in corpus-based instruction, gaps remain in understanding how different tools influence collocation acquisition among low-proficiency learners. Previous studies have largely focused on COCA and BNC (Akıncı & Yıldız, 2017; Al-Mahbashi et al., 2015; Altun, 2021; Ayyat, 2024; Daskalovska, 2015; Durmuş & Kilimci, 2020; Girgin, 2019; Jafarpour et al., 2013; Li, 2017; Łuszcz, 2016; Ma & Mei, 2021; Men, 2020; Satake, 2023; Ucar & Yükselir, 2015; Wu, 2021), with limited exploration of simplified alternative tool like SkELL. Furthermore, while the effectiveness of corpus tools in general collocation learning has been established, research is still lacking on how different corpus interfaces, training approaches, and scaffolding techniques impact verb-noun collocation learning specifically among struggling learners.

Given the indispensable role of appropriate corpus tools, especially for lower-proficiency learners, in verb-noun collocation learning, the strategic pedagogy that uses corpora and corpus tools in DDL can help low-proficiency learners avoid confusion and cognitive overload. Consequently, Ma et al. (2022) introduce the concept of Corpus-Based Language Pedagogy (CBLP), which emphasizes the integration of corpus technology into language learning through a strategically designed curriculum and instructional strategies. For example, a teacher prioritizes selecting an appropriate corpus tool tailored to low-proficiency students, providing supplementary training, and designing a structured corpus-based collocation lesson to enhance their learning experience.

Notably, no prior research has applied SkELL in collocation learning for Chinese EFL low-proficiency students. Existing studies have predominantly explored SkELL's effects on Japanese learners, leaving a significant gap in understanding how Chinese EFL learners interact with this tool. Given the linguistic and educational differences between Japanese and Chinese learners, our study addresses this critical gap by examining how SkELL-supported collocation instruction affects Chinese students' verb-noun collocation learning compared to COCA. The study not only expands the applicability of SkELL but also contributes to a broader discussion on corpus tool suitability across different learner populations.

To enhance verb-noun collocation proficiency among low-proficiency learners, the study aims to examine the effectiveness of corpus tools integrated with pedagogical practices and to identify the most appropriate tool tailored to their learning needs. In the field of corpus linguistics, this study makes a significant contribution by informing the corpus-based lesson design and the selection of corpus tools specifically tailored to meet the learning needs of Chinese low-proficiency learners. Building upon these insights, the study implemented an intervention design featuring an eight-week instructional lessons grounded in CBLP. The intervention incorporated structured lesson plans, scaffolded activities, and guided exploration of corpus tools, ensuring accessibility and effectiveness for low-proficiency learners.

To shed more light on the above study objectives, an intervention was conducted to compare the impact of SkELL and COCA in enhancing English verb-noun collocation learning among Chinese EFL low-proficiency learners by addressing the following research questions:

1. To what extent do SkELL and COCA enhance verb-noun collocation proficiency among low-proficiency Chinese EFL learners?
2. How do SkELL- and COCA-supported lessons differ in their impact on verb-noun collocation acquisition for low-proficiency Chinese EFL learners?
3. How do learners perceive the effectiveness of SkELL for verb-noun collocation learning?

Literature Review

Social Constructivism Theory (SCT) in Designing Corpus-based Learning

Constructivist theories of learning emphasize the active role of learners in constructing knowledge through interaction with their environment. In the context of Second Language (L2) collocation acquisition, constructivism highlights the importance of meaningful engagement, scaffolded learning, and the co-construction of knowledge through guided discovery (Vygotsky, 1978), while it offers a foundational framework for understanding how learners develop linguistic competence through mediated learning experiences. Central to this theory is the concept of the

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the difference between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other. ZPD underscores the necessity of scaffolding, where structured support is gradually removed as learners gain proficiency (Tabib, 2022, p. 187). In language learning, scaffolding can take the form of teacher guidance, peer collaboration, and technological tools that facilitate corpus exploration.

Corpus-based Language Pedagogy (CBLP) aligns closely with Vygotsky's SCT theory, as it provides learners with authentic language input and allows them to interact with linguistic data through data-based learning. Within a constructivist paradigm, corpus tools such as COCA and SkELL serve as mediating artefacts that bridge the gap between learners' existing knowledge and their potential development in collocation competence. For low-proficiency learners, direct engagement with large corpus databases may present cognitive challenges, as observed in previous studies (Boers et al., 2014; Boulton & Cobb, 2017; Daskalovska, 2015; Liu & Ma, 2025). However, when combined with structured scaffolding, corpus tools become effective learning instruments. Teachers act as facilitators, guiding students in interpreting corpus output, identifying collocational patterns, and applying them in their target tasks. This mediated learning process enables students to move through their ZPD and develop collocational proficiency in a way that would not be possible through traditional memorization-based approaches. Hence, a crucial way for effective corpus-based learning is selecting tools that cater to low-proficiency learners' linguistic abilities. SkELL, for instance, offers a simplified interface that reduces cognitive load, making it more accessible for low-proficiency learners. By integrating corpus tools into guided instructional activities, teachers provide the necessary scaffolding to help learners analyze and apply verb-noun collocations meaningfully.

By situating this study within the SCT framework, this study emphasizes the interactive and scaffolded nature of corpus-based collocation learning. In particular, Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD highlights the importance of structured guidance in helping low-proficiency learners navigate corpus tools effectively. Furthermore, the concept of CBLP reinforces the idea that successful corpus-based instruction requires both appropriate tool selection and well-designed scaffolding strategies (Liu & Ma, 2025), which informs the present study's design, examining the role of both corpus tools and instructional scaffolding in enhancing verb-noun collocation proficiency for low-proficiency learners.

Corpus Tools for Verb-Noun Collocation Learning

The application of corpus tools for verb-noun collocations has gained increasing scholarly attention in the last two decades. Early corpus-based studies primarily focus on the benefits of data-driven learning (DDL), where learners interact with authentic language examples extracted from large corpora (Boulton & Cobb, 2017; Crosthwaite, 2024). DDL approach revalues collocation teaching by focusing on learner discovery rather than traditional rule-based methods. Nowadays, the focus of research has shifted from determining whether DDL works to exploring how it can be effectively implemented for diverse language proficiency learners (Alharbi, 2024). Notably, tools in DDL such as the British National Corpus (BNC) and Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) have been widely used to support collocation learning by providing contextualized instances of word combinations. Teaching collocations through corpus-based tools

was of significant help to the students' retention and learning of collocations (Akbari et al., 2015). Many studies underscore the need for DDL with explicit instruction in collocation instruction (Akıncı & Yıldız, 2017; Frankenberg-Garcia, 2024; Gablasova et al., 2017; Liu & Gablasova, 2023), while others highlight the effectiveness of corpus tools like Sketch Engine in enabling learners to identify recurring patterns in authentic texts (Hirata & Hirata, 2019; Kilgarriff et al., 2015). For instance, Chen (2017) conducted an empirical study on business English learners and found significant gains in collocational competence following an eight-week intervention. Sun and Park (2023) highlight the effectiveness of corpus-based collocation instruction in improving learners' collocation knowledge and retention, while also noting the need to resolve conflicting results regarding instructional methods. These findings indicate that corpus tools play a crucial role in collocation acquisition but may require tailored pedagogical approaches for different-level students to maximize benefits.

Consistent with these claims, recent studies argue that with appropriate scaffolding in DDL, low-proficiency learners can benefit significantly from corpus tools. Chen (2017) and (Gablasova et al., 2017) found that structured corpus-based instruction led to measurable improvements in collocational accuracy, even among less proficient learners. They tend to support that corpus-based pedagogy is proved to be effective for lower-level learners. The introduction of user-friendly corpus tools, such as SkELL (Sketch Engine for Language Learning), has been a pivotal development in addressing cognitive barriers by providing more accessible search functionalities and intuitive collocation outputs (Hirata & Hirata, 2019; Kilgarriff et al., 2015). As they elaborate, SkELL is a valuable educational tool that broadens students' English learning experiences through authentic examples and offers opportunities for teachers to create more communicative activities, though further research is needed for its effective implementation.

Subsequently, one of the critical debates in corpus-based collocation learning is its effectiveness across different proficiency levels. While research consistently supports the effectiveness of corpus tools for advanced learners, findings regarding low-proficiency learners remain inconsistent (Boulton & Cobb, 2017; Daskalovska, 2015; Wu, 2015; Yoon, 2008). For example, studies examining the effectiveness of corpus-based collocation pedagogy using COCA on different proficiency levels demonstrated that intermediate and advanced learners typically showed greater gains, though improvements were reported across all levels (Chen, 2017). Furthermore, some studies found that DDL using the COCA is effective for collocation learning in L2 writing, but higher proficiency learners performed better than lower proficiency learners. Lower-proficiency learners even perceived the corpus as less helpful than higher-proficiency learners (Wu, 2016). They noted improvements in L2 learners who integrated corpus tools into language learning, but the effectiveness varied based on learner proficiency, especially for lower-proficiency learners who often struggle with extracting meaningful patterns and applying them in productive tasks. The difficulty stems from the cognitive load involved in analyzing large datasets without sufficient guidance (Boulton, 2017).

Recent studies have shifted toward investigating how teacher instruction embedded by corpus tools specifically impacts verb-noun collocation learning for low-proficiency learners. The concept of CBLP emphasizes the integration of corpus technology into language learning through a strategically designed curriculum and instructional strategies, highlighting that beyond selecting an appropriate corpus tool effective pedagogy must include well-designed scaffolding mechanisms

such as guided discovery, explicit instruction, and corpus-based interactive activities (Ma et al., 2024). Rather than assuming that corpus exploration is inherently unsuitable for such learners, studies suggest that corpus tools must be integrated into teaching practices through scaffolded activities that progressively build learners' analytical skills (Alsehibany & Abdelhalim, 2023, p. 178). Accordingly, low-proficiency learners are not overwhelmed by the large corpus data but instead receive structured support that enhances their ability to extract and apply collocational patterns meaningfully. CBLP aligns with recent research findings that scaffolding plays a crucial role in mitigating the challenges of corpus-based learning for low-proficiency learners. In this regard, our study also explored how instructional strategies can maximize the benefits of corpus-based collocation learning, particularly with SkELL tool.

Notably, the absence of research on the use of SkELL for Chinese low-proficiency learners presents a significant gap in the existing literature. While SkELL has been studied in the context of Japanese learners (Hirata & Hirata, 2019), its applicability to Chinese students remains less explored. Moreover, the comparative effectiveness of SkELL and the COCA in supporting verb-noun collocation learning has yet to be systematically investigated. Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by investigating how SkELL-supported scaffolding interventions impact the enhancement of verb-noun collocations for low-proficiency Chinese learners.

Method

The current study aimed to compare the impact of SkELL and COCA on English verb-noun collocation learning for low-proficiency Chinese EFL learners. Therefore, an intervention design with pre- and post-tests was adopted to examine the differences among three groups, the SkELL group (n=20), COCA group (n=20), and control group (n=20).

Participants

This study was carried out at a vocational college during the fall semester of 2024 in southwestern China, where English is a compulsory course for undergraduate students. The 60 first-year EFL students, aged between 17 and 20, volunteered to participate in the study. They had studied English for six years but their English vocabulary size was estimated to be no more than 1000 words based on their average 50 out of 150 on the college entrance examination, which is equivalent to level 3 (or the lower stage) in China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) developed by the National Education Examinations Authority and Department of Language Information Management (Ministry of Education, 2018). A presurvey ensured that all the participants had no prior knowledge about corpus use in collocation learning.

To address our research questions on the differential impact of SkELL and COCA on English verb-noun collocation learning for low-proficiency Chinese EFL learners, we randomly divided the students into three groups (SkELL group, COCA group, and control group). The first group was the SkELL group, 20 participants who were instructed using the SkELL; the second was the COCA Group, 20 participants who were taught collocations through COCA; and the last was the control group (C-Group), 20 participants who received traditional lesson-based instruction.

The duration of the English course is 8 weeks with each lesson lasting for 60 minutes. The course aims to provide students with a basic understanding of corpora, and corpus tools, and develop students' overall English skills, focusing specially on verb-noun collocation learning. By the end of the course, SkELL group students were invited to evaluate the effectiveness of using

SkELL for verb-noun collocation learning through a survey. During the study, three groups were taught using the same teaching materials, textbook, and instructor.

A convenience sampling method was utilized to recruit participants for the questionnaire as well as the pre-and post-tests. Additionally, purposeful sampling was implemented to select interview participants based on their availability and relevance to the research objectives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

Instruments

Two instruments were designed for data collection: pre- and post-collocation tests, and a survey. The instrument was checked by the three proficient EFL instructors and piloted to a group of preparatory class students including 20 students for validity and reliability.

Pre- and Post-tests

To assess the impact of different instructional methods on students' proficiency in verb-noun collocations, a pre-test was administered to all participants prior to the intervention, followed by a post-test at the end of the lesson. Both tests comprised 20 multiple-choice items and 20 gap-filling items, designed to evaluate students' collocational knowledge comprehensively. Each correct response was awarded one point, with a maximum achievable score of 40. The pre-test and post-test utilized the same set of multiple-choice and gap-filling items to ensure consistency and comparability of results (refer to Appendix A). These test formats were selected as they are among the most commonly used and effective measures for assessing collocational competence (Nguyen, 2022). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run on the data obtained from the proficiency test.

Questionnaire

The basic assumption that underlies all attitude scales is that it is possible to discover attitudes by asking individuals to respond to a series of statements of preference (Fraenkel et al., 2012). To measure students' overall attitudes toward the use of SkELL for collocation learning, an online questionnaire with 16-item was developed by examination of previous literature with slight modification, e.g., Hirata and Hirata (2019), along with their considerations of the specific use of the corpus in the classes serving as research sites for the study (refer to Appendix B).

As the commonly used attitude scale in educational research is the Likert scale, this part consisted of 16 statements to which the respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement on a scale of 1-6 (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: somewhat agree, 5: agree, 6: strongly agree). For the analysis of this Likert-type data, the mean scores of the students' responses for each question were computed relative to the six-point scale employed. A standard deviation (± SD) was also obtained to examine statistically significant differences between students' opinions. In the present study, the data are presented as mean ± SD.

Procedures

To investigate the differential impact of SkELL and COCA on English verb-noun collocation learning for low-proficiency Chinese learners, an 8-lesson study was arranged as an intervention. To begin with, the pretest and the intervention tasks were piloted on 20 learners. The analysis of the data revealed that, as expected, learners did not know the targeted collocations and corpus use.

The design of the study is summarized in Table One.

Table 1. *The procedure of the study*

	Groups		
Lessons	SkELL group (n=20)	COCA group (n=20)	Control group (n=20)
1	Pretest (all groups) + briefing		
2-7	SkELL-based instruction	COCA-supported instruction	Lecture-based instruction
8	Post-test (all groups) + Questionnaire (corpus-based groups)		

In the first lesson, a pretest was administered in which students were asked to finish a pretest, including 20 multiple-choice items as a recognition measure and 20 gap-filling items as a productive measure within 30 minutes. After taking pretest, 6 physical lessons were conducted among SkELL group, COCA group and the control group respectively. In the last lesson, they were required to take the post-test, and complete survey question to explore their overall evaluation of using SkELL for collocation learning.

Target Collocations

During the 8-lesson intervention, students were taught 60 verb-noun collocations. These collocations were selected from the Academic Collocation List (ACL) created by Ackermann and Chen (2013), available at https://www.pearsonpte.com/teachers/academic-collocation (refer to Appendix C). The nodes and collocates were chosen in line with their textbook words in terms of the frequency level to measure their knowledge of the collocations.

Collocation Course Design

A 6-lesson collocation English course was held for each group at a Chinese vocational college. Each lesson took about 60 minutes in which 5-6 verb-noun collocations were presented to the learners under three different conditions. The control group was instructed on the target collocations through traditional lesson-based instruction. For example, the teacher first wrote each collocation on the board and then provided its meaning in Chinese followed by translating some typical example sentences. Then, the control group completed a fill-in-the-blank activity without any access to a dictionary. Their answers were checked by the teacher at the end. In contrast, the SkELL group and COCA group learners were asked to search for the given collocations in the concordance and read the example sentences. With the guidance of the teacher, they need to discuss how to identify the collocations in different contexts and summarize their general usage. The specific teaching activities for the collocation course design are shown in Appendix D.

This collocation course design embedded with SkELL and COCA was based on the four-step CBLP design model developed by Ma et al. (2022). In the first step, the lesson began with a brief explanation of verb-noun collocations in simple terms, ensuring that students understand the concept and raise their awareness of the target collocation features. To test their prior knowledge, the teacher provided relatable examples such as “make a fortune” instead of “get a fortune”. The importance of verb-noun collocations for natural and fluent English was emphasized, highlighting their role in effective communication. In the second step, students were guided to access the

SkELL or COCA website on their mobile phones. The teacher demonstrated each of their essential features, including the interfaces with word search function (see Figure 1), example sentences (see Figure 2), and concordance display (see Figure 3). Using a sample verb such as “achieve”, the teacher illustrated how to identify commonly associated nouns and how SkELL or COCA presented collocation patterns (see Figure 4 for COCA; see Figure 5 for SkELL). To reinforce learning, students work in pairs to practice using SkELL or COCA. They were given some common verb-noun collocations from the target list. Each pair followed structured guidelines with teacher guidance, ensuring students correctly interpreted the results from SkELL or COCA. In the third step, students were encouraged to summarize the rules that they explored based on their hands-on activities. The teacher concluded with brief feedback on the student’s exploration. In the last step, students individually completed fill-in-the-blank activities in the textbook. The teacher circulated among students, offering feedback and clarification where needed.

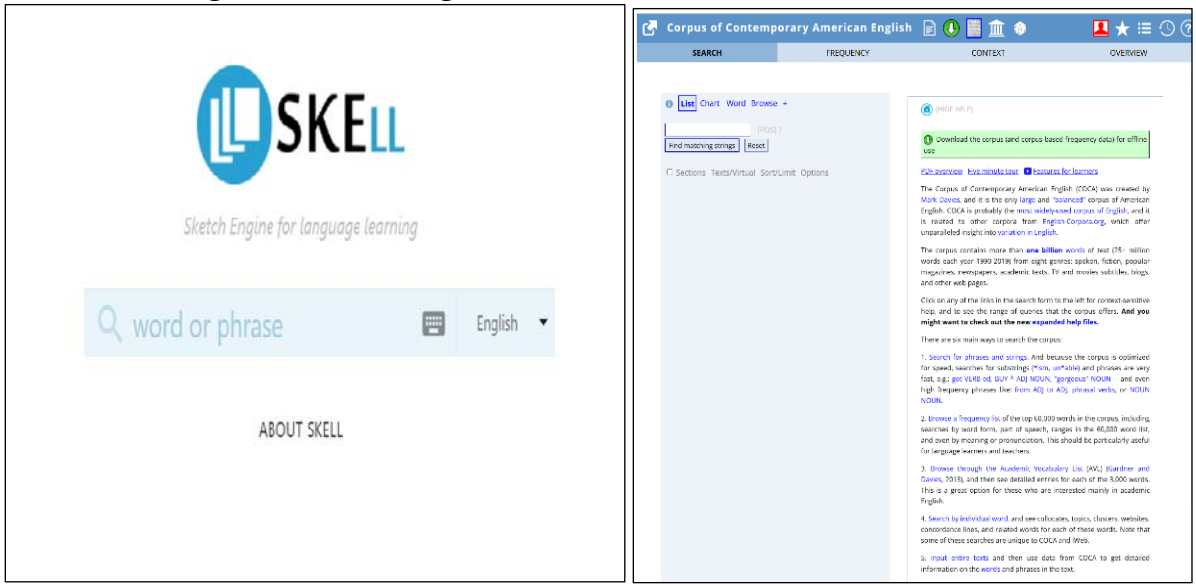


Figure 1. The interfaces of SkELL and COCA



Figure 2. SkELL example sentences display *achieve*

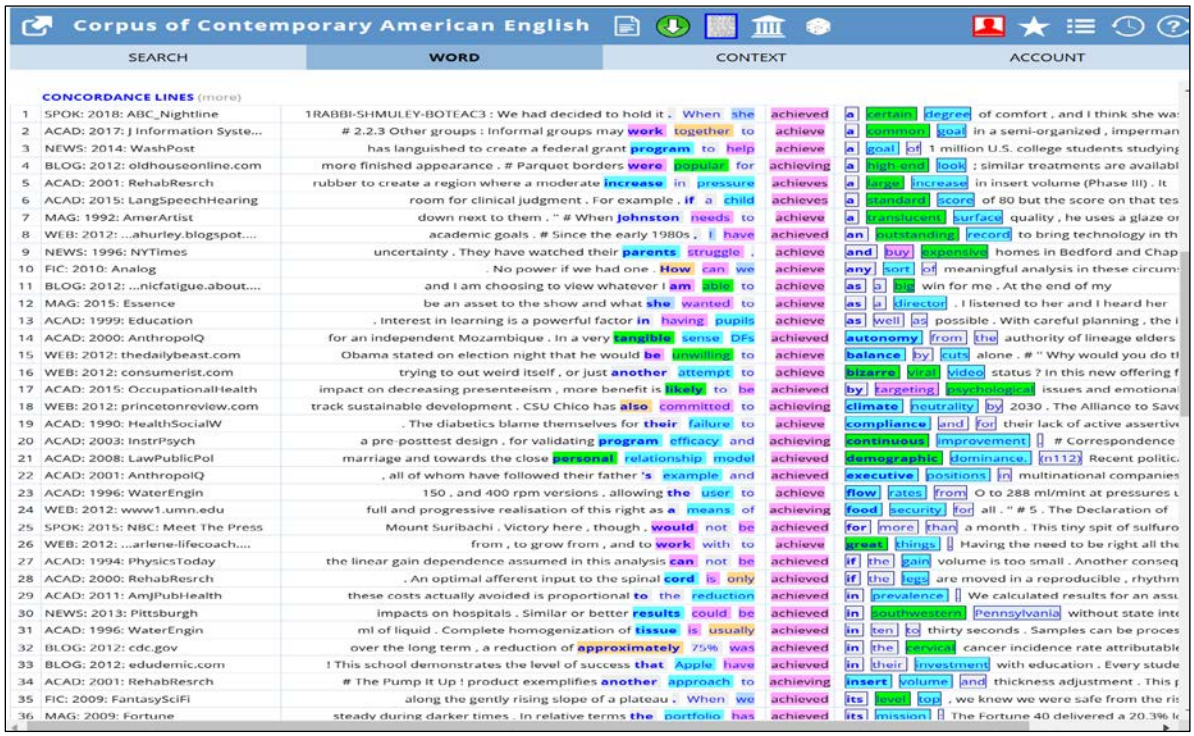


Figure 3. COCA Concordance Display of *achieve*

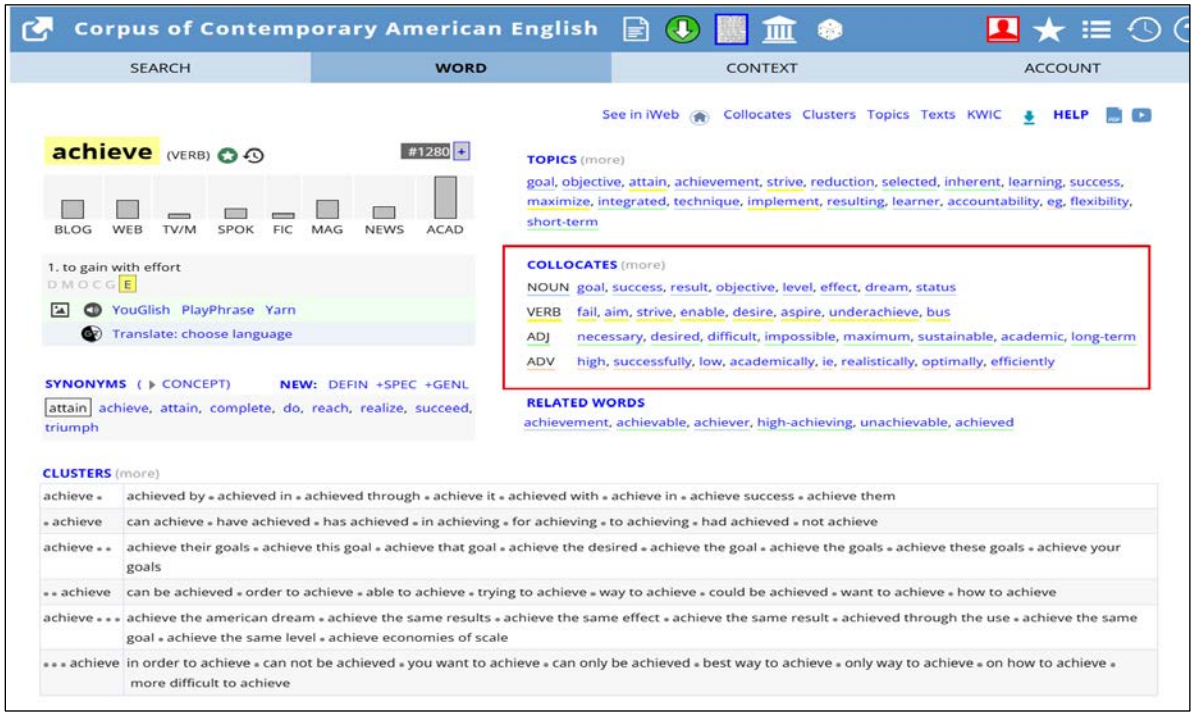


Figure 4. COCA Search Results for *achieve*

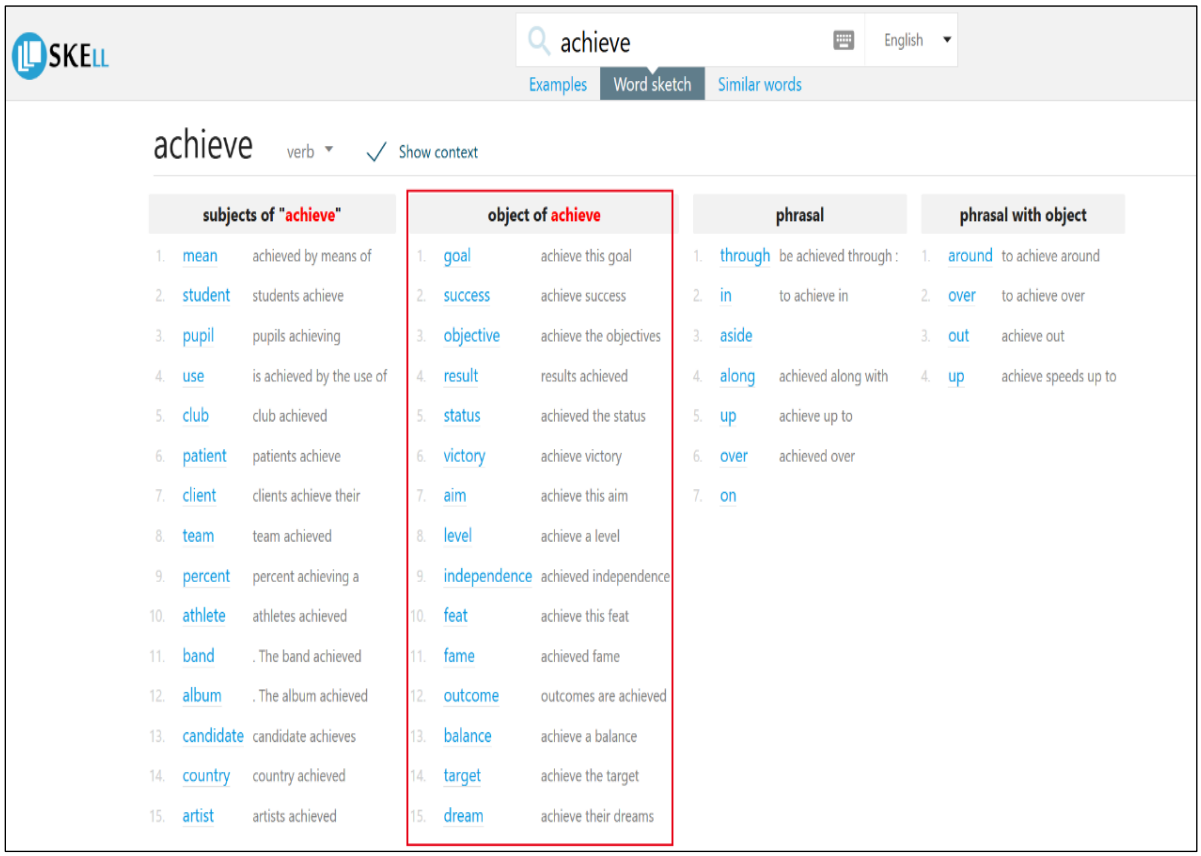


Figure 5. SkELL word sketch display of *achieve*

Scoring and Data Analysis

The pre- and post-tests had a maximum score of 40, with each correct response earning one point and incorrect responses receiving zero. The proficiency test results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to confirm that the three participating groups were homogeneous before the intervention. Additionally, a repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to compare the group's performance on the pretest and post-test.

Results

Quantitative Data Analysis

Before conducting statistical comparisons of the pre-test and post-test scores among the three groups, it was essential to evaluate the normality of the data distribution. Assessing normality ensured that the assumptions underlying the parametric test were met, thereby validating the reliability of the statistical results. This study adopted the Shapiro-Wilk test which has been evaluated as the most powerful test for normality (Mbah & Paothong, 2015). The p-value is a key statistical measure that helps determine whether the data deviates significantly from normality. If $p > 0.05$, the data is normally distributed. In contrast, if $p \leq 0.05$, the data significantly deviates from normality (Mbah & Paothong, 2015).

Table Two presented the results of the Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality for the pretest and

post-test scores among COCA group (n=20), SkELL group (n=20) and control group (n=20), showing that all of the groups were normally distributed.

Table 2 *Shapiro-Wilk Tests of Normality*

		Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	COCA	.970	20	.764
	SkELL	.940	20	.241
	Control	.934	20	.182
Post-test	COCA	.952	20	.393
	SkELL	.935	20	.189
	Control	.959	20	.526

Afterwards, Table Three showed the descriptive statistics for the pretest and post-test, revealing that the means of corpus-based groups (i.e., the SkELL group and the COCA group) were better than the means of no-corpus group (i.e., the control group). The results demonstrated the pretest scores across the three groups were relatively similar, suggesting that students had comparable collocation proficiency before the intervention. However, the results of the post-test indicated that students performed better after the intervention than before. It is worth noting that the SkELL group showed the highest improvement, with a mean increase of 11.6 points (ranging from 18.20 to 29.80 in mean scores).

Table 3. *Descriptives Statistics for Collocation Tests*

						95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
		N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Min	Max
Pretest	COCA	20	16.85	5.412	1.210	14.32	19.38	6	26
	Control	20	17.85	5.669	1.268	15.20	20.50	6	25
	SkELL	20	18.20	4.895	1.094	15.91	20.49	7	25
	Total	60	17.63	5.275	.681	16.27	19.00	6	26
Posttest	COCA	20	25.65	7.989	1.786	21.91	29.39	12	38
	Control	20	22.45	7.824	1.749	18.79	26.11	8	35
	SkELL	20	29.80	5.709	1.277	27.13	32.47	20	38
	Total	60	25.97	7.744	1.000	23.97	27.97	8	38

Homogeneity of variances is an assumption for parametric tests. Table Four showed that all *p*-values were well above 0.05, meaning that the variances among the three groups in the pretest were homogeneous. Hence, a one-way ANOVA was run to compare group means.

Table 4. *Tests of Homogeneity of Variances*

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Pretest	Based on Mean	.438	2	57	.647
	Based on Median	.316	2	57	.730
	Based on the Median and with adjusted df	.316	2	56.799	.730
	Based on trimmed mean	.417	2	57	.661
Post-test	Based on Mean	2.376	2	57	.102

Based on Median	1.863	2	57	.165
Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.863	2	53.686	.165
Based on trimmed mean	2.339	2	57	.106

In Table Five, the results of the one-way ANOVA for the pretest score demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference among the three groups, F (2, 57) =0.345, p=0.71, η^2=0.012, while there was a significant difference for the post-test score among the three groups with a moderate effect size, F (2, 57) =5.17, p=0.009, η^2=0.154.

Table 5 *ANOVA Test of Pre- and Post-tests Score within Groups*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta-squared
Pretest	Between Groups	19.633	2	9.817	.345	.710	.012
	Within Groups	1622.300	57	28.461			
	Total	1641.933	59				
Post-test	Between Groups	543.233	2	271.617	5.170	.009	.154
	Within Groups	2994.700	57	52.539			
	Total	3537.933	59				

To locate the exact difference among groups, a Tukey HSD post-hoc analyse was run. Results of the post-test score showed that there was a significant difference between the SkELL group and the control group in learning verb-noun collocations, *p*=0.006. However, the main effect between the COCA group and either the control (*p*=0.35) or SkELL (*p*=0.1175) groups did not reach statistical significance, suggesting that the COCA group's learning method did not lead to a statistically significant improvement. The results of the Tukey HSD post-hoc test further demonstrated that the SkELL group's learning method was effective in improving students' verb-noun collocation knowledge, as shown in Table Six.

Based on these results, the answers to the research question 1 and 2 are positive. We can conclude that SkELL was the most effective corpus tool for learning verb-noun collocations among low-proficiency students, even though corpus-based instruction performed better than traditional lesson-based instruction.

Table 6. *Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for Multiple Comparisons*

Dependent Variable			Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Post-test	COCA	Control	3.200	2.292	.350	-2.32	8.72
		SkELL	-4.150	2.292	.175	-9.67	1.37
	Control	COCA	-3.200	2.292	.350	-8.72	2.32
		SkELL	-7.350*	2.292	.006	-12.87	-1.83
	SkELL	COCA	4.150	2.292	.175	-1.37	9.67
		Control	7.350*	2.292	.006	1.83	12.87

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

Survey Analysis

The questionnaire was designed and administered to 20 participants after the intervention to evaluate students' perceptions of SkELL-supported verb-noun collocation learning. It contained 16 items, each measuring different aspects of students' experiences and attitudes. To ensure the

questionnaire's internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated, yielding a value of 0.765. This indicated acceptable reliability, suggesting that the items collectively measure a consistent construct (see Table Seven).

The overall mean score across all items was 5.20 out of 6, reflecting a positive perception of SkELL-supported collocation learning. The highest-rated item was Item 5 (Mean = 5.70, SD = 0.657), indicating that most students had never used SkELL or online dictionaries before the course. This finding was significant because it suggested that students' positive feedback was not biased by prior familiarity, but rather by their new learning experience with SkELL. Interestingly, students strongly expressed that SkELL should be widely introduced in colleges after use, according to Item 14 (Mean = 5.25, SD = 0.550), suggesting that students found SkELL useful, accessible, and beneficial for learning collocations, reinforcing its practicality as an educational tool. As shown in Item 11, SkELL provided appropriate example sentence length, making it easier for students to read. While most items were rated positively, some had lower mean scores and higher SD values, indicating more diverse opinions. Item 16 (Mean = 4.85, SD = 0.875) and Item 15 (Mean = 4.55, SD = 0.887) received the lowest ratings, implying that students were less confident about SkELL's role in improving overall other aspects of language learning, like writing and reading skills. The higher SD values suggested mixed perceptions, where some students may have found SkELL effective for collocations but not necessarily for broader application in other aspects of language learning. Therefore, the results highlighted a potential demand—while SkELL helped with collocation knowledge, students might still require additional writing support or guidance to fully integrate corpus use into their writing in future learning.

Table 7. *Students' Assessment of SkELL-supported Collocation Learning*

Item No.	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
1	SkELL's large volume of example sentences is more useful for your English study than those presented by English dictionaries.	5.25	.550	
2	SkELL assists in learning more easily how words and phrase's function than English dictionaries presenting a limited number of example sentences.	5.30	.571	
3	SkELL is better than English dictionaries because it enables you to search words and/or phrases.	5.25	.550	
4	Using both SkELL and English dictionaries is indispensable for your English study.	5.30	.571	
5	I hadn't used either SkELL or online English dictionaries until I took this course.	5.70	.657	
6	SkELL helps you learn various collocations.	5.25	.550	
7	SkELL is useful when you prepare for English exams.	5.35	.489	
8	SkELL enhances your motivation to study English.	5.20	.523	
9	The number of example sentences provided by SkELL is appropriate for my English study.	5.10	.641	
10	SkELL attracts and interests me, so studying with it is fun and entertaining.	5.25	.444	
11	I don't need longer example sentences in SkELL.	5.20	.616	
12	The layout of the website and interface is easy to access via mobile phones.	5.55	.510	

13	Using SkELL in the classroom helped me study English successfully.	4.85	.489	
14	SkELL should be widely used in college school.	5.25	.550	
15	SkELL is effective in improving reading skills.	4.55	.887	
16	SkELL is effective in improving writing skills.	4.85	.875	
	Total	5.20	.604	0.765

Discussion

Based on the results reported above, three groups presented different effects on learning verb-noun collocations. First, the non-significant pre-test results ($F = 0.345$, $p = 0.710$) indicated that all participants started at a similar level of collocation proficiency, ensuring the validity of the experimental design. In contrast, the post-test results ($F = 5.170$, $p = 0.009$) demonstrated a statistically significant difference among the groups, indicating that at least one instructional method led to substantial improvements in collocation proficiency. Consequently, corpus-based learning may enhance students' ability to acquire and use verb-noun collocations more effectively compared to traditional lesson-based instruction. Second, to further explore the exact differences among groups, a Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis was used to identify which groups benefited the most. Results claimed that SkELL-supported instruction outperformed both the COCA-supported and control groups, revealing the significant impact of SkELL-supported learning on verb-noun collocation proficiency for low-proficiency students. All in all, the findings suggested that learners benefited most from SkELL-supported learning when provided with well-designed scaffolding.

In addition to the pre-and post-tests results, this study also explored learners' perceptions and assessment of SkELL-supported collocation learning after the intervention, utilizing a 16-item questionnaire to collect participants' feedback. The overall results indicated that learners held a positive attitude toward SkELL-supported collocation learning, suggesting that students found SkELL engaging, useful, and beneficial in enhancing their collocation knowledge.

It was worth noting that these findings contrasted with previous studies (Boulton & Cobb, 2017; Daskalovska, 2015; Huang, 2014), which suggested that corpus-based learning may not be suitable for lower-level learners due to the overwhelming amount of information available in corpora, easily leading them to confusion and cognitive overload. However, they aligned with some recent studies (Liu & Ma, 2025; Ma et al., 2024; Saeedakhtar et al., 2020), which highlighted the effectiveness of corpus-based learning for low-proficiency learners. Most importantly, a key contribution of this study was its demonstration that the effectiveness of corpus-based learning for low-proficiency students largely depended on the selection and application of an appropriate corpus tool with well-designed scaffoldings. While corpus-based learning, in general, proved more beneficial than traditional instruction, this study revealed that SkELL-supported verb-noun collocation learning outperformed COCA-supported verb-noun collocation learning, which suggested that SkELL was a more effective and user-friendly tool for low-proficiency students. Unlike more complex corpus tools, for example, COCA, which may present too much unfiltered linguistic data, SkELL provided simplified, high-frequency collocation patterns that tailored to those who possessed limited linguistic proficiency. Hence, this study emphasized that not all corpus tools were equally beneficial for all learners. The superior performance of the SkELL group compared to the COCA group suggested that corpus tools specifically tailored to students' proficiency levels, when integrated with pedagogical scaffolding, are more effective for low-

proficiency learners.

Consequently, while the results of this study reinforced the significance of level-matching corpus tool for low-proficiency learners, they also underscored the importance of pedagogical scaffolding for corpus-based learning. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while students appreciated SkELL for collocation learning, they were less confident about its impact on their other aspects of language learning (i.e., reading and writing). Thus, it highlighted the need for teacher-mediated corpus use, where teachers provide effective scaffolding, ensuring that students can make full use of the corpus data.

This study provided valuable insights, yet it has some limitations. The sample size was relatively small (N = 20), which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused on only one type of collocation, limiting the scope of its applicability to broader linguistic contexts. Future research should consider longitudinal studies for a larger sample to explore the effectiveness of SkELL-based instruction. Furthermore, it can also investigate how customized corpus-based instruction can enhance students' ability to improve overall language proficiency.

Conclusion

While early studies (Boulton & Cobb, 2017; Yoon, 2008) suggest that corpus tools may not be well-suited for low-proficiency learners, recent studies (Chen, 2017; Gablasova et al., 2017; Hirata & Hirata, 2019; Liu & Ma, 2025; Ma et al., 2024) challenge this notion by emphasizing the role of scaffolding and user-friendly tools. The concept of CBLP further reinforces that effective corpus-based learning is not solely about tool selection but also involves strategic curriculum design and instructional interventions (Ma et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2022). Our study builds upon these findings by demonstrating that with appropriate instructional support, corpus-based learning can be highly effective for low-proficiency learners, particularly when using simplified tools like SkELL. The study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for a more nuanced approach to corpus-based learning. While past research has established the general effectiveness of corpus tools in L2 learning, our study highlights the importance of tool selection and instructional design in optimizing collocation acquisition for low-proficiency learners.

Overall, the findings examined the impact of the corpus tool on verb-noun collocation learning for Chinese low-proficiency students and further explored the exact difference between SkELL- and COCA-supported verb-noun collocations learning under the same teacher scaffolding. The findings highlighted the potential force of SkELL-supported verb-noun collocation learning in enhancing verb-noun collocation proficiency for low-proficiency students. The results of the questionnaire showed students held a positive attitude toward the SkELL corpus, due to its manageable example sentence length that was easy to read. Therefore, this study carries important pedagogical implications for the implementation of SkELL and exploring other corpus-based tools for improving language proficiency. Hence, it is recommended that the SkELL corpus tool be introduced into Chinese EFL low-proficiency learners' classes, especially in vocational college settings, to facilitate verb-noun collocational learning.

By addressing the lack of research on SkELL for Chinese learners, we contribute to expanding the scope of corpus-based collocation instruction in diverse linguistic contexts. Future research should explore additional scaffolding mechanisms and investigate the long-term retention effects of corpus-based collocation learning. Additionally, further comparative studies between

different corpus tools can provide deeper insights into the affordances and limitations of various platforms.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Verb-noun Collocation Pre- and Post-tests

Verb-noun Collocation Pretest

Time allowed: 60 minutes
Total points: 40 (1 point per question)

Part A: Multiple Choice Questions (20 points)
Select the most appropriate verb that collocates with the underlined noun.
1. Students need to _____ practical experience before entering the workforce.
a) make
b) gain
c) take
d) do

2. The committee will _____ responsibility for organizing the conference.
a) assume
b) take
c) hold

d) both a and b

3. It is important to _____ precautions when conducting laboratory experiments.
a) make
b) take
c) do
d) have

4. The professor helped students _____ awareness of cultural differences.
a) raise
b) increase
c) develop
d) both a and c

5. The university will _____ measures to improve student satisfaction.
a) take
b) implement
c) adopt
d) all of the above

6. Participants must _____ permission before sharing research data.
a) get
b) obtain
c) receive
d) all of the above

7. The study aims to _____ progress in understanding climate change.
a) achieve
b) make
c) show
d) both a and b

8. Students should _____ notes during lectures.
a) write
b) take
c) make
d) both b and c

9. The research team will _____ recommendations based on their findings.
a) make
b) provide
c) give
d) both a and b

10. Universities must _____ standards of academic integrity.
a) maintain
b) uphold
c) keep
d) all of the above

11. Students need to _____ concentration during exams.
a) maintain

b) keep
c) hold
d) both a and b

12. The department will _____ changes to the curriculum next year.
a) make
b) implement
c) introduce
d) all of the above

13. Researchers should _____ care when handling sensitive data.
a) take
b) exercise
c) show
d) both a and b

14. The study will _____ light on this complex issue.
a) shed
b) throw
c) cast
d) all of the above

15. Students must _____ deadlines for assignment submission.
a) meet
b) follow
c) observe
d) both a and c

16. The university aims to _____ opportunities for international exchange.
a) create
b) provide
c) offer
d) all of the above

17. Professors should _____ feedback on student assignments.
a) give
b) provide
c) offer
d) all of the above

18. The research will _____ focus on qualitative methods.
a) place
b) put
c) have
d) both a and b

19. Students need to _____ respect for diverse viewpoints.
a) show
b) demonstrate
c) express
d) both a and b

20. The department will _____ priority to improving research facilities.
a) give
b) assign
c) set
d) all of the above

Part B: Gap-Filling (20 points)
Complete each sentence with an appropriate verb using the given initial letters.
1. Students must co_____ research before writing their papers.
2. The university will im_____ new policies next semester.
3. Researchers need to ga_____ data through surveys.
4. Students should ta_____ advantage of learning resources.
5. The department will ma_____ improvements to facilities.
6. Professors must pr_____ feedback on assignments.
7. Students need to de_____ skills in academic writing.
8. The university will of_____ support to international students.
9. Researchers should dr_____ conclusions from evidence.
10. Students must me_____ requirements for graduation.
11. The committee will se_____ priorities for the year.
12. Professors should ra_____ awareness about plagiarism.
13. Students need to ke_____ records of their research.
14. The department will es_____ guidelines for research.
15. Researchers must co_____ analysis of results.
16. Students should ex_____ caution when citing sources.
17. The university will pr_____ opportunities for learning.
18. Professors must ma_____ standards in assessment.
19. Students need to sh_____ progress in their studies.
20. Researchers should ob_____ protocols for data collection

Academic Verb-noun Collocation Post-test

Time allowed: 60 minutes
Total points: 40 (1 point per question)

Part A: Multiple Choice (20 points)
Choose the most appropriate verb that collocates with the underlined noun in academic contexts.
1. Researchers must _____ reliable data through systematic observation.
a) collect
b) gather
c) obtain
d) all of the above

2. Their methodology failed to _____ conclusive evidence for the hypothesis.
a) create
b) yield
c) generate
d) both b and c

3. The study aims to _____ a comprehensive analysis of socioeconomic factors.

a) do
b) make
c) conduct
d) perform

4. This theoretical framework helps scholars _____ a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.
a) achieve
b) gain
c) obtain
d) all of the above

5. The researcher needs to _____ significant differences between control groups.
a) identify
b) find
c) detect
d) both a and c

6. These findings _____ important implications for clinical practice.
a) carry
b) have
c) hold
d) all of the above

7. Their experiment failed to _____ support for the alternative hypothesis.
a) provide
b) give
c) lend
d) both a and c

8. The study will _____ particular emphasis on methodological innovations.
a) put
b) place
c) make
d) both a and b

9. Scholars must _____ careful consideration to potential confounding variables.
a) pay
b) give
c) take
d) both a and b

10. The results _____ light on previously unexplored aspects of cognitive development.
a) throw
b) shed
c) cast
d) all of the above

11. Researchers must _____ access to restricted demographic data.
a) get
b) gain
c) obtain
d) all of the above

12. The findings _____ significance beyond the immediate research context.
a) carry
b) bear
c) hold
d) both a and b

13. Scientists need to _____ caution when interpreting correlational data.
a) take
b) exercise
c) practice
d) both a and b

14. The analysis aims to _____ relationships between variables.
a) establish
b) determine
c) identify
d) all of the above

15. This framework helps _____ distinctions between similar concepts.
a) draw
b) make
c) establish
d) both a and c

16. The study will _____ reference to established theoretical models.
a) make
b) provide
c) give
d) both a and c

17. Researchers must _____ attention to methodological limitations.
a) pay
b) give
c) direct
d) all of the above

18. Their findings _____ substantial contribution to existing knowledge.
a) make
b) provide
c) offer
d) all of the above

19. The analysis will _____ precedence to quantitative measures.
a) give
b) take
c) grant
d) both a and c

20. These results _____ influence on future research directions.
a) have
b) exert

c) exercise
d) both a and b

Part B: Gap-Filling (20 points)
Complete each sentence with an appropriate verb that collocates with the given noun. Use only one word for each gap.
1. Students must co_____ extensive research before writing their dissertation.
2. Researchers need to de_____ clear evidence to support their hypotheses.
3. The professor will pr_____ detailed feedback on your assignments.
4. Scientists must es_____ reliable methods for data collection.
5. Students should ma_____ regular attendance throughout the semester.
6. Researchers must im_____ appropriate controls in their experiments.
7. The university will in_____ new policies next semester.
8. Scholars need to ge_____ original ideas for their research proposals.
9. Students must su_____ assignments by the stated deadline.
10. Researchers should ob_____ strict protocols during experiments.
11. The committee will re_____ applications for research funding.
12. Students need to de_____ critical thinking skills.
13. Professors must ad_____ effective teaching strategies.
14. Researchers should fo_____ clear research questions.
15. Students must ac_____ necessary skills for their field.
16. The department will or_____ academic conferences annually.
17. Researchers need to an_____ data systematically.
18. Students should ex_____ caution when citing sources.
19. Professors must en_____ academic integrity in assessments.
20. The framework helps ac_____ understanding of social processes.

Appendix B: Students' Questionnaire

Please answer all questions in the questionnaire.
The following questions are regarding your opinions on using SKELL corpus. Please use the scale below to circle the response that most closely resembles your perspectives (6-point Likert-scale questions: 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= somewhat disagree; 4= somewhat agree; 5= agree; 6: strongly agree).

1. SkELL's large volume of example sentences is more useful for your English study than those presented by English dictionaries.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. SkELL assists in learning more easily how words and phrase's function than English dictionaries presenting a limited number of example sentences.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. SkELL is better than English dictionaries because it enables you to search words and/or phrases.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Using both SkELL and English dictionaries is indispensable for your English study.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I hadn't used either SkELL or online English dictionaries until I took this course.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. SkELL helps you learn various collocations.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. SkELL is useful when you prepare for English exams.	1	2	3	4	5	6

8. SkELL enhances your motivation to study English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. The number of example sentences provided by SkELL is appropriate for my English study.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. SkELL attracts and interests me, so studying with it is fun and entertaining.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I need longer example sentences in SkELL.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. The layout of the website and interface is easy to access via mobile phones.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Using SkELL in the classroom helped me study English successfully.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. SkELL should be widely used in college school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. SkELL is effective in improving reading skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. SkELL is effective in improving writing skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix C: Target Collocation List

#	Component I	POS I	Component II	POS II	Addition
1	achieve (a)	v	goal	n	
2	achieve (an)	v	outcome	n	
3	acquire	v	knowledge	n	
4	address (an)	v	issue	n	
5	apply (a)	v	method	n	
6	bear	v	resemblance	n	(to)
7	carry out	v	research	n	(of)
8	cause	v	consequences	n	
9	collect	v	data	n	
10	convey (a)	v	message	n	
11	create	v	opportunities	n	
12	draw	v	attention	n	(to)
13	enhance	v	learning	n	
14	experience	v	difficulties	n	
15	face (a)	v	dilemma	n	
16	follow (a)	v	procedure	n	
17	gain	v	access	n	(to)
18	gain	v	insight	n	(into)
19	give	v	access	n	(to)
20	give	v	emphasis	n	
21	give	v	priority	n	(to)
22	give (a)	v	presentation	n	
23	give (an)	v	explanation	n	
24	have	v	access	n	(to)
25	have (a)	v	tendency	n	(to)
26	identify	v	factors	n	
27	identify (an)	v	issue	n	
28	increase	v	awareness	n	
29	lead to (the)	v	conclusion	n	

30	make	v	adjustments	n	
31	make (a)	v	contribution	n	
32	make (a)	v	living	n	
33	make (an)	v	assessment	n	
34	meet	v	criteria	n	
35	meet	v	expectations	n	
36	obtain (a)	v	result	n	
37	offer (an)	v	opportunity	n	
38	play (a)	v	role	n	(in)
39	pose (a)	v	problem	n	
40	pose (a)	v	threat	n	(to)
41	present	v	evidence	n	
42	provide	v	assistance	n	
43	provide	v	guidance	n	
44	provide	v	resources	n	
45	provide (a)	v	service	n	
46	provide (an)	v	opportunity	n	
47	raise	v	awareness	n	
48	reach (a)	v	consensus	n	
49	reach (a)	v	peak	n	
50	reach (an)	v	agreement	n	
51	receive	v	treatment	n	
52	report	v	findings	n	
53	require	v	knowledge	n	
54	seek	v	help	n	
55	set (a)	v	target	n	
56	show (a)	v	trend	n	
57	store	v	data	n	
58	take	v	responsibility	n	
59	take into	v	consideration	n	
60	undertake	v	work	n	

Appendix D: Collocation Course Design based on SkELL and COCA

Step	Objectives	Activities based on SkELL & COCA

Step 1: Test Prior Knowledge	Assessing students' prior knowledge and raise their awareness of the target collocation features	Ask students to fill in the blanks by using "do" or "make". • You have to make a living and if you're smart you can _____ a fortune in a short time. a. make b. take c. get d. do • If people stare at the sun long enough, they will _____blind because our eyes are very sensitive. a. get b. have c. take d. go • If the boss wanted to see him, he was probably going to _____ fired. a. go b. get c. come d. take
Step 2: Hands-on Search	Introducing SkELL and COCA; guiding students to access corpus tools; demonstrating basic SkELL and COCA features	Ask students to fill in the blank using SkELL and COCA • working together to _____ a common goal is important. • Every American president in the last 30 years has tried to _____a deal with Iran. • Heavy smokers lose their health. The are more likely to _____a disease of lung cancer in the future. Students need to based on the following guidelines: • Search for each pairs in SkELL or COCA. • Identify and list three verbs frequently used with the noun. • Construct one example sentence using each collocation.
Step 3: Inductive Discovery	Encouraging students to infer rules or patterns from corpus data	Ask students to summarize the language patterns. Usage of the verb-noun collocations: "achieve" often comes before noun like "goal" or "success" or "objective", but "goal" was the most frequent object of "achieve".
Step 4: Output Exercises	Applying learned target verb-noun collocation knowledge through tasks	Ask students to complete fill-in-the-blank activities with the help of corpus tools and explain the reasons for answers. The students were guided by the following points: • Use SkELL to identify suitable verb collocates for each noun or noun collocates after verb. • Fill in blanks in given sentences with the correct collocations. • Create their own example sentences using the identified verb-noun combinations.

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Investigating Factors Affecting the Completion of EFL Teachers' Graduate Studies from Social Cognitive Perspectives

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Abstract
Graduate studies have been proven to be a significant teacher's professional learning. Pursuing graduate studies helps teachers strengthen their professional growth, develop teaching practices, and improve students' learning experiences. Previous studies have shed light on internal and external factors encouraging teachers to embark on their graduate studies, leaving a knowledge gap in comprehending critical factors impacting the completion of such studies. Drawing upon the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989), this multiple case study aims to address this gap by examining factors affecting the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in an English language teaching master's program. Data were qualitatively collected through semi-structured interviews with ten purposefully selected teachers graduating from this program. Subsequently, data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings revealed two categories of influences, personal and contextual factors. On a personal level, intrinsic motivation, a positive attitude, and self-efficacy enabled participants to persist through academic challenges. Contextual factors included professional, institutional, and familial assistance that ignited their inner resilience and sustained their commitment to learning. Notably, most participants identified the former as more decisive in their graduate study completion than the latter. Critically, these findings align well with Bandura's theory, emphasizing the dynamic interconnection among personal attributes, environmental conditions, and academic behaviors. Understanding these influencing factors is essential for minimizing drop-out rates and maximizing support to these teachers. This research ended with pedagogical implications for university program managers, teacher educators, and EFL teachers pursuing graduate studies.
Keywords: Affecting factors, case study, EFL teachers, graduate studies, graduate study completion, social cognitive perspectives, teacher professional learning, professional development
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Introduction

Teachers' professional learning (TPL) is widely acknowledged as a prominent element for their continuing professional development (CPD). Teachers partake in many TPL-related activities to gain needed academic knowledge and boost instructional effectiveness (Akiba, 2012). In this view, teachers strengthen their professional growth and contribute greatly to students' learning progress (Mostafa, 2021). Among different TPL forms, teachers choose to pursue graduate studies (Korucu-Kis & Demir, 2019). Graduate studies are seen as a formal form of TPL and a process of continuous studying and reflecting. Furthermore, it facilitates teachers to continuously undergo various teaching-related activities, such as collaborating with other academics and critically analyzing their teaching practices in an intensive professional environment (Sevim & Akın, 2021). Graduate studies also require them to be involved in educational research engagement. Conducting educational research helps teachers come up with goal-driven strategies for their current classroom challenges and informs pedagogical implications to other stakeholders (Ngo et al., 2023). Therefore, graduate studies are viewed as a critical form of professional needs for TPL, which strengthens their professional development. This endeavor, in turn, fosters high-quality professional practices and enhances the quality of teaching and learning.

In recent decades, since the official participation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), Vietnam invested significant effort in ensuring the continuous development of Vietnamese education in every field, particularly education (Nguyen, 2015). In education, especially teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), Vietnam aims to enhance its citizens' English proficiency as a foreign language. The National Foreign Languages Project was accepted to facilitate this long-term goal. Moreover, in 2018, a general reform in education was introduced, through which English language teaching transferred from knowledge-based to learners' communicative competence-based teaching (Trinh et al., 2024). The quality and sustainable development of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers is a critical prerequisite to achieving these goals. As a result of the reforms, EFL teachers' CPD-related activities prioritize developing teachers' English language proficiency, TELT-related pedagogy, and educational research competencies. Besides providing EFL teachers with necessary CPD-related activities, institutional leaders actively encourage EFL teachers to pursue their graduate studies in TEFL (Le & Trinh, 2021). More significantly, EFL teachers who recognize the importance of personal and professional development through TPL also independently embark on graduate studies.

Lately, much research has shed light on factors motivating EFL teachers to pursue their graduate studies and their fear of failure in these studies (Le & Trinh, 2021). Little research aims to comprehend what factors affect the completion of graduate studies among this teacher population. This multiple case study, grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989), aimed to address this research gap. The research aim was to examine factors affecting the completion of a master's program in TEFL of EFL teachers. Moreover, it is expected to identify the factors most affecting their completion. It is crucial to consider these factors because there is a close connection between EFL teachers' performance while pursuing a master's program in TEFL programs and the caliber of English language instruction they will deliver as master's teachers. A thorough grasp of these factors can guide the adjustment and modification of this program and, ultimately, the advancement in language instruction of EFL teachers in the local region.

Literature Review

Significance of Graduate Studies

Teachers actively participate in different professional development forms to catch up with educational trends, improve pedagogical knowledge, and address classroom challenges more effectively (Viáfara & Largo, 2018). Among these forms, graduate studies are regarded as a formal form that aims to improve teachers' professional practices through doing educational research. The first critical element in graduate studies is the emphasis on teachers' beliefs in their professional practices (Warren et al., 2010). Graduate studies allow teachers to reflect on teaching practices and contribute to meaningful changes. These changes further allow them to integrate their reflective practices in graduate courses to draw out professional trajectories and foster a community of practice in their institution (Vaughan & Burnaford, 2016). Secondly, graduate studies aim to improve teachers' professional practices through research (Nana & Jing, 2017). Research competence is regarded as one of the most crucial teacher qualities. Improved research competence supports teachers in comprehending the underlying causes of their classroom challenges (Heng et al., 2020). Ultimately, research gives them evidence-based findings to address these challenges best. Moreover, research in graduate studies aims to transform teachers into competent, critical, analytical, and innovative teacher-researchers.

Graduate Studies in Vietnam

Graduate studies in Vietnam are regarded as a formal form of Vietnamese teachers' professional learning. They are based on that of the former Soviet Union patterns (Kelly, 2000). Vietnamese graduate studies are available some majors (Tran, 2013). With emergent interests in Western economic methods along with the context of internationalization, Vietnamese graduate education has become more flexible in some disciplines (Le & Trinh, 2021). In education, graduate studies emphasize the interconnection between teachers' teaching and academic research. In TEFL, since the open-door policy in 1986, graduate studies have experienced a period of strong development with an expansion in the number of programs (Nguyen et al., 2020). Especially, teachers embarking on master's pursuit reflect the increasing demand for high-quality EFL teachers. As Phan et al. (2025) argued, "among many CPD-related activities, EFL teachers pursue a master's degree through which they can improve their professional practices through research engagement" (p. 1782). These master's programs focus on not only training teachers' teaching methodology but also educational research competencies. Upon the completion of these programs, EFL teachers are expected to become critical thinkers and global citizens. Critically, they "transform themselves into teacher-researchers and change agents" (Phan et al., 2025, p. 1782).

Factors Affecting the Completion of EFL Teachers' Graduate Studies in TEFL

The completion of teachers' graduate studies is affected by various factors. These factors can be classified into personal and environmental influences (Le & Trinh, 2021; Rungduin & Miranda, 2018; Pinar et al., 2021).

Regarding personal influences, intrinsic motivation significantly contributes to teachers' completion of graduate studies (Kudaibergenov & Lee, 2024). Amoah and Yeboah (2021) conceptualized motivation as personal motives alongside their attitude, direction, persistence, and the quality of goal-directed behaviors to "to seek out intellectual and experiential novelty" (p. 59). Furthermore, motivation explains why people set life goals and how well they act to achieve these goals (Lin et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2024). This internal force sustains teachers' commitment via

the learning challenges of graduate programs. Embarking on graduate studies helps them map a clear career advancement and expertise development path. Alongside motivation, self-efficacy is regarded as a stand-out contributor to teachers' success in professional development training (Pinar et al., 2021). Bandura (1989) considered self-efficacy as people's belief in their abilities to perform a particular task successfully. Together with motivation, self-efficacy is one of the most prominent predictors of how effectively people perform in their endeavors. Teachers with high levels of personal motivation might exhibit greater self-efficacy in their learning endeavors. These factors critically influence teachers' efforts to complete graduate studies.

In addition to personal factors, environmental factors critically shape teachers' completion of their graduate studies (Pinar et al., 2021). Firstly, crucial assistance from teacher educators and classmates provides teachers with professional academic guidance. Additionally, these stakeholders instill in teachers a sense of collaborative community and offer individualized strategies for teachers to deal with their academic challenges (König et al., 2024). Secondly, institutional support includes access to research resources, flexible curricula, and learning advising systems (Le & Trinh, 2021). These provisions help teachers mitigate academic barriers and promote an inclusive culture with teachers' academic satisfaction. Finally, familial support offers emotional encouragement and ignites teachers' emotional resilience (Krulatz et al., 2024). Collectively, these environmental factors create a supportive ecosystem that boosts teachers' motivation and self-efficacy, enabling them to persist through the high demands of graduate programs and achieve their professional goals.

Little research has been conducted concerning the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in Vietnamese contexts. Le and Trinh (2021) regarded the fear of failure as a contributor to teachers' participation in TPL-related activities. They concluded that participants' fear encompassed the feeling that their TEFL qualifications were inadequate. Participants were worried about job loss, lack of opportunities to advance their education, and loss of CPD opportunities due to repetitive teaching tasks. Additionally, a mid-career crisis, negative impacts of lacking role models, insufficient support from colleagues, and low self-confidence were seen as fear-driven motivations promoting participants to pursue graduate studies.

Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989)

The social cognitive theory (henceforth called SCT) (Bandura, 1989) was implemented as the theoretical framework for this research. Bandura (1989) assumes that people's competence can be physically and psychologically different from one another because of the environment and social practices influencing their development. Notably, the SCT values the inter-directional influence among three elements: people, the environment, and their behaviors. Afterward, Bandura (1989) introduced a triadic reciprocal causation to explain how people, the environment, and their behaviors continuously influence people's development (see Figure 1). Interconnected relationships between people and people's behaviors reflect their beliefs and actions, which affect each other. In contrast, perceptual systems are changed because of their behavioral experiences. Therefore, they also react differently to the contextual environment, with the impact of their physiological characteristics. Likewise, people's social reactions depend heavily on their social status and surroundings. The environment's impact on individuals must be transformed into actual impacts, which rely on their behaviors (Bandura, 1989).

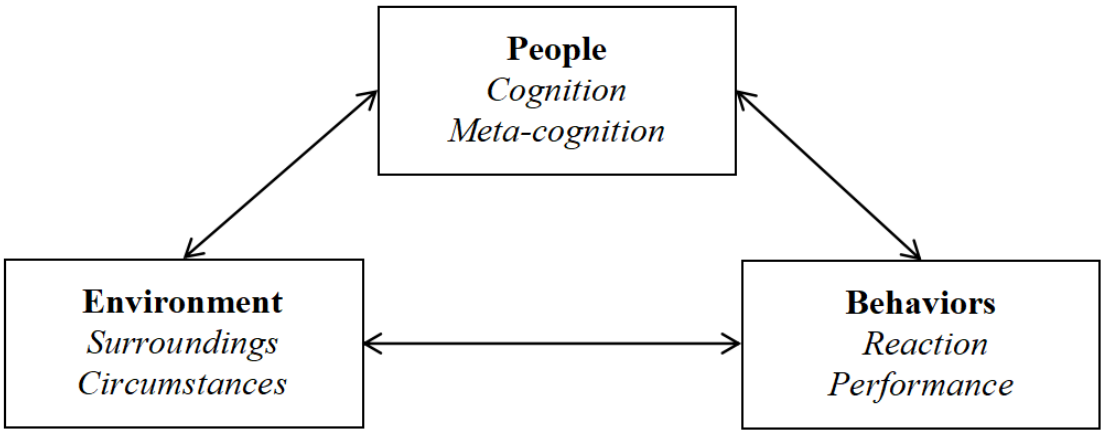


Figure 1. A triadic reciprocal causation in the SCT (Bandura, 1989)

Alongside these aspects, self-efficacy is another critical part in the SCT. It is conceptualized as the degree to which people can perform their behaviors based on prior experiences, self-assessment, and reflection. Their self-efficacy originates from their performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological or emotional states. As a result, people's self-efficacy also plays a crucial role in altering their behavioral choices. In this research, utilizing the SCT aligned well with the research aim. It served to shed light on how personal and contextual factors affected their academia and completion of graduate studies, specifically a master's program in TEFL. To fulfill this gap, this research sought to answer the following research questions.

What factors affect the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in a TEFL master's program?

Methods

Research design

The qualitative approach is best suited to this research's aim to shed light on factors affecting the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in TEFL. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) mentioned that the qualitative approach "involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). This approach allows this research to explore the participants' experiences and perspectives in-depth. In particular, a multiple case study was carried out to achieve this research's aim. According to Yin (2014), multiple case studies involve the in-depth analysis of multiple cases in a specific circumstance to comprehend insights into a phenomenon of interest. Researchers can capture various participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights by examining multiple cases.

Research Context and Participants

The current research explored factors affecting the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies, particularly a master's program in TEFL. This program is offered at a prominent public university located in Mekong Delta, Vietnam. This program usually lasts two years and is comprised of 60 credits. Each credit is defined by fifteen 50-minute sessions of teacher educators' theoretical instruction and forty-five 50-minute master's learners' self-regulated learning and self-

organized activities. Furthermore, it is characterized as research-oriented and requires learners to be involved in varied research-related activities to complete it. To enroll in this program, learners have to sit an entrance exam through which they show their competitive English language proficiency and TEFL-related knowledge. After master's learners finish all coursework, they must complete and defend their graduation thesis before a professional evaluation committee. Those graduating from this master's program wish to enhance their pedagogical knowledge, better competence in resolving TEFL-related problems, educational research competence, and 21st century skills of global citizens.

The purposive sampling technique was implemented to recruit participants for this research. This technique provided a more comprehensive understanding of a group of individuals (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Teachers who had graduated with a master's degree in TEFL were selected as research participants. They originated from different academic backgrounds and achieved specific personal and professional development successes during their master's pursuit. Details of the participant teachers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Research participants' demographic information*

Participant	Gender	Master's completion year	Undergraduate degree	Workplace
1	Male	2023	TEFL	English center
2	Male	2023	TEFL	High school
3	Female	2023	TEFL	High school
4	Female	2023	EFL-majored studies	English center
5	Female	2024	TEFL	High school
6	Male	2023	TEFL	High school
7	Female	2023	EFL-majored studies	English center
8	Female	2023	TEFL	High school
9	Female	2024	EFL-majored studies	High school
10	Male	2024	EFL-majored studies	High school

Instruments and Procedures

Data was qualitatively collected via semi-structured interviews with all participants. This interview format was employed as it facilitates natural interviewer-interviewee conversations and their adaptability during the interview process (Creswell, 2013). The interviewer and interviewees used Vietnamese to exchange ideas during the interview process. In the interviews, each interviewee was asked a set of open-ended questions. This question type allows for an in-depth discussion to clear misunderstandings and encourages collaboration between interviewers and interviewees. Interview questions focused on exploring interviewees' perceptions regarding factors influencing their completion on a master's program in TEFL.

Before the interviews, interviewees were provided with a short explanation of the aim of this research. They were informed that their responses were recorded and assured that the recorded files would be kept confidential and used only for this research's analysis. After the interviews, the recorded files were transcribed into textual forms. These forms were subsequently translated into English. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. This analysis process involved coding the data, organizing codes into themes, and interpreting the findings. Initial codes were generated based on the interview questions, and additional codes emerged from the data through an iterative process of reading and re-reading interview transcripts. Codes were grouped into themes that represented factors influencing the master's completion of graduate studies in TEFL. The next step involved interpreting the findings concerning the research questions. The

results were finally reported descriptively and thematically, supported by direct quotations from the transcripts to illustrate key findings.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Participants who participated in this research had the right to withdraw without subsequent consequences. Before the interviews, they were informed about the research's aim, procedures, risks, and benefits. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. Two critical strategies were used to ensure this research's trustworthiness. First and foremost, after each interview, interview transcripts were returned to each participant for their comments and feedback. Secondly, participants from various professional and academic backgrounds were recruited to triangulate the collected data.

Results

This research investigated factors affecting the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in TEFL. Two themes emerged in the thematic analysis: personal factors and contextual factors.

Personal factors

Individual motivation

All participants emphasized the significance of their personal motivation to complete their master's degree in TEFL. The motivation sources stemmed from the desire to enhance their teaching expertise and research competencies.

> Personal motivation stems from my passion for teaching and desire to enhance my research competencies as an ELT teacher-researcher. This passion has inspired me to embrace every learning opportunity, whether exploring innovative teaching methodologies, conducting in-depth academic research, or engaging in professional development activities. Motivation has also given me the resilience to persevere during moments of difficulty, such as managing tight deadlines or navigating complex academic concepts. (Participant 2)

> The first factor is my motivation. Before taking the course, I desired to widen my knowledge in teaching so that I could teach well and be paid a higher salary. Moreover, this intrinsic motivation has kept me committed to the theoretical and practical aspects of English Language Teaching. It facilitated my exploration of innovative teaching methods and strategies and the ways to write and conduct my thesis. (Participant 3)

Positive attitude

Alongside their motivation, participants showed a consistent positive attitude towards their master's learning. Even though they faced different obstacles in their master's pursuit, they were resilient enough to figure out suitable strategies to overcome them.

> The first factor to graduating from my master's program on time was maintaining a clear understanding and positive attitude towards my learning goals and staying committed throughout the course. During moments of being overwhelmed with class assignments and personal work, reflecting on my initial objectives helped me regain focus and calmly tackle each challenge. (Participant 1)

> First and foremost, personal patience and resilience have been essential to my master's journey. Completing a master's degree entails handling complex topics and projects, frequently requiring endurance and a calm, steady approach to overcome obstacles and disappointments. I have always tried to maintain a positive attitude towards my learning so that I could overcome these difficulties. (Participant 5)

Self-efficacy

Participants evaluated their self-efficacy as one of the most critical factors contributing to their master's program completion. Self-efficacy stemmed from themselves and the knowledge they gained from stakeholders.

> Upon completing my master's program, I had to thank myself immensely. While I enrolled in this program, with my academic background, I could learn better and quickly and collaborate effectively with my teammates. I felt confident about my ability and problem-solving skills. Moreover, when I was conducting my thesis for graduation, I felt confident and strong enough to finish it because of the research knowledge I learned from my lecturers and supervisor. (Participant 6)
>
> I would have dropped out of the program if I had not been confident in my learning ability. Self-confidence was very critical to me during this journey. My beloved father has taught me that I had better do 100% of my efforts whenever I do things. Moreover, despite facing many personal problems and learning challenges, I always believed in myself and held my true confidence in myself. I think that was one of the reasons motivating me to complete this master's program. (Participant 7)

Environmental factors

Professional support

Participants acknowledged the influence of teacher educators on their academic progress. They stated that the quality and research competences of teacher educators shaped their learning outcomes and nurtured their emotional maturity.

> I must thank the lecturers I have had the privilege to learn from during the master's program. As a EFL teacher pursuing graduate studies, I deepened my professional knowledge through their expertise. I gained valuable insights into teaching methods, effective communication, and how to connect with students. Their dedication reignited my passion for teaching and made it more potent than ever. (Participant 8)
>
> I appreciate all the well-qualified lecturers at this university. They have considerably influenced my success in my master's course. They have been good models for me to learn. They brought me positive energy in learning and applied what I had learned in my public high school. Although I sometimes was under pressure in studying with the deadline, I never lost my heart thanks to the teaching methods of my teachers during the master's coursework. (Participant 9)

Participant cherished the opportunities to collaborate with their classmates in their learning and research activities. Working with groups of EFL teachers with different academic backgrounds helped participants become more knowledgeable in the field.

> My classmates' support subsequently plays a very critical role. Their feedback and insights provided valuable perspectives that guide my improvement. Working with different types of people during our research or learning projects changed my perceptions of collaborative learning. I must acknowledge the necessity of working together during a master's journey to achieve the ultimate learning outcomes. (Participant 3)
>
> Furthermore, peer collaboration has been significant and has enriched my learning experience. I engaged in discussions and group work with my fellows in the master's class, who contributed to my coursework and thesis with constant proofreading, generous sharing

> of knowledge, and invaluable feedback. Their support encouraged me to complete my final assignments and thesis on time. (Participant 8)

Institutional support

Learning settings, facilities, curriculum, and research materials granted by the university greatly affected how participants experienced their master's journey and established their completion on the program.

> The university's access to quality resources, including academic journals and teaching materials, has been crucial. The file containing links to access reputable article sites for graduate students is updated and sent regularly to students' emails at the learning resource center. These resources have supported my coursework and thesis writing. (Participant 2)
>
> Following my teachers' support, there are a huge amount of learning and research activities (how to learn, what to learn, whom to learn with, where to find the learning resource…) in the syllabus of my program built the road to my successful academic performance. Thanks to my active participation in these activities, I recognized my weaknesses and how to cope with them effectively. (Participant 5)

Familial support

In addition to professional collaboration, participants mentioned the crucial roles of their families in reigniting their emotional resilience. Although participants faced many life obstacles, their families' mental and financial assistance encouraged them to move forward.

> My family also contributed greatly to my success during my master's journey. Their endless love, unconditional support, positive encouragement, loving care, and sympathy made me try harder in my journey. Although I had to move to this city to learn and work alone, their timely encouragement ignited my motivation even when I felt disappointed about my learning results. (Participant 1)
>
> Last, my family greatly supported me in finance and spirit during the course. I would not have concentrated on my studies if I had had problems with finance. My family also encouraged me a lot when I faced problems, which made me feel better and stronger again after difficulties. (Participant 10)

Between personal and environmental factors: Which are more influential?

When asked about the most significant factor affecting their success in master's learning, participants indicated the learner-related factor. They themselves were the most significant contributors to the completion on their master's pursuit.

> My personal factor is the most significant, as having a strong sense of purpose and commitment was the foundation that allowed me to benefit from the other factors fully. With a clear direction, I could stay focused even during challenging times. When faced with overwhelming assignments or personal struggles, my goals reminded me why I started and motivated me to keep moving forward. They helped me stay on track so that I could make the most of the support I received from stakeholders. (Participant 7)
>
> Among these factors, overcoming adversity is the most significant contributor to my success. It is through facing and overcoming difficulties that I could develop a strong character and a strong work ethic. Adversity pushes me to discover my strengths, refine my goals, and grow a clear mindset focused on growth and learning. This ability to rise above challenges not only aids my academic pursuits but also prepares me for the future beyond my master's course. (Participant 10)

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Discussion

This research investigated the factors influencing the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in a master's program in TEFL. Findings indicated that two significant factors affected their completion: personal and environmental. Participants, their surroundings, and their academic endeavors were interconnected, contributing to their successful completion of the master's program in TEFL. These findings reflected Bandura's (1989) triadic reciprocal causation. In the research, this causation explained how participants' self-efficacy is formed by themselves, their environment, and their academic endeavors. These elements collectively contributed to their completion of a master's degree in TEFL (see Figure 2).

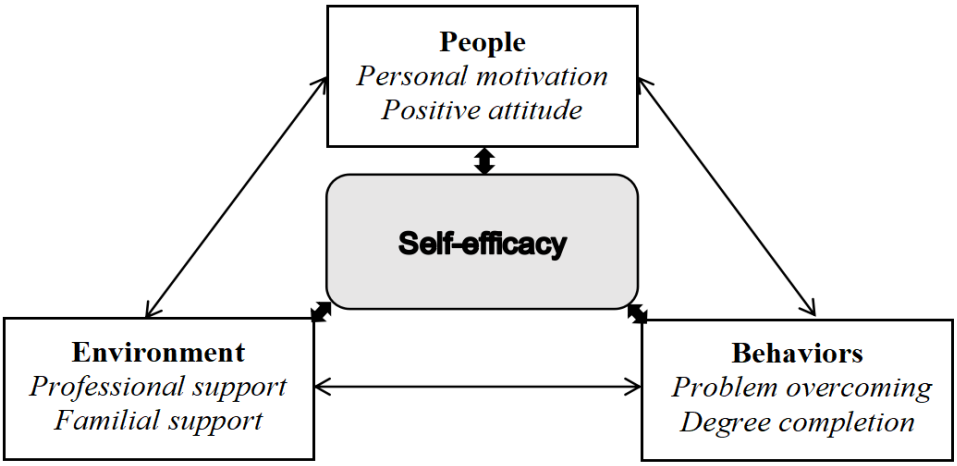


Figure 2. Factors affecting EFL teachers' completion of a master's pursuit in TEFL

As Bandura (1989) assumed, people's attributes, such as intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes, are perceived to be the foundation for self-efficacy. As self-efficacy strengthens, it influences people's motivation and attitudes toward their learning. This finding aligns with Rungduin & Miranda (2018), who emphasized that their motivation and highly positive attitudes help participants overcome their learning difficulties and complete their master's pursuit. Additionally, it overlaps with the findings of Pinar et al. (2021), who affirmed that the more motivated and self-efficient teachers are, the harder they strive for academic excellence. In the context of the Mekong Delta, teachers' personal motivation is driven by the desire to escape poverty and develop their professional careers. They regard a master's degree as an opportunity to improve their expertise and professional development. Bandura (1989) subsequently argued that the environment interacts with people and creates favorable conditions for forming their self-efficacy. As Pinar et al. (2021) and Le and Trinh (2021) confirmed, professional support from teacher educators and colleagues is valued as core in helping teachers overcome academic barriers. Moreover, participants received significant support from their families, which enhanced their emotional resilience and maintained their perseverance in learning. Unlike in Western countries, where personal independence is prioritized, Vietnamese people often receive financial and spiritual support from their families. Parents care about material needs and motivate children to study peacefully. This kind of support establishes an advantage for participants whenever they face academic obstacles and professional pressures. The eventual critical element is people's behavior. It refers to a direct result of the interaction between people and the environment (Bandura, 1989). Participants live in the Mekong Delta and grow up in challenging economic conditions. These living conditions force them to persevere and be creative and analytical in overcoming academic

challenges such as lack of time, finances, or academic resources and facilities. Participating in collaborative academic groups and seeking professional assistance exemplify how self-efficacy motivates them to act. Bandura (1989) mentioned that each small successful behavior strengthens people's self-efficacy. In a Vietnamese context, Le and Trinh (2021) also evaluated that teachers often act based on fear of failure, such as losing career opportunities and feeling that their current level is insufficient to meet the requirements of teaching as a profession. This fear, combined with motivation and environment, motivates them to act more persistently to complete their master's pursuit. Interestingly, participants reported that their personal factors were the ultimate determinants of their success in completing their master's pursuit. While external assistance provided essential resources, participants' intrinsic motivation, positive attitude, and self-efficacy helped them achieve their academic goals. The emphasis on individual self-efficacy embodies that although a supportive environment plays a critical role, it is the strength of personal motivation and self-resilience that authentically propels them towards completing their graduate studies.

Conclusions and Implications

This research sought to examine factors that affected the completion of EFL teachers' graduate studies in TEFL within a Vietnamese context. External and contextual factors significantly led to their successful completion. Among these factors, participants reported that their personal factors played the most significant role in this endeavor. In line with SCT's assumption, participants' personal factors, such as their self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and positive attitude, were crucial to their persistence and success in completing graduate studies.

Based on the results of this research, several pedagogical implications emerged for university program managers, teacher educators, and master's learners. First, the university program managers should organize more teaching-research training activities, webinars, and conferences to satisfy master's learners' professional needs. Moreover, they offer more supportive systems to improve learners' motivation and resilience to complete their program. It is also essential to inform teacher educators of learners' needs so that they are better able to gain an in-depth comprehension of their learners. Consequently, teacher educators can adjust their teaching approaches and the program's curriculum and syllabus to establish constructive alignment and quality of teaching and learning. Lastly, EFL teachers should reconsider the roles of individual and contextual contributors affecting their graduate study completion. Furthermore, they can attend professional development activities more actively to continuously update their pedagogical knowledge and research competence in order to achieve the output standard of their master's program.

Some methodological implications are subsequently drawn out for other researchers. Future research should collect quantitative data from a larger sample of participants and combine it with qualitative data to provide a more in-depth comprehension of factors affecting EFL teachers' completion of graduate studies. Moreover, those interested in teachers' CPD can investigate how EFL teachers map out their future professional trajectories alongside their agency and identity. Exploring how the completion of a master's degree benefits EFL teachers upon coming back to their workplace would be a worthy area for future research.

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Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment for IELTS Speaking Skills: A Chinese High School Case Study

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Abstract
This qualitative case study investigated how a Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment framework enhanced International English Language Testing System speaking skills among Chinese high school English as a Foreign Language learners. The significance of this research lies in addressing the critical gap between diagnostic assessment theory and practical implementation in examination-oriented educational contexts. The study examined three key questions: how cognitive subskills develop through diagnostic assessment, what feedback processing strategies students employ, and what pedagogical challenges teachers face during implementation. The 16-week intervention at an international school in southwest China involved five Grade 11 students at the Common European Framework of Reference A2 level and one experienced teacher. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, mock test recordings, and document analysis. Findings revealed significant improvements across five subskills: linguistic knowledge, syntactic complexity, pronunciation mastery, discourse management, and speech structure awareness. Students evolved from surface-level feedback engagement to sophisticated metacognitive processing strategies, particularly in pattern recognition and cross-contextual transfer. The teacher's implementation emphasized culturally sensitive adaptations, addressing face-saving concerns and reconciling diagnostic assessment with examination traditions. The study demonstrates that integrating diagnostic assessment principles with culturally responsive pedagogy enhances speaking development for high-stakes examinations, with implications for curriculum design and teacher education. The single-site nature and small sample size limit generalizability, warranting broader implementation studies across diverse Chinese educational contexts.

Keywords: Chinese English learners, cognitive diagnostic assessment, diagnostic feedback, English speaking assessment, second language speaking developmen

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Introduction

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has emerged as a crucial gateway for millions of students pursuing international education and professional opportunities worldwide, with speaking proficiency being one of its most challenging yet essential components (Bogachevska, 2022; Fleming, & Shinjee, 2024; Karim & Haq, 2014; Shiny & Karthikeyan, 2022). In China particularly, where over 27 million university students are engaged in English language learning and assessment, IELTS speaking scores play a decisive role in academic and career advancement (Cheng & Curtis, 2010). Moreover, the significance of the IELTS speaking assessment has intensified as China continues to be one of the largest sources of international students globally, with Chinese test-takers comprising a notable proportion of IELTS candidates around the world (Hu, 2019; Zhang, 2024). Validation studies highlight the generalizability and consistency of linking IELTS speaking tests to China's Standards of English Language Ability, underscoring the role of standardized frameworks in bridging diagnostic feedback and instructional practices (Chen & Wu, 2022).

The current IELTS speaking assessment framework has demonstrated relatively strong reliability and validity in evaluating candidates' oral proficiency through its standardized band scoring system (Brown, 2006a, 2006b; Read, 2022; Suss, 2023). However, it presents significant limitations in providing detailed diagnostic information about learners' specific strengths and weaknesses across these dimensions (Dashti & Razmjoo, 2020; Heidari Vincheh et al., 2024; Kafipour, & Khoshnood, 2023; Quaid, 2018). As Kuo et al. (2016) emphasize, traditional evaluation methods that rely solely on total test scores provide substantially less diagnostic information than comprehensive assessment approaches, making it challenging for learners to identify specific areas requiring focused improvement.

Furthermore, research consistently indicates that Chinese test-takers lag behind global averages in speaking scores, despite demonstrating strong performance in other test components (Heidari Vincheh et al., 2024; Hu, 2019). Traditional assessment methods may not adequately capture or address the specific cognitive and linguistic challenges faced by Chinese learners in oral communication tasks (Huang, 2024; Wang & Wright, 2018). These challenges often stem from fundamental differences between Chinese and English language systems, including phonological patterns, tonal features, syntactic structures, and pragmatic conventions. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Csapó and Molnár (2019), technology-based assessment systems can effectively monitor students' cognitive development and make the psychological dimension of learning more visible, suggesting promising avenues for improvement.

In response to these challenges, Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment (CDA) has emerged as a particularly promising framework for enhancing language assessment practices. CDA represents a psychometric approach that provides fine-grained diagnostic feedback by identifying specific cognitive attributes or skills that learners have mastered or need to develop (Jang, 2008; Javidanmehr, & Anani, 2017; Leighton & Gierl, 2007; Leighton et al., 2010). Unlike traditional assessment methods that produce single proficiency scores, CDA decomposes performance into

multiple cognitive subskills, enabling attribute-level diagnosis that reveals learners' strengths and weaknesses across distinct competency areas (Tang & Zhan, 2021). This diagnostic granularity is achieved through sophisticated statistical modeling that maps test items to underlying cognitive attributes, thereby generating detailed learner profiles for targeted instructional interventions (Li, 2019; Zhai et al., 2023).

Notably, the CDA framework presented by Heidari Vincheh et al. (2024) offers an innovative approach to understanding the complex cognitive processes involved in language production, emphasizing diagnostic feedback for learner development through systematic analysis of speaking performance patterns. By focusing on the detailed mapping of cognitive skills underlying successful task performance, CDA offers potential solutions to the limitations of traditional scoring methods for IELTS assessment (Minakova, 2020). Recent research has provided compelling evidence for the efficacy of cognitive diagnostic approaches in language testing contexts, demonstrating significant improvements in learners' speaking performance through systematic diagnostic assessment and targeted feedback mechanisms (Ravand & Robitzsch, 2018; Souzandehfar, 2024; Nakatsuhara et al., 2017).

While previous CDA applications have primarily focused on receptive skills such as reading and listening (Jang, 2008; Leighton & Gierl, 2007), the framework's application to productive skills like speaking remains largely unexplored, particularly in examination-oriented contexts such as Chinese educational settings. The highly valued examination culture in Chinese society has created a testing environment that heavily emphasizes summative evaluation over formative assessment (Cheng & Curtis, 2010; Minakova, 2020). This cultural context presents both challenges and opportunities for implementing cognitive diagnostic frameworks in addressing the specific needs of Chinese learners.

Building upon the Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment framework established by Heidari Vincheh et al. (2024), this study examines the implementation and adaptation of this diagnostic approach within the context of Chinese high school EFL learners' IELTS speaking skills development. The significance of this investigation lies in its potential to provide empirical evidence for the practical application of CDA in examination-oriented educational settings, offering insights into how diagnostic assessment can be culturally adapted while maintaining its theoretical integrity. Furthermore, this study addresses the critical gap in qualitative research examining the cognitive processes underlying speaking skill development through diagnostic assessment.

Given the complex, context-dependent nature of implementing diagnostic assessment in real classroom settings, this investigation employs a qualitative case study methodology. This methodological approach enables deep exploration of participants' experiences, cognitive processes, and pedagogical adaptations, capturing the nuanced interactions between diagnostic feedback and high-stakes test preparation. Through systematic investigation aligned with the qualitative paradigm, this research examines the following three research questions:

1. How does the implementation of a Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment (CDA) framework impact the development of specific speaking subskills among Chinese high school students?
2. What cognitive processes do Chinese EFL learners employ when engaging with diagnostic feedback during their IELTS speaking preparation?
3. How does the Chinese EFL teacher implement the CDA framework in pedagogical practice, and what challenges or modifications does the teacher encounter during the process?

These research questions are designed to capture the complexity of implementing diagnostic assessment through qualitative inquiry, enabling rich descriptions of learner development trajectories, cognitive processing strategies, and pedagogical adaptations within the specific cultural and educational context of Chinese IELTS speaking preparation.

Literature Review

IELTS Speaking Assessment

The IELTS speaking assessment, a globally recognized benchmark for evaluating oral language proficiency, has been integral to academic and professional contexts since its introduction in 1989 (Souzandehfar, 2024). The speaking test is structured across three sections—an introduction and interview, a long turn, and a discussion—providing candidates with varied opportunities to demonstrate their speaking skills. It employs a band scoring system ranging from 1 to 9 that evaluates four primary criteria: fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation (Brown, 2006a, 2006b; Read, 2022). The standardized nature of the framework ensures consistency and comparability across diverse testing environments. However, its predominantly summative orientation limits its ability to provide nuanced, diagnostic feedback for learners aiming to enhance specific aspects of their performance (Dashti & Razmjoo, 2020; Panahi, & Mohebbi, 2022).

One of the strengths of the IELTS speaking assessment lies in its reliability and robust design, which has been extensively validated through empirical research. Ginting et al. (2023) affirm that the test reliably measures speaking proficiency, ensuring fairness and accuracy in evaluating candidates' abilities. However, reliability can sometimes be undermined by examiner variability. Hajiabdorrasouli & Ahmadi, (2023) and Mehraban (2022) highlight that subjective differences in examiner styles and interpretations of band descriptors can influence scoring, impacting inter-rater reliability. While standardized rubrics mitigate discrepancies, absolute consistency across examiners remains a challenge.

Concerns regarding the validity of the IELTS speaking test have also been raised. Gagen, & Faez (2024) critique the predictive validity of the test, questioning its effectiveness in gauging real-world communicative competence. While the test effectively assesses structured speaking tasks, it may not fully capture the dynamic, interactive nature of authentic communication. Similarly, Heidari Vincheh et al. (2024) question the content validity of the assessment, pointing

out gaps in its ability to evaluate a comprehensive range of speaking skills, including pragmatic and sociolinguistic competencies essential for academic and professional success. These critiques emphasize the need for more holistic evaluation criteria that encompass both linguistic accuracy and communicative effectiveness.

A notable limitation of the IELTS speaking framework is its inability to provide detailed diagnostic feedback, crucial for identifying and addressing specific weaknesses. The band descriptors, while offering a broad overview of performance, lack the granularity required for targeted skill development (Huang, 2024; Kafipour & Khoshnood, 2023). This is especially problematic for non-native English-speaking learners, such as Chinese EFL students, who face unique linguistic and cognitive challenges in mastering speaking skills (Hu, 2019; Wang & Wright, 2018). For instance, phonological differences, such as the absence of certain English phonemes in Mandarin, contribute to pronunciation difficulties. Similarly, syntactic and pragmatic divergences impede fluency and discourse management, while cultural factors, including an emphasis on rote learning, limit authentic communicative practice (Huang et al. 2022).

There are also some disadvantages for certain learner groups in terms of examiner perceptions. Research suggests that cultural or linguistic biases may inadvertently affect scoring outcomes, particularly when learners display non-native-like pronunciation or discourse strategies that deviate from Anglo-centric norms (Borger, 2019; Woolridge et al. 2023). These biases underscore the need for inclusive assessment practices that acknowledge diverse linguistic and cultural identities while maintaining fairness and objectivity.

The potential of diagnostic approaches extends beyond individual skill development to broader pedagogical implications. Research supports the role of diagnostic assessment in informing curriculum design. Ismail et al. (2022) emphasize that detailed diagnostic information enables educators to align instructional strategies with learners' specific needs, enhancing language instruction effectiveness. Similarly, Barghi et al. (2025) demonstrate how diagnostic tools can identify granular weaknesses, such as grammatical accuracy or lexical depth, allowing for targeted interventions. Minakova (2020) highlights how dynamic assessment (DA) for IELTS speaking preparation promotes learners' ability to self-correct errors and enhances their use of complex linguistic structures like tense-aspect markers. DA, through systematic feedback, not only supports immediate test performance but also fosters transferable skills for broader language use.

Additionally, diagnostic assessments facilitate greater learner autonomy by providing actionable feedback that empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey. Souzandehfar (2024) underscores the importance of fostering metacognitive awareness through diagnostic feedback, helping learners reflect on their performance and set achievable goals for improvement. Csapó and Molnár (2019) demonstrate how technology-enhanced diagnostic systems make cognitive processes more visible, enabling learners to monitor progress and adapt strategies effectively. These findings align with the broader emphasis on formative assessment as a tool for promoting self-regulated learning and long-term skill development.

In the context of high-stakes tests like IELTS, the integration of diagnostic elements is particularly critical. Diagnostic frameworks bridge the gap between assessment and instruction, fostering a more learner-centered approach that prioritizes skill development alongside performance evaluation (Gebril, 2022). For instance, Nakatsuhara et al. (2017) demonstrate how systematic diagnostic assessments within speaking tests can provide detailed performance insights, enabling candidates to focus on areas requiring improvement. This alignment of diagnostic feedback with pedagogical objectives represents a transformative shift in language assessment practices.

While the IELTS speaking assessment has contributed substantially to language testing, its limitations highlight the need for innovation. Exploring diagnostic methodologies addresses these challenges, ensuring assessments evaluate proficiency while supporting learners in achieving communicative potential. Therefore, it could be argued that diagnostic frameworks complement traditional assessments, paving the way for comprehensive and equitable language testing practices.

Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment Implementation in China

Cognitive diagnostic assessment (CDA) has emerged as a transformative approach in language teaching, offering an alternative to traditional assessments by providing fine-grained diagnostic feedback. Grounded in cognitive psychology and psychometric theory, CDA allows educators to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses at a granular level, facilitating targeted instruction. Its application has evolved significantly, with early studies focusing on receptive skills like reading and listening (He et al., 2022; Min & He, 2022). However, in high-stakes speaking assessments such as IELTS, CDA remains underutilized, particularly in contexts like China, where the education system predominantly relies on summative evaluations.

The IELTS speaking test, while widely recognized for its reliability and validity, has long been criticized for its inability to provide detailed diagnostic feedback. Holistic scoring frameworks, as currently employed, obscure test-takers specific strengths and weaknesses, making it difficult for learners to focus on areas that require improvement (Heidari Vincheh et al., 2024). This limitation is especially problematic in China, where English learners face unique linguistic and cognitive challenges. Despite the growing demand for diagnostic assessments, few studies have systematically explored the application of CDA to speaking skills in Chinese educational contexts, leaving a critical gap in both research and practice.

A comprehensive CDA framework for IELTS speaking, proposed by Heidari Vincheh et al. (2024), could be used as a promising means to address these gaps within the EFL context. This framework identifies five subskills essential for speaking proficiency: linguistic knowledge, syntactic knowledge, pronunciation mastery, discourse management and fluency, and speech structure awareness. Each of these subskills represents a critical component of oral communication, offering a roadmap for diagnosing and developing speaking abilities in a structured and systematic manner. For instance, linguistic knowledge encompasses vocabulary and

grammatical accuracy, foundational elements for constructing meaningful sentences. Syntactic knowledge focuses on sentence structure, enabling learners to produce more complex and coherent speech. Pronunciation mastery addresses phonological accuracy, including stress, rhythm, and intonation, which are particularly challenging for Chinese learners due to the phonemic differences between English and Mandarin (Hu, 2019). Discourse management and fluency involve organizing ideas logically and maintaining a natural flow of speech, while speech structure awareness emphasizes the importance of cohesive and coherent responses.

It should be noted that the implementation of this framework in Chinese high schools presents both opportunities and challenges. One on hand, Chinese learners' emphasis on systematic learning aligns well with the structured approach of CDA. For example, the focus on speech structure awareness resonates with Chinese students' preference for clear frameworks and methodologies in learning. However, on the other hand, traditional teaching practices, which often prioritize rote memorization over interactive and communicative approaches, may hinder the development of subskills like discourse management and fluency (Tiu et al., 2023). EFL teachers in China often rely on prescriptive methods that emphasize correctness, which, while useful for building grammatical accuracy, can limit learners' ability to express ideas spontaneously and interactively.

Cultural and institutional factors further shape the implementation of CDA in Chinese educational settings. The hierarchical nature of teacher-student relationships and the cultural emphasis on face-saving can influence how diagnostic feedback is delivered and received. Teachers may hesitate to provide detailed feedback for fear of embarrassing students, while students may prefer indirect feedback that highlights their strengths rather than their weaknesses (Bui, 2024; Gao, 2021; Liu & Xu 2017). These dynamics necessitate culturally sensitive approaches to feedback, such as incorporating peer assessments or anonymous evaluations, to create a supportive environment for skill development.

Moreover, interactional competence, as highlighted by Lam et al. (2023), is an essential component of speaking proficiency that requires more attention within diagnostic frameworks. Interactional competence involves managing interactions effectively during speaking tasks, such as turn-taking, negotiating meaning, and responding appropriately to interlocutors. These aspects are particularly relevant in IELTS speaking tasks but are often overlooked in traditional assessments. Therefore, integrating diagnostic tools to address interactional competence can help Chinese learners develop the pragmatic and sociolinguistic skills necessary for real-world communication.

Despite these challenges, there are more significant opportunities for integrating CDA into Chinese high schools. Advances in technology-based assessments offer efficient ways to track and analyze cognitive skill development (Shi et al., 2024). These tools can be particularly valuable in large classrooms in China, where individualized diagnostic assessments are logistically challenging. Additionally, Shi et al. (2024) demonstrated the use of polytomous cognitive diagnostic models (CDMs) to diagnose Chinese EFL learners' writing performance. The study

highlighted how CDMs provide a granular understanding of learners' strengths and weaknesses, which could be adapted to speaking skills. These tools allow for the synthesis of diagnostic information into actionable feedback, further supporting personalized instruction. Moreover, case studies from other domains, such as the successful implementation of CDA in reading assessments in Changchun City, China, demonstrate the feasibility of adapting international frameworks to local contexts (Li et al., 2021). All in all, these experiences highlight the importance of aligning diagnostic assessments with curriculum goals, teacher training, and the use of localized materials to ensure cultural relevance.

Another essential factor in implementing CDA effectively is the adaptability of teachers and students to new assessment practices. Chinese EFL teachers have shown a growing willingness to adopt innovative methodologies, provided they align with both national educational standards and the practical realities of their classrooms (Mei & Chen, 2024). For instance, incorporating the CDA framework into existing preparatory programs for IELTS can provide students with actionable insights into their speaking abilities, enabling them to focus on specific areas for improvement. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of test preparation but also supports broader language learning objectives.

Thus, the integration of Heidari Vincheh et al.'s CDA framework into Chinese high schools offers a promising pathway for addressing the limitations of traditional assessments in IELTS speaking. By providing detailed feedback across key subskills, this framework can bridge the gap between assessment and instruction, fostering a more learner-centered approach to language education. Moreover, it has the potential to transform how speaking skills are taught and evaluated, promoting a deeper understanding of learners' needs and empowering them to achieve their full communicative potential.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to evaluate the impact of CDA on learners' performance and perceptions in diverse Chinese contexts. Additionally, exploring the interplay between cultural factors and diagnostic feedback processes can provide valuable insights into how CDA can be effectively adapted to different educational settings. Through such efforts, the CDA framework can not only enhance the teaching and assessment of IELTS speaking skills but also contribute to the broader goal of improving English language education in China.

Methodology

This qualitative case study employed an interpretive research paradigm to investigate the implementation and impact of a Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment (CDA) framework on IELTS speaking skills development among Chinese high school EFL learners. The study utilized multiple data collection methods including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, mock test recordings, and document analysis to capture the complexity of the intervention across 16 weeks. This multi-method approach enabled a comprehensive examination of student learning processes, teacher implementation strategies, and the cultural adaptations required for the successful integration of diagnostic assessment principles within the Chinese educational context.

Participants

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology to explore the implementation and impact of a Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment (CDA) framework on IELTS speaking skills development among Chinese high school EFL learners. This approach aligns with understanding complex educational phenomena in their natural settings (Creswell, 2013) and facilitates an in-depth examination of how the CDA framework influences speaking skill development across dimensions identified in the literature review. This qualitative approach also aligns with recent research demonstrating the effectiveness of in-depth exploratory methods in understanding learner experiences and educational interventions in language learning contexts (Abdulaal et al., 2022; Pang et al., 2024).

The qualitative research was conducted at a private international high school in southwest China, selected for its emphasis on preparing students for overseas higher education. Five Grade 11 students at the A2 CEFR proficiency level were purposefully selected through criterion-based sampling to ensure participants possessed the specific characteristics essential for investigating the CDA framework implementation. These students were preparing for undergraduate studies in Australia and represented a homogeneous group regarding their language proficiency needs. The study also involved an experienced Chinese EFL teacher with a Master's degree in TESOL from the UK and five years of IELTS training experience, selected for his expertise in assessment practices.

The purposeful sampling strategy was directly aligned with the research questions examining cognitive diagnostic assessment in IELTS preparation. As Palinkas et al. (2015) emphasize, this approach is appropriate for bounded systems where the population shares critical characteristics relevant to the research focus. The sampling ensures both the student cohort perspective while incorporating expert pedagogical insight, enhancing the study's credibility. According to Etikan et al. (2016), studying educational interventions in small, specialized populations provides rich, in-depth insights, though findings remain context-specific rather than generalizable.

Table One presents the demographic information of the five student participants involved in this study.

Table 1. *Demographic information of student participants*

Participants	Age	Gender	Years of English study	Proficiency level (CEFR)
Student 1	Female	16	7	A2
Student 2	Female	17	7	A2
Student 3	Male	16	8	A2
Student 4	Male	16	7	A2
Student 5	Male	16	7	A2

Table two provides the demographic profile of the teacher participants who implemented the CDA framework throughout the intervention period.

Table 2. *Demographic information of the teacher participant*

Participant	Age	Gender	Qualification	Teaching experience	Role
Chinese teacher	30	Male	Master's degree in TESOL (UK)	5 years	IELTS trainer and CDA implementer

Research Instruments

This study employs multiple carefully selected instruments to collect comprehensive data on implementing the Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment (CDA) framework for IELTS speaking skills development in the Chinese EFL context. Each instrument was chosen to ensure academic rigor while providing nuanced insights into both learners' and teachers' experiences with the CDA framework.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocols

The primary instrument in this study is the semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen due to its effectiveness in eliciting in-depth qualitative data while allowing flexibility to explore unanticipated themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are recognized for balancing the structure needed to maintain focus with openness that encourages rich, descriptive responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The interview protocols underwent rigorous development through a systematic three-phase process. Initial drafts were grounded in the research questions mentioned above, followed by expert review from three TESOL professionals for content validation and clarity. The protocols were then refined through pilot testing with two students outside the main study cohort, allowing for adjustments in question sequencing and phrasing. The final protocols incorporated both structural and elaboration probes to encourage detailed responses while maintaining consistency across sessions. To capture distinct perspectives, separate protocols were developed for students and the EFL teacher, with each focusing on their unique experiences with the CDA framework. Interviews were conducted bi-weekly over 16 weeks (one academic semester), enabling the documentation of evolving perspectives and experiences throughout the implementation period. For the students, questions were designed to explore their perceptions of the feedback received and its impact on their speaking skills development. Sample questions include:

1. How do you feel the diagnostic feedback helps you improve specific aspects of your speaking skills?
2. What do you find most challenging about the speaking tasks in the CDA framework?
3. Can you provide an example of how the feedback has influenced your practice strategies?

For the EFL teacher, the questions focused on the instructional strategies and the teacher's experience with implementing the CDA framework. Examples include:

1. What challenges have you faced in integrating CDA into your teaching practices?
2. How do you think the CDA framework affects your students' learning progress?
3. Can you describe the feedback process and its influence on your teaching approach?

Classroom Observation Checklists

Classroom observations were conducted weekly using a structured checklist. Observations are widely used in qualitative studies to gather contextual data and triangulate findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The checklist development followed a systematic process grounded in educational research methodology. The final instrument included predefined categories examining student engagement through participation patterns, instructional strategies focusing on CDA implementation, and the integration of diagnostic feedback into classroom practice.

The observation protocol underwent multiple iterations of refinement, with each category carefully aligned to the research questions and CDA framework principles. This systematic approach to classroom observation provided real-time insights into the interaction between teaching and learning dynamics, particularly focusing on how diagnostic feedback influenced instructional practices and student responses.

Mock Speaking Test Recordings

Mock speaking test performances were assessed using a comprehensive measurement protocol that integrated the five cognitive subskills from the CDA framework with standard IELTS band descriptors. The assessment instrument consisted of a detailed analytical rubric with 25 performance indicators (five indicators per subskill) rated on a 1-9 scale. For linguistic knowledge, indicators included lexical precision, vocabulary range, idiomatic expression, collocation accuracy, and word formation skills. Syntactic complexity was measured through sentence variety, grammatical range, tense consistency, conditional structure usage, and subordinate clause implementation. The pronunciation mastery assessment focused on phonemic accuracy, stress patterns, intonation contours, connected speech features, and fluency markers. Discourse management evaluation examined coherence devices, topic maintenance, turn-taking strategies, self-correction mechanisms, and information organization. Speech structure awareness was assessed through introduction formulation, thesis development, supporting evidence provision, transitional element usage, and conclusion strategies. Inter-rater reliability was established by having both the EFL teacher and an external IELTS examiner independently score a sample of recordings (20%), yielding a Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.87. Quantitative improvements were calculated as percentage increases from baseline to final assessments, with comprehensive score profiles documented for each student across all five subskills.

Audio recordings of mock IELTS speaking tests were adopted to track the student participants' progress in specific linguistic subskills, derived from the CDA framework. These subskills included linguistic knowledge, syntactic knowledge, pronunciation mastery, discourse management and fluency, and speech structure awareness (Heidari Vincheh et al., 2024). These recordings provided critical data for analyzing the effectiveness of the CDA framework in addressing targeted areas of speaking performance. This approach aligns with research emphasizing the importance of recording natural speech to analyze performance development over time (Nakatsuhara et al., 2017). Recordings were systematically reviewed to examine areas such as pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and discourse management, complementing findings from the diagnostic feedback.

Document Analysis

Document analysis involved reviewing lesson plans, diagnostic profiles, and feedback materials from the Chinese EFL teacher to examine how the CDA framework was operationalized. This method is commonly used in qualitative research to provide additional layers of evidence (Bowen, 2009). The analysis employed a systematic coding scheme developed specifically for this study, focusing on the alignment between diagnostic feedback and targeted subskills, integration of CDA principles into lesson planning, progression of feedback strategies, and modifications in teaching approaches based on diagnostic results.

The document analysis protocol ensured consistent examination of materials across the 16-week study period, enabling the researchers to track changes in instructional planning and feedback delivery. This systematic approach to document analysis provided valuable insights into how the CDA framework principles were translated into practical teaching strategies and how these strategies evolved in response to student needs and progress.

This comprehensive set of instruments, each carefully designed and implemented, ensured thorough data collection while maintaining methodological rigor. The combination of interviews, observations, recordings, and document analysis enabled robust triangulation of findings, strengthening the validity of the study's conclusions about the effectiveness of the CDA framework in developing IELTS speaking skills among Chinese high school EFL learners.

Research Procedures

This study followed a systematic approach to collect and analyze data on the implementation of the Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment (CDA) framework for IELTS speaking skills development among Chinese high school students. The procedures were meticulously designed to ensure academic rigor and to address the research questions accordingly.

The data collection was conducted over a 16-week period, spanning one academic semester. The 16-week implementation period was selected based on empirical and practical considerations. This timeframe aligns with research indicating that meaningful changes in speaking proficiency require 12-15 weeks of sustained intervention (Nakatsuhara et al., 2017). Corresponding with one academic semester in the Chinese educational system, the CDA framework implementation followed a structured three-phase protocol across the 16-week intervention. In the initial implementation phase (weeks 1-4), the EFL teacher conducted baseline diagnostic assessments using standardized IELTS speaking tasks across all three sections of the test. Students' performances were video-recorded and analyzed using the five-dimension cognitive diagnostic rubric adapted from Heidari Vincheh et al. (2024), with each subskill scored on a scale of 1-9 corresponding to IELTS band descriptors. The teacher then developed individualized diagnostic profiles for each student, highlighting specific strengths and weaknesses across the five cognitive subskills. During the core intervention phase (weeks 5-12), weekly 120-minute sessions integrated explicit instruction on each subskill with diagnostic feedback cycles. Each session typically comprised: (1) a 30-minute mini-lesson targeting a specific cognitive subskill; (2) a 40-minute practice component using authentic IELTS speaking tasks; (3) a 30-minute diagnostic

feedback session where students received individualized feedback on their performance using the diagnostic rubric; and (4) a 20-minute guided self-reflection activity where students documented their understanding of the feedback and planned targeted practice strategies. The final evaluation phase (weeks 13-16) focused on the integration of all subskills, with comprehensive mock tests administered in weeks 13 and 16 to assess overall progress.

What's more, the implementation of the CDA framework incorporated systematic cultural adaptations to enhance its effectiveness within the Chinese EFL context. These adaptations were informed by Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1986) and Jin's (2023) cultural learning approaches. Four primary modifications were implemented: (1) Feedback delivery was adjusted to incorporate indirect communication strategies aligned with face-saving cultural practices, such as using group-level feedback for common errors before addressing individual challenges; (2) Diagnostic profiles were framed within achievement-oriented terminology rather than deficit-based language, emphasizing progress potential rather than performance gaps; (3) Structured rubrics were developed with explicit criteria and exemplars to accommodate Chinese learners' preference for clear assessment frameworks; and (4) Metacognitive reflection activities were gradually introduced, beginning with teacher-guided protocols before transitioning to more autonomous reflection practices. These adaptations were systematically documented through teacher reflection logs and modified based on student responses throughout the implementation period.

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary instrument for gathering rich qualitative data about the CDA framework implementation. Following established qualitative principles (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), interviews were conducted bi-weekly over the 16-week period, resulting in eight interview sessions with each of the five Grade 11 students at A2 CEFR proficiency level and eight separate sessions with the experienced EFL teacher with IELTS training expertise. The interview protocols underwent rigorous development through expert review and pilot testing with two students outside the main study cohort, ensuring both validity and cultural appropriateness within the Chinese educational context. For student participants, questions explored their experiences with diagnostic feedback across five key cognitive subskills identified by Heidari Vincheh et al. (2024): linguistic knowledge, syntactic knowledge, pronunciation mastery, discourse management and fluency, and speech structure awareness. The protocols specifically examined how students processed and implemented feedback in relation to IELTS speaking task requirements. For the EFL teacher, interviews investigated instructional adaptations, implementation challenges within the Chinese high school setting, and perceptions of the framework's effectiveness in addressing students' specific linguistic and cognitive needs. Each interview session, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes, was conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and encourage open dialogue. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for detailed analysis. The systematic documentation process included both immediate post-interview notes and reflective memos to capture contextual details and emerging insights.

To supplement the interviews, weekly classroom observations were conducted to document the integration of the CDA framework into regular instruction. Observations were guided by a structured checklist, which included categories such as student engagement, instructional strategies, and the interaction between diagnostic feedback and classroom practices. These observations also noted the emphasis on the five cognitive subskills as part of the instructional process, providing valuable contextual data and triangulating the findings from the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to interviews and observations, mock IELTS speaking tests were administered periodically. The audio recordings from these tests were analyzed to track the participant's progress in the five key cognitive subskills: linguistic knowledge, syntactic knowledge, pronunciation mastery, discourse management and fluency, and speech structure awareness. This approach follows best practices in performance-based assessments (Nakatsuhara et al., 2017), providing longitudinal insights into the development of speaking proficiency. Document analysis also formed a key part of the data collection process. Lesson plans, diagnostic profiles, and feedback materials from the EFL teacher were examined to understand how the CDA framework was operationalized and aligned with instructional goals (Bowen, 2009). This analysis emphasized the inclusion of the five cognitive subskills as focal points in both planning and feedback processes, further substantiating the study's findings.

This study adhered to rigorous ethical protocols to protect participant rights and ensure research integrity. Written informed consent was obtained from all student participants, with additional parental/guardian consent secured for those under 18 years of age. The consent forms, available in both English and Mandarin, detailed the study's purpose, data collection methods, confidentiality measures, and participants' right to withdraw without consequences. To protect confidentiality, all data were stored in encrypted, password-protected files, with participants assigned pseudonyms in all documentation. Mock test recordings were securely stored on dedicated devices without internet connectivity. The teacher participant was fully briefed on all aspects of the research and actively involved in implementation decisions, ensuring professional agency throughout the process. Regular debriefing sessions were conducted to address emerging ethical considerations, particularly regarding the balance between research objectives and pedagogical responsibilities. Institutional approval was obtained from both the international school's administration and the researchers' university ethics committee. All these protocols aligned with best practices in qualitative research ethics (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For data analysis, this research employed a systematic analytical approach following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. The thematic analysis process utilized a rigorous coding framework informed by both deductive and inductive approaches. First, researchers independently conducted multiple close readings of all transcripts and documentary evidence, generating initial codes. For calibration purposes, three researchers independently coded 20% of the dataset, then met to reconcile discrepancies and establish preliminary code definitions. This iterative process yielded a structured codebook containing 47 codes organized into six categories: Cognitive Subskill Development, Diagnostic Feedback Reception, Metacognitive

Processing Strategies, Implementation Challenges, Cultural Adaptations, and Pedagogical Modifications. Each code was defined using explicit criteria, example indicators, and exclusion parameters. The codebook was then validated through independent coding of another 20% of the data by two additional researchers, resulting in a Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.87, indicating strong inter-rater reliability. For the mock test recordings analysis, a specialized analytical matrix was developed to document frequency counts of specific speaking features across the five cognitive subskills. Linguistic knowledge improvements were quantified by tracking advanced vocabulary usage rates, while syntactic complexity was measured by calculating the proportion of compound and complex sentences per response. Pronunciation accuracy was evaluated by documenting error reduction rates across specific phonemic categories. Discourse management progress was assessed through frequency analysis of cohesive device usage and topic maintenance markers, while speech structure improvement was determined through comparative analysis of organizational patterns against standardized templates for each speaking task type.

These practices, combined with systematic reflexive journaling, enhanced the trustworthiness of findings while providing an audit trail of analytical decisions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This framework provided a robust foundation for examining CDA implementation outcomes, particularly regarding cognitive subskills critical to IELTS speaking performance among Chinese high school students.

Results

The findings address three research questions of the study: (1) the impact of CDA framework implementation on speaking subskill development among Chinese high school students; (2) the cognitive processes employed by Chinese EFL learners when engaging with diagnostic feedback; and (3) the EFL teacher's implementation of the CDA framework, including challenges and modifications. The results draw from multiple data sources collected over 16 weeks, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, mock test recordings, and document analysis.

Impact of CDA Framework on Specific Speaking Subskills Development

Overview of Subskill Development

The comprehensive analyses across multiple data sources revealed significant improvements in students' speaking proficiency through the CDA framework implementation. Mock test recordings demonstrated substantial gains across all five targeted subskills over the 16-week period: linguistic knowledge (40% increase in advanced vocabulary usage), syntactic complexity (35% improvement in complex sentence structures), pronunciation accuracy (45% reduction in phonemic errors), discourse management (50% enhancement in cohesive device usage), and speech structure organization (average improvement of 1.5 IELTS bands).

These improvements manifested in observable changes in students' speaking performance. Student 3 articulated this development in vocabulary sophistication:

"Before, I would just use simple words, but now I can express more complex ideas using words like substantial and feasible."

In the meantime, the EFL teacher corroborated this observation through classroom interaction notes:

"Students have become more conscious of word choice. They're not just replacing simple words with complex ones; they're learning to use vocabulary that precisely conveys their intended meaning."

Figure One below illustrates the progression of improvement across all five subskills, highlighting both initial and final assessment scores. The graph demonstrates consistent upward trends, with particularly notable gains in pronunciation mastery and discourse management. These improvements were reflected in both mock test performances and classroom interactions, as documented through the teacher observations and student self-reports. Appendix A provides a detailed summary of key improvements, evidence sources, and representative quotes for each subskill.

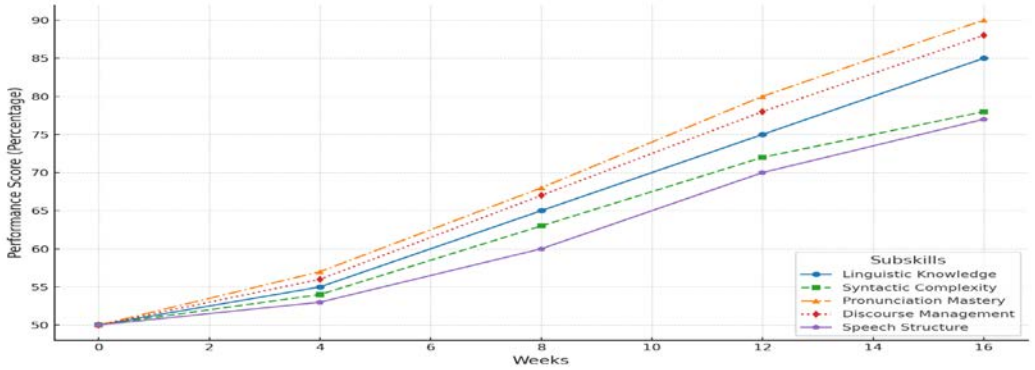


Figure 1. Development of speaking skills over 16-week period of the study

Detailed Analysis by Subskill

Linguistic Knowledge

The implementation of CDA revealed significant improvements in students' linguistic competence. Document analysis of mock test transcripts showed a 40% increase in the use of advanced vocabulary and idiomatic expressions over the 16-week period. As Student 3 reflected:

"The diagnostic feedback helped me identify overused words and phrases. Now I can express myself more precisely. For example, instead of just saying 'important', I can use words like 'crucial', 'essential,' or 'fundamental' depending on the context."

Teacher observation notes corroborated this development, documenting the increased frequency of academic vocabulary usage in classroom discussions. The EFL teacher noted:

"Students have become more conscious of word choice. They're not just replacing simple words with complex ones; they're learning to use vocabulary that precisely conveys their intended meaning."

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Syntactic Knowledge

Analysis of mock test recordings demonstrated notable improvement in syntactic complexity. The frequency of compound and complex sentences increased by 35% from baseline assessments. Student 2 articulated this development:

"Previously, I would say 'Technology is good. It helps people. But it has problems.' Now I can say 'While technology offers numerous benefits to society, its rapid advancement also presents significant challenges that need careful consideration.' "

Pronunciation Mastery

Mock test recordings revealed substantial improvement in pronunciation accuracy, particularly in areas traditionally challenging for Chinese learners. Quantitative analysis of recordings showed a 45% reduction in phonemic errors related to sounds absent in Mandarin Chinese, such as /θ/ and /ð/. Student 4's reflection captured this development:

"The individualized feedback on my pronunciation helped me identify specific sound patterns I was struggling with. For instance, I learned to distinguish between 'think and 'sink' by practicing the tongue position the teacher showed me. Now I feel more confident with these sounds."

Classroom observation notes documented increased student willingness to attempt challenging pronunciations. The EFL teacher observed this change in confidence:

"Initially, students would avoid words containing difficult sounds. Now they actively seek opportunities to practice these pronunciations, showing remarkable improvement, particularly in stress patterns and intonation."

Figure Two illustrates the growing trends of improved pronunciation for students. In particular, confidence, stress patterns, phonemic awareness, and intonation emerged as the most impactful elements.

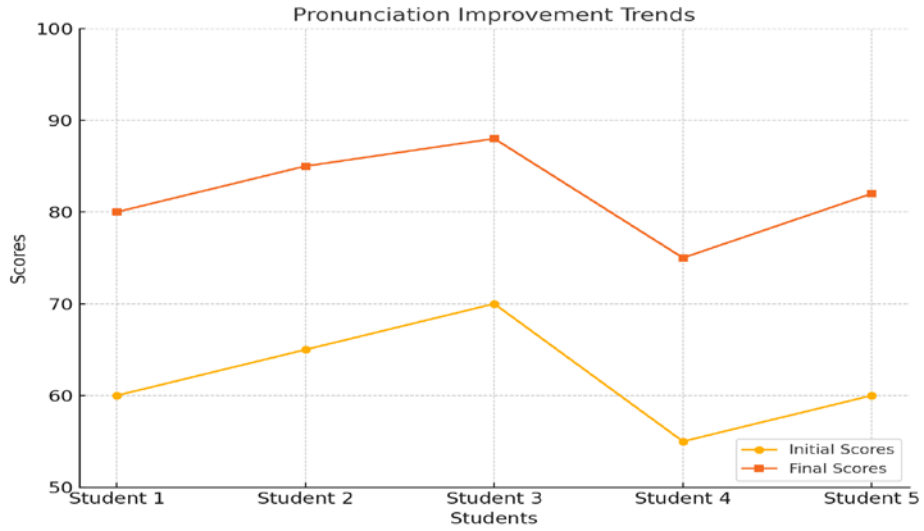


Figure 2. The growing trend of the improved pronunciation

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Discourse Management and Fluency

Analysis of mock test transcripts demonstrated significant enhancement in discourse management capabilities. Students showed a 50% increase in the appropriate use of discourse markers and cohesive devices. Student 5's mock test responses exemplified this improvement:

"In my early notes, I would just list ideas without connection. Now I can say, 'While traditional education has its merits, there are compelling reasons to consider modern alternatives. Firstly... Additionally... Furthermore...' It helps me express my thoughts more clearly."

The teacher's assessment logs noted particular improvement in students' ability to maintain coherence during extended responses. As documented in observation notes:

"Students now demonstrate greater facility in connecting ideas and maintaining topic relevance throughout their responses. Their improved use of discourse markers has enhanced both the coherence and overall fluency of their speech."

Speech Structure Awareness

Document analysis of lesson plans and student performance records revealed systematic improvement in speech organization. Mock test recordings showed that by week 12, all five students consistently incorporated clear introductions, structured arguments, and coherent conclusions in their responses. Student 1 articulated this development:

"The CDA framework taught me to organize my thoughts before speaking. Now I always start with a clear position, support it with two or three main points, and end with a strong conclusion. This structure helps me feel more confident and makes my answers more convincing."

The teacher's reflective journal highlighted this improvement:

"The most striking development has been students' ability to structure their responses. They've moved from random, disconnected thoughts to well-organized arguments with clear progression and logical conclusion."

Data from mock test evaluations showed that student's scores in the 'coherence and cohesion' criterion of the IELTS speaking band descriptors improved by an average of 1.5 bands over the study period. This improvement was particularly evident in Part 2 (long turn) responses, where structured organization is crucial. Student 2 reflected on this progress:

"Before the CDA training, I would panic during the two-minute talk. Now I have a mental template: introduction, key points, examples, and conclusion. This helps me organize my thoughts quickly and speak more confidently."

Cognitive Processes in Engaging with Diagnostic Feedback

Analysis of interview data, classroom observations, and student reflection logs revealed complex patterns in how students processed and implemented diagnostic feedback throughout the 16-week study period. The cognitive engagement with feedback demonstrated a cyclical pattern of reception, processing, and implementation, with each phase building upon previous learning experiences.

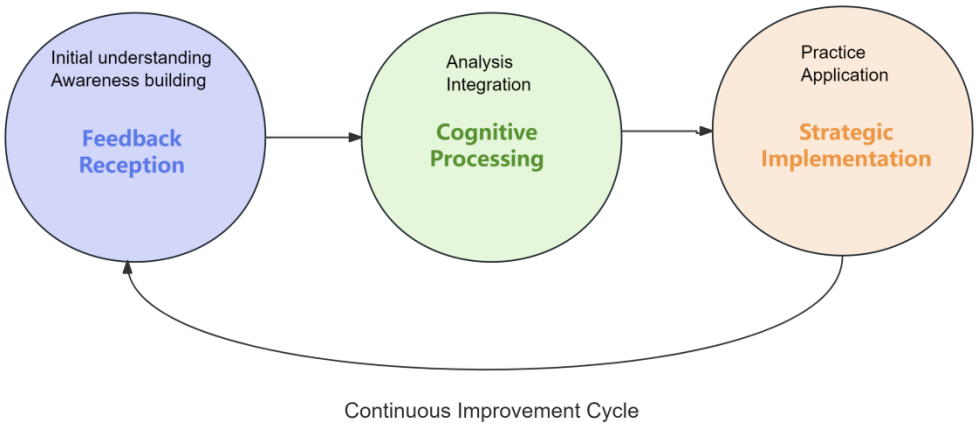


Figure 3. Student cognitive processing of diagnostic feedback

Figure Three showcases the interconnected nature of students' cognitive processing, indicating how feedback reception leads to cognitive analysis and subsequent implementation in a continuous improvement cycle. The diagram captures the recursive nature of learning observed in the study, where implementation experiences generated new insights that influenced how subsequent feedback was received and processed.

Student Engagement Patterns

Interview data revealed three distinct patterns in how students processed diagnostic feedback, each characterized by specific cognitive strategies and implementation behaviors. The first pattern, Immediate Application, was predominantly observed in the early stages of the study period. Students exhibiting this pattern would attempt to implement feedback directly without significant analytical processing. As Student 4 explained:

"Initially, when the teacher pointed out my pronunciation errors, I would just repeat the correct pronunciation immediately without understanding why I made the mistake in the first place."

The second pattern, Reflective Processing, emerged as students developed more sophisticated approaches to feedback engagement. This pattern involved deliberate analysis before implementation attempts. Student 1's reflection exemplified this approach:

"I started keeping a feedback journal where I would write down the teacher's comments and think about why certain aspects of my speaking needed improvement. This helped me understand the underlying patterns in my mistakes."

The third pattern, Integrated Adaptation, represented the most advanced level of feedback engagement. Students demonstrating this pattern showed an ability to synthesize multiple pieces of feedback and adapt them across different speaking contexts. The EFL teacher observed this development:

"By week 12, several students were able to take feedback from one speaking task and apply it creatively to different scenarios, showing a deep understanding of the principles behind the feedback."

Cognitive Processing Strategies

Analysis of classroom observations and interview data revealed specific cognitive strategies students employed when processing diagnostic feedback. Appendix B presents a summary of these strategies and their observed outcomes.

Evolution of Feedback Processing

The current study revealed a clear progression in how students processed and utilized diagnostic feedback over time. During the first four weeks, most students exhibited predominantly surface-level engagement with feedback, focusing on immediate corrections without deeper analysis. Student 2 reflected on this early phase:

"In the beginning, I was just trying to fix whatever the teacher pointed out without really thinking about the bigger picture."

By weeks 8-12, significant shifts in cognitive processing were observed. Students began developing more sophisticated strategies for engaging with feedback, as evidenced by their reflection logs and classroom participation. Student 5 described this transition:

"I started seeing connections between different pieces of feedback. For example, I realized that my pronunciation issues were often related to stress patterns, not just individual sounds."

The final weeks of the study (weeks 13-16) showed the emergence of advanced cognitive processing strategies. Students demonstrated the ability to:

- Anticipate potential areas for improvement before receiving feedback
- Connect feedback across different speaking tasks and contexts
- Develop personalized strategies for implementing feedback effectively

The EFL teacher noted this progression as well:

"The most significant change was in how students approached feedback. They moved from passive reception to active engagement, often initiating discussions about how to apply feedback in different situations."

Impact on Speaking Performance

The evolution in cognitive processing strategies showed a direct correlation with improvements in speaking performance. Analysis of mock test recordings revealed that students who demonstrated more sophisticated feedback processing patterns achieved greater improvements in their speaking scores. As Student 1 noted:

"Once I started really analyzing the feedback instead of just trying to implement it immediately, I saw much bigger improvements in my speaking ability."

Document analysis of teacher feedback logs supported this finding, showing that students who developed advanced cognitive processing strategies required progressively less explicit feedback to achieve improvements in their speaking performance. This suggests that enhanced cognitive processing of diagnostic feedback contributes to greater learner autonomy and more effective self-regulation in speaking skill development.

EFL teacher's Implementation of the CDA Framework

The analysis of teacher implementation data revealed three key dimensions of the CDA framework integration: pedagogical adaptations, implementation challenges, and strategic

responses. Document analysis of lesson plans, teaching logs, and interview transcripts demonstrated systematic development in the EFL teacher's approach throughout the 16-week period.

Pedagogical adaptations

The EFL teacher developed specific strategies to implement the CDA framework effectively in practice. Interview data revealed deliberate modification of instructional approaches:

"I restructured my feedback delivery to align with the five cognitive subskills, ensuring each student received targeted guidance in areas requiring development."

This systematic approach was evidenced in lesson planning documents, which showed explicit alignment between diagnostic outcomes and instructional interventions. The teacher's reflective journal documented the evolution of diagnostic practices:

"Initially, I focused on immediate corrections, but gradually developed more sophisticated diagnostic tools that helped identify patterns in students' cognitive processing of speaking tasks."

This progression was further supported by systematic documentation of student performance patterns and corresponding pedagogical responses.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions

Analysis of teacher interviews and observation data identified three primary implementation challenges:

- Differentiation of Feedback: "Balancing individualized diagnostic feedback with group instruction required careful planning and time management."
- Cultural Considerations: "Adapting feedback delivery to align with Chinese students' cultural preferences while maintaining diagnostic clarity was crucial."
- Resource Constraints: "Developing comprehensive diagnostic profiles within time constraints while maintaining instructional momentum presented ongoing challenges."

The teacher's strategic responses to these challenges demonstrated adaptive expertise, as evidenced in the modified assessment protocols and differentiated feedback mechanisms developed over the study period.

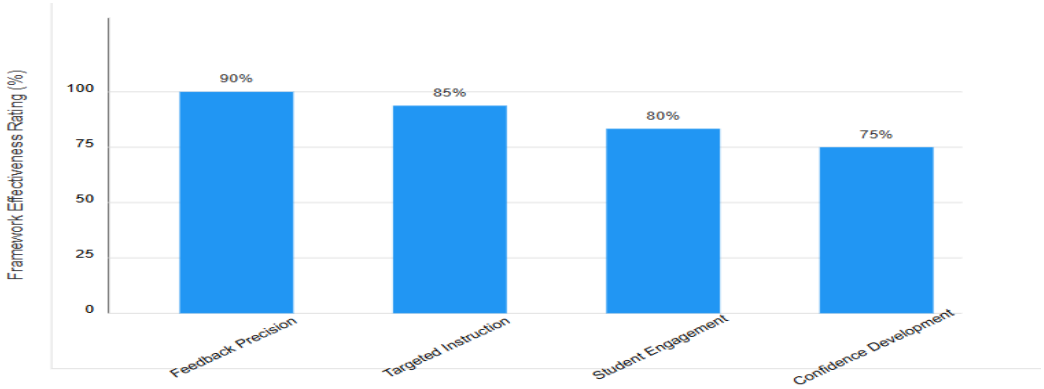


Figure 4. Teacher's perceptions of CDA framework effectiveness

Figure Four illustrates the teacher's evaluation of the CDA framework's effectiveness across key implementation dimensions. The data, derived from structured reflection logs and quantified assessment records, shows particularly strong outcomes in feedback precision (90%) and targeted instruction (85%), with notable gains also observed in student engagement (80%) and confidence development (75%).

Evidence-based Implementation Outcomes

Document analysis revealed systematic improvement in the teacher's diagnostic capabilities, evidenced by increasingly detailed and nuanced feedback records. The teacher noted:

"The framework provided a structured approach to identifying specific cognitive barriers in students' speaking development, enabling more precise instructional interventions."

Classroom observation data supported this finding, showing increased alignment between diagnostic assessments and subsequent teaching strategies. For example, pronunciation feedback evolved from generic correction to targeted analysis of cognitive processing patterns underlying specific pronunciation challenges.

Summary of Progress

Considering all the factors mentioned above, it is safe to say that the implementation of the CDA framework yielded significant improvements across multiple dimensions of speaking skill development. Appendix C presents a comprehensive summary of progress indicators across all five cognitive subskills, supported by multiple data sources.

The findings demonstrate that the CDA framework's implementation facilitated substantial improvements in students' speaking proficiency, particularly in areas traditionally challenging for Chinese EFL learners. The systematic integration of diagnostic assessment with targeted instruction provided a structured pathway for developing critical speaking subskills, addressing a significant gap in traditional EFL classroom practices.

Discussion

This qualitative case study investigated the implementation of a Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment (CDA) framework for developing IELTS speaking skills among Chinese high school EFL learners. The discussion synthesizes findings across three research questions, examining how the framework impacted speaking subskill development, cognitive processing strategies, and pedagogical implementation within the Chinese educational context.

RQ1: Development of Speaking Subskills

The first research question examined how CDA framework implementation impacts specific speaking subskill development among Chinese high school students. The findings revealed substantial improvements across five critical subskills: linguistic knowledge, syntactic complexity, pronunciation mastery, discourse management, and speech structure awareness. Linguistic knowledge showed marked advancement, with students progressing from basic vocabulary usage to sophisticated lexical choices. Students demonstrated increased grammatical accuracy and expanded vocabulary range, replacing generic terms with nuanced alternatives. For instance, learners evolved from using "important" to employing contextually appropriate variations such as "crucial" or "fundamental." This progression directly addresses the research question by demonstrating how systematic diagnostic feedback enables precise identification and

remediation of lexical weaknesses. These findings align with Jang's (2008) emphasis on explicit feedback's role in improving lexical choices. Heidari Vincheh et al. (2024) similarly found that targeted feedback fosters lexical sophistication. The CDA framework's detailed feedback reports encouraged students to systematically address specific weaknesses, ensuring consistent progress beyond what traditional instruction typically achieves.

Syntactic complexity exhibited parallel development, with students transitioning from simple to compound and complex sentence structures. The framework facilitated grammatical understanding through structured scaffolding that identified specific clause structure errors and prompted targeted practice. This finding supports Ellis's (2003) Input-Interaction Hypothesis, which emphasizes meaningful input's importance in promoting syntactic development. The ability to vary sentence types for rhetorical effect proved particularly valuable for IELTS speaking tasks, where sophisticated constructions contribute to higher band scores.

Pronunciation mastery, traditionally challenging for Chinese EFL learners, showed notable progress through systematic intervention. The framework addressed L1 phonological interference by focusing on problematic sounds, improving both phonemic accuracy and stress patterns. Students corrected persistent errors such as /r/ and /l/ confusion, while recordings revealed enhanced intonation patterns contributing to more natural speech production. This finding reinforces Wang and Wright's (2018) assertion that pronunciation difficulties stem from fundamental phonological differences between English and Mandarin. The improvement also aligns with Ma and Chong's (2022) findings that Chinese IELTS candidates strategically prioritize speaking skills due to perceived malleability and potential for rapid improvement. The CDA framework's structured approach appears to validate this perception while providing a systematic methodology for achieving pronunciation gains.

Discourse management and speech structure awareness demonstrated learners' enhanced ability to organize ideas coherently and articulate arguments effectively. Students developed a sophisticated understanding of introduction-body-conclusion formats and adapted responses for various task types. This development supports Mayer's (2014) Cognitive Load Theory, suggesting that clear instructional scaffolding reduces cognitive burden, enabling focus on higher-level organizational strategies.

RQ2:Cognitive Processing Patterns

The second research question explored cognitive processes Chinese EFL learners employ when engaging with diagnostic feedback during IELTS preparation. The findings revealed a developmental trajectory from surface-level feedback processing to sophisticated metacognitive strategies.

Initial engagement patterns showed students focusing on immediate corrections without deeper analysis. Learners repeated corrected phrases but struggled to transfer corrections across contexts. This mirrors Poehner and Wang's (2021) observations regarding initial diagnostic feedback integration stages. However, as the intervention progressed, students adopted increasingly reflective approaches characterized by meta-analytical review and contextual application. The evolution toward sophisticated processing strategies directly answers the research question by demonstrating how learners internalize diagnostic principles. Students progressed from mechanical repetition to analyzing error patterns, understanding root causes, and anticipating similar challenges. This transformation aligns with Zimmerman's (2002) Self-Regulated Learning Theory, highlighting how reflective practices foster autonomy and long-term improvement. The

framework encouraged students to understand error origins, similar to developmental patterns observed in hybrid computerized dynamic assessment studies (Silva Moreira et al., 2024). Feedback sessions prompted analysis of pronunciation and grammatical errors regarding L1 interference or task-specific demands, aligning with Jin and Liu's (2024) emphasis on contextualizing diagnostic feedback within learners' linguistic backgrounds. Advanced processing manifested as students began generalizing feedback principles across tasks, demonstrating what Poehner et al. (2015) term "cognitive modifiability." This higher-order cognitive process indicates genuine internalization of diagnostic principles. Students developed pattern recognition abilities, identifying recurring error types and preemptively addressing them during practice.

Despite progress, initial challenges emerged when transitioning from surface-level to deeper processing. Some students reported difficulty connecting specific feedback to broader patterns, echoing challenges noted in dynamic assessment literature (Poehner & Lantolf, 2022). The CDA framework addressed this through collaborative discussions where peers shared application strategies, fostering collective metacognitive growth consistent with Bakhoda and Shabani's (2019) findings on group-based dynamic assessment effectiveness.

The development of anticipatory error correction strategies represents sophisticated cognitive processing. Learners who mastered these processes reported increased confidence and preparation for varied speaking tasks, reflecting the profound shift from teacher-dependent feedback to self-regulated improvement. This aligns with Sun et al.'s (2023) assertions about dynamic assessment's relationship to learning potential and validates Csapó and Molnár's (2019) findings on metacognitive engagement's importance in diagnostic assessment.

RQ3:Teacher Implementation and Cultural Context

The third research question examined how the Chinese EFL teacher implemented the CDA framework in pedagogical practice and what challenges or modifications emerged. The findings revealed complex navigation between diagnostic assessment principles and cultural educational norms.

The teacher's implementation demonstrated sophisticated cultural calibration in feedback delivery methods. Recognizing students' face-saving preferences, the teacher employed indirect feedback strategies, anonymized error correction, and group discussions to minimize potential embarrassment. This adaptation directly addresses the research question by showing how cultural sensitivity shapes framework implementation without compromising diagnostic clarity. These modifications align with Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions theory emphasizing collectivist values in educational settings. Luo et al.'s (2020) argument that culturally calibrated feedback enhances learner receptivity found validation in increased student engagement when feedback honored face-saving concerns. Zhang (2021) similarly found indirect feedback strategies significantly increase engagement in high-context cultures, supporting the teacher's adaptive approach.

Examination-oriented educational traditions posed substantial implementation challenges. Students initially equated success with high scores rather than skill improvement, reflecting the dominance of summative assessment in Chinese contexts described by Huang et al. (2022). The teacher addressed this by explicitly linking diagnostic tasks to IELTS band score improvements, providing concrete examples of how subskill development translates to test performance. This framing reconciled diagnostic assessment with examination traditions, as Ismail et al. (2022) suggest when aligning formative and summative goals. The framework's structured nature

resonated with students' systematic learning preferences, addressing Tiu et al.'s (2023) findings on Chinese learners' methodological preferences. However, resource constraints emerged, particularly time requirements for individualized feedback with large classes. The teacher prioritized feedback for critical subskills and utilized technology for streamlined delivery, demonstrating pragmatic adaptation suggested by Ahmadi (2018) for scalable diagnostic practices.

Unexpected Outcomes

Beyond anticipated findings, several unexpected outcomes emerged, enriching the understanding of diagnostic assessment's broader impact. Peer feedback mechanisms developed organically as students internalized CDA principles and applied them collaboratively. This phenomenon, initially absent from the instructional design, created shared diagnostic language among learners. Souzandehfar's (2024) findings on diagnostic assessment's social dimensions support this collaborative feedback's role in fostering deeper cognitive engagement.

Substantial confidence increases emerged as an unanticipated byproduct. While not a primary framework focus, enhanced self-efficacy underscores diagnostic feedback's psychological benefits. Nakatsuhara et al. (2017) argue that understanding personal progress fosters self-efficacy and risk-taking willingness. Students reported increased participation in speaking activities both within and beyond classroom contexts, suggesting diagnostic assessment's motivational impact extends beyond skill development. Metacognitive awareness development further highlighted the framework's transformative potential. Through reflective practices, learners demonstrated increased self-regulation, recognizing and addressing weaknesses autonomously. This shift toward autonomous learning validates diagnostic frameworks' role in fostering lifelong language development capabilities.

Summary of Findings

The implementation of the CDA framework comprehensively addressed all three research questions, demonstrating significant enhancement of speaking subskills, promotion of sophisticated cognitive processing strategies, and successful cultural adaptation in pedagogical practice. These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of diagnostic assessment in language education while providing practical insights for implementation in examination-oriented contexts. The framework's success in bridging formative assessment principles with high-stakes test preparation suggests broader applicability for similar educational environments where cultural sensitivity and examination success must coexist.

Implications

The findings of this study yield significant implications for pedagogical practices, policy development, and theoretical understanding of diagnostic assessment in language education. These implications extend beyond the immediate context of IELTS speaking preparation to broader applications in EFL instruction and assessment, offering substantial insights for various stakeholders in language education.

Pedagogical Implications

From a pedagogical perspective, the successful implementation of the CDA framework emphasizes the necessity of integrating diagnostic practices into IELTS preparation courses. Specifically, this study's findings showed notable improvements in cognitive subskills like

linguistic knowledge, syntactic complexity, and pronunciation mastery, underscoring the value of structured feedback tailored to these areas (Jin & Liu, 2024). For example, learners who received targeted pronunciation feedback demonstrated significant reductions in phonemic errors, indicating that diagnostic practices can address specific linguistic challenges effectively.

Teachers should adopt structured approaches to feedback delivery that explicitly align with subskill development. Practical strategies include using audio-visual tools to provide real-time corrective feedback on pronunciation and designing scaffolded speaking tasks to promote syntactic complexity. Moreover, integrating peer feedback sessions—guided by diagnostic rubrics—can enhance learners' ability to analyze and critique performance, as evidenced by the emergence of peer feedback mechanisms in this study. Such sessions not only reinforce diagnostic principles but also foster collaborative learning and shared accountability.

Teacher training programs are strongly recommended to incorporate modules focused on diagnostic assessment implementation, emphasizing strategies for creating diagnostic profiles, addressing large class sizes, and balancing individualized and group feedback. For example, training could include simulation activities where teachers practice delivering diagnostic feedback in diverse classroom settings, ensuring practical applicability (Zhorova et al., 2022).

Policy Recommendations

For policymakers and educational administrators, this study highlights the necessity of robust institutional support for implementing diagnostic assessment frameworks. As Csapó and Molnár (2019) highlight, effective diagnostic assessment requires substantial resource allocation, including dedicated time for teacher training, technology integration, and ongoing professional development. Institutions should prioritize investments in teacher readiness, such as training programs and scalable technologies like automated speech analysis platforms, which can complement teacher-led diagnostics in large classrooms by providing data-driven feedback.

Policies should integrate diagnostic elements into formative and summative systems to ensure continuous learner progress monitoring. For instance, mandating periodic diagnostic assessments during academic terms can generate actionable insights for instructional adjustments and targeted interventions (Ismail et al., 2022). Curriculum developers are highly recommended to embed diagnostic principles into IELTS preparation materials by incorporating features such as built-in diagnostic feedback prompts to guide learners in reflecting on their performance. Additionally, policies should address cultural influences to enhance framework effectiveness. For example, indirect feedback approaches, shown in this study to be effective in collectivist settings like China, should inform culturally responsive diagnostic designs (Cheng et al., 2021). Aligning diagnostic frameworks with cultural norms maximizes learner receptivity and fosters broader engagement.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes significantly to the theoretical understanding of diagnostic assessment by extending Heidari Vincheh et al.'s (2024) framework in the EFL context. Specifically, it highlights how diagnostic feedback fosters iterative cognitive engagement, enabling learners to move from surface-level corrections to reflective, autonomous adaptation. The findings on metacognitive awareness underscore the importance of integrating self-regulated learning theories, such as Zimmerman's (2002), into diagnostic frameworks to support long-term skill development.

The emergence of peer feedback mechanisms adds a social dimension to diagnostic theories, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) principles of collaborative learning. This study demonstrates that learners internalize diagnostic principles through peer interactions, which can amplify cognitive engagement and foster shared responsibility for learning outcomes. However, future frameworks must account for the variability in peer feedback accuracy, emphasizing the need for teacher guidance to scaffold effective peer evaluation.

Cultural dimensions also emerge as critical to the effectiveness of diagnostic frameworks. In collectivist educational settings, group dynamics and indirect feedback approaches were found to significantly enhance learner engagement (Claramita et al., 2022). This underscores the need for diagnostic assessment theories to incorporate cultural adaptations explicitly, ensuring applicability across diverse contexts.

Finally, the study has implications for test developers, particularly those designing high-stakes assessments like IELTS. Incorporating diagnostic rubrics that align with cognitive subskills can enable precise identification of learner strengths and weaknesses while maintaining the reliability and validity of assessments (Nakatsuhara et al., 2017). Such innovations can bridge the gap between testing and instruction, providing actionable insights that benefit both educators and learners.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study aimed to investigate the implementation of a Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment (CDA) framework for enhancing IELTS speaking skills among Chinese high school EFL learners. The study examined how diagnostic feedback influenced learners' cognitive subskill development, their engagement with assessment data, and the cultural factors shaping implementation in the Chinese educational context. The findings revealed significant improvements across five cognitive subskills: linguistic knowledge, syntactic complexity, pronunciation mastery, discourse management, and speech structure awareness. Learners progressed from surface-level engagement with diagnostic feedback to employing sophisticated metacognitive strategies, demonstrating the framework's effectiveness in fostering self-regulated learning. The study also identified culturally specific adaptations, including the integration of traditional Chinese pedagogical values with diagnostic assessment principles, which enhanced learner receptiveness and engagement. This research contributes to the field by extending CDA frameworks to demonstrate how structured diagnostic feedback fosters metacognitive development in EFL contexts. The findings offer practical strategies for implementing culturally responsive diagnostic assessments in Chinese educational settings, with particular relevance for educators and test developers working in high-stakes examination environments. However, the study's small sample size and specific institutional context limit generalizability, pointing to the need for longitudinal research across diverse educational settings to validate these findings and explore the framework's sustained impact and broader applicability.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Comprehensive Analysis of Speaking Subskill Development

Subskill	Key improvements	Evidence sources	Representative quotes
Linguistic Knowledge	Enhanced vocabulary range; Improved grammatical accuracy; Better idiomatic expression use.	Mock test recordings; Classroom observations; Interview data.	"Before, I would just use simple words, but now I can express more complex ideas using words like *substantial* and *feasible*." (Student 3)
Syntactic Knowledge	Increased complex sentence use; Reduced errors in tense/agreement; Better clause coordination.	Mock test recordings; Teacher feedback logs; Student interviews.	"I've learned to combine ideas using *while* and *whereas* instead of just using simple sentences." (Student 2)
Pronunciation Mastery	Improved stress patterns; Better intonation control; Enhanced phonemic accuracy.	Audio recordings; Teacher observations; Student self-reports.	"The targeted feedback helped me realize I was stressing the wrong syllables. Now my pronunciation sounds more natural." (Student 4)
Discourse Management	Better topic development; Improved coherence; Enhanced use of transitions.	Mock test recordings; Class discussions; Interview data.	"Now I can link my ideas smoothly using transitions like *furthermore* and *consequently*." (Student 1)
Speech Structure	Clear introduction/conclusion; Logical argument progression;	Test performances; Lesson plans; Student reflections.	"I always plan my response structure: introduction, main points, and conclusion."

	Better topic organization.		(Student 5)

Appendix B
Cognitive Processing Strategies and Outcomes

Strategy	Description	Examples of implementation	Impact on learning
Meta-analytical review	Systematic analysis of feedback patterns	"I began categorizing feedback based on different aspects of speaking - grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation." (Student 3)	Enhanced ability to identify recurring patterns in speaking performance
Comparative analysis	Connecting new feedback with previous learning	"When I receive feedback now, I compare it with previous comments to see if I'm making progress." (Student 5)	Improved integration of feedback across learning experiences
Contextual application	Adapting feedback to different speaking contexts	Teacher observation notes showing students successfully transferring feedback across different speaking tasks.	Greater flexibility in applying learned skills

Appendix C

Progress Indicators across All Five Cognitive Subskills

Subskill	Observed development patterns	Supporting evidence	Implementation outcomes
Linguistic knowledge	Significant increase in advanced vocabulary range	"Students demonstrated broader lexical choices in spontaneous speech." (Teacher observation notes)	Progressive development in vocabulary sophistication
Syntactic complexity	Notable improvement in sentence structure variety	"I can now express complex ideas using different grammatical patterns." (Student 2)	Enhanced structural sophistication in responses
Pronunciation mastery	Substantial reduction in L1 interference	"Students showed marked improvement in challenging	Improved phonological awareness and control

		phonemic distinctions." (Teacher feedback logs)	
Discourse management	Enhanced use of cohesive devices	"Their responses flow much more naturally now." (Teacher interview)	More coherent extended discourse
Speech structure	Clear improvement in organizational patterns	"My answers have a clear beginning, middle, and end now." (Student 5)	Systematic approach to response organization

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From Teaching English as a Second Language to Teaching English as a Foreign Language: An Autoethnographic Narrative

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Abstract
This auto-ethnographic study presents an account of the first author's journey as an English teacher that covers two phases from the first-person point of view. The journey began in Nigeria, where English is considered a second language, and later continued in Türkiye where it is learned as a foreign one. Using personal memories and documents such as certificates, letters, and reflective journaling, the author retraces key moments that influenced both his teaching journey and his personal development. This work does not seek to offer neat conclusions, but rather to pause, reflect, and pose a question: What becomes of a teacher's identity when he transitions between different cultural and linguistic landscapes? The researcher hopes to open a space for thinking about the ways our environments, students, and histories shape our professional identities and influence our practices. The study matters because it speaks to something many teachers experience but few name—the quiet transformations we undergo as we move across borders, literal and metaphorical. The findings reveal that transitioning from Nigerian English as a Second Language to Turkish English as Foreign Language contexts presents complex challenges, including conflicting language policies, (mis)use translation, excessive emphasis on exams, and limited target language use. Yet alongside the challenges came growth, renewal, and the deepening of a professional self. What emerges is a portrait of a teacher learning to listen more closely, not just to students, but to the silences within, where meaning often awaits.

Keywords: Autoethnography, cross-cultural experience, English language teaching, professional growth, teacher identity

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Introduction

Kachru's (1985) Three Circles of English is a theoretical framework that serves as a useful launchpad for any scholarly discussion of the status of English as a global language vis-à-vis other languages and cultures. According to this model, there are people, cultures, and countries, such as the US and UK, that regard English as their *mother* tongue. They appear to have no practical alternative to English, and for them, it holds the status of a first language (L1). In Kachru's model, this category belongs to the Inner Circle. Kachru (1985) argued that, being the source of the language, the Inner Circle served as the natural custodian of English. They are the law-givers, the norm-creators. On the other hand, there are societies upon which, due to historical circumstances, the English language was imposed and which subsequently adopted it as their second language (L2). Paradoxically, however, people in this category cannot do without English: it is a necessary educational, social, economic, cultural and political tool. Countries formerly colonized by the British Empire, such as India, Kenya and Nigeria fall under what Kachru (1985) calls as the Outer Circle.

In the English as a Second Language context (e.g., Nigeria, where the researcher was born and raised) English is historically woven into nearly every aspect of the people's lives, having been both adopted and adapted with a passion akin to religious sectarianism. English reached parts of what is now Nigeria as early as the sixteenth century, but it was colonial rule in the nineteenth century that cemented its status as the national language used in education, politics, and as a unifying medium in a richly multilingual nation (Danladi, 2013; Ezenwa-Ohaeto & Akujobi, 2013; Justina, 2012; Taiwo, 2009; Zabus, 2007). Some Nigerians have adopted English as a first language, often at the expense of their indigenous tongues, the researcher sees it as his second, a conscious act of loyalty to his heritage and to those who resisted conflating English with civilization Phillipson, 1992). You have a good number of eminent scholars and journalists who took it upon themselves to do everything doable to purify English from local adulteration of all forms and keep it as pristine as the falling snow; conversely, there are the progressive academics and other professionals that dedicated themselves to developing a local variety of Nigerian English. Despite the apparent disagreement between the two camps of the purists (the custodians of the RP or Standard British English) and the progressives, both have subscribed to the inevitability of using English. The more energy each camp exerted in trying to win the general public, the more their opponents felt obliged to debunk their theories and win the ideological battle. The result is that English flourishes either way. No one questions the necessity of using it in the first place. It is the official language, the language of education, the language of the law, the language of politics, and the language of national unity. Perhaps it is this socio-political relevance of the English language in the ESL context that led Kachru (1985) to describe the Outer Circle as the "norm-developers". A term that may refer both to the Outer Circle's ability to develop the language norms transferred from the Inner Circle, and to its potential to generate its own distinct usages, creatively shaping them and passing them on to the Expanding Circle.

In contrast to Nigeria, Türkiye is considered a "norm-dependent" country, given that English is neither its first nor second language. Türkiye falls in the Expanding Circle, which is the third group in Kachru's Three Concentric Circles model of World Englishes (Kachru, 1985). In Expanding Circle countries, English is used as a Foreign Language (EFL) and holds a secondary role. The English speakers in this circle rely on the Inner/Outer Circles for their norms. Like in the other countries in the Expanding Circle, Türkiye values English primarily as a form of global cultural capital rather than as a vital political instrument. Therefore, in Türkiye, the English

language does not enjoy official status and is learned mostly by the younger generations, businesspeople and professionals whose jobs or ambitions are, to varying degrees, global in nature. Thus, EFL practitioners and scholars have a somewhat utilitarian approach to the language: they neither felt the burden to keep it original as it was during the colonial era nor did they see any wisdom in refining it and adapting it to the Turkish setting. In other words, English users in Türkiye are not limited by the so-called Queen's English. Nor are they burdened by the arduous task of creating their unique version of the English language.

The author's journey as an English teacher started in 2009 after graduating from college, where he received a diploma in English Education. Two years later, the researcher enrolled at university to pursue his BA in English language and literature. He taught ESL for eleven years (2009-2020) at different levels of education in Nigeria before coming to the Republic of Türkiye, where he has been teaching EFL for 5 years (2020 to 2025). Fimbal Royal Schools was where the author's teaching career began in the 2009/2010 academic year. It is a group of private schools, nursery, primary, junior and senior secondary, in the metropolis of Kano State, Nigeria. The author started teaching in the junior secondary school (the terminology used there for middle school) and later got promoted to teach at the senior secondary school based on his performance and dedication. Türk Eğitim Derneği (TED) Elazığ Koleji was the first conventional school the author was employed as an EFL teacher in Türkiye in September 2020. This study provides a reflective account of the author's experiences in both countries, Nigeria and Türkiye, with a view to documenting and communicating them to both fellow ELT professionals/researchers and the broader, general audience.

By crafting this autoethnographic note, the author engaged in the act of critical reflection hoping that this research will offer him a rare opportunity to "recreate" his professional self or rather more accurately, participate actively in "creating" his *other* (i.e., professional) self (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992), or, even more importantly, the author partook "in cultural analysis and interpretation" (Chang, 2008, p. 43, as cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2021, p. 199). In other words, by writing this autoethnographic reflection, the author sought to break open the kernel of his personal identity, attempting to access that hidden part of his being that he had long taken for granted throughout his professional life. Wall (2006) captures this interesting fact of doing autoethnography when she aptly remarks that: "We cannot separate ourselves from what we do" (p. 156). It is important to note here that although numerous studies have examined both evident and subtle transformations in teachers' lives as they transition between the Inner, Outer or Expanding Circles, none has specifically addressed these dynamics within the distinct sociolinguistic and educational environments of Nigeria and Türkiye.

The aim of this study aligns with the overall purpose of writing autoethnography which is, as Méndez (2013) puts it, "to recreate the researcher's experience in a reflexive way" (p. 284). Its objective is to reflect on the author's professional journey as an English teacher, beginning in Nigeria's ESL context and continuing in Türkiye's EFL context. The research questions are as follows:

1. What challenges and opportunities arise when an English teacher transitions from an ESL to an EFL teaching context?
2. How does the use or avoidance of translation in English language classrooms affect students' ability to think in the target language and engage critically with texts?
3. How **does the overemphasis on grammar and exams in EFL contexts affect communicative competence and classroom practices?**

4. How can an EFL teacher's role as a cultural mediator influence students' views on language, culture, and identity while promoting critical thinking and reducing stereotypes?

Methodology

The current study is an example of *autoethnography:* a term derived from three Greek words, namely, *auto*, meaning *self*; *ethno*, meaning *people or culture*; and *graphy*, which means *writing*. Autoethnography "refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture" (Ellis, 2004, p. 36). A famous ethnographer, David Hayano was the first person who used it to describe studies in which anthropologists' study "their own" people (Ellis, 2004, p. 38). It is both a theoretical framework and a research methodology as it allows social scientists to explore "selves in relation with others" (Allen, 2017, p.73). As a "genre of academic writing, [autoethnography] draws on and analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author and connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communication practices, traditions, premises, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotions, values, and larger social, cultural, and political issues" (Poulos, 2021, p. 4). "As a toolbox within the qualitative research workshop" (Hayler, 2011, p. 19) autoethnography offers the researcher a rare opportunity to examine a particular aspect of their life critically from their perspectives to gain more insight into the how's and why's of a specific endeavour while at the same time making their private story a public "property." Thus, as Arikan (2015) puts it, "ethnographical research studies try to find answers to researchers' heart-felt questions" (p. 78). On the other hand, autoethnography stresses the need to view the political and sociocultural phenomena through the lens of an individual, through personal narratives and perspectives. "Autoethnography," writes Allen (2017), "recognizes an impossibility of escaping the language game in life and research" (p. 74). Autoethnographers engage in a reflective process in which they continuously assess and adjust their perspectives, personal experiences, and stories within the social and cultural frameworks because as Ellis and Flaherty (1992) rightly state, even "one's sense of self is conditioned by the peculiarities of time, place, and activity" (p. 10).

Data Collection

The data of autoethnography is derived mainly from the author's lived experiences, which as the primary source of autoethnographic data (Cooper & Lilyea, 2021). An autoethnographer can collect data from journal entries, self-reflective notes or from external sources such as governmental documents, certificates, emails, letters and photographs closely related to the experience under exploration. Personal memories, as well as "current observations," are also among the valuable sources from which autoethnographers commonly gather data (Choi, 2017). Sometimes researchers using the autoethnographic method combine their personally lived experiences and externally reported experiences and even scholarly literature related to the topic under investigation. Poulos's (2019) *Accidental Ethnography: An Inquiry Into Family Secrecy* in which the scholar studied "an important communication phenomenon," secrecy in the contemporary American society is a perfect example of this practice (Poulos, 2021, p. 7). In this study, the researcher used this mixed approach to source his data. The data were generated both internally from his memory, current observations, and personal reflection notes, and externally from several documents relevant to his academic and professional journey on his way to becoming an ESL/EFL teacher. In the latter category, the author also added insights drawn from

conversations with his colleagues past and present. This is an effective means of collecting autoethnographic data (Ghyasi, 2024; Perry, 2024).

Data analysis

An autoethnographer has many options when it comes to data analysis. Here are the four major ones, according to Cooper and Lilyea (2021): 1) *General Descriptive Qualitative Research;* 2) *Ethnographic Method;* 3) *Narrative Inquiry* and 4) *Arts-Based Qualitative Research* (p. 201). The researcher's choice in this study is General Descriptive Qualitative Research (GDQR) and it afforded him enough room for qualitative descriptions of his lived experience. Due to its flexibility, GDQR helped him identify and categorize patterns, themes, and provide a straightforward and accurate depiction of what occurred throughout his professional journey without necessarily resorting to intellectualization. However, this does not mean GDQR data analysis completely conceals any clues as to *why* the events in this autoethnography occurred or why the people reacted the way they did. There might be a lot of those clues, but being inclined to offer a descriptive summary of his experience, the author preferred to stay *on* their surface instead of digging deep into them. Providing a plain, comprehensive summary is a distinguishing feature of descriptive qualitative research (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 334).

The author employed data triangulation to enhance the credibility and depth of the study. The author used three primary data sources: personal memories supported by informal conversations with previous and current colleagues, official documents (such as certificates and employment letters) and researcher journaling. Personal memories provided the foundational narrative, while documents were analyzed to validate timelines, professional roles, and institutional affiliations. These documents were not inert as they clarified, confirmed, and could at times, challenge the author's narrative thread.

The process involved was as follows:

1. Narrative thematization: The author laid bare, sifted, and shaped his memories into thematic constellations, revealing moments of rupture, growth, adaptation, and resistance.
2. Documentary dialogue: For each key recollection, the author summoned relevant documents, not merely as proof, but as partners in meaning-making. A certificate, for instance, did not simply confirm a course; it shimmered with the unspoken labor he had endured to attain it.
3. Cross-textual weaving: The researcher placed memories and documents side by side. He noted alignments when they appeared, and when tensions surfaced, he embraced them as meaningful—perhaps exposing the space between what was lived and what was recorded.
4. Interpretive synthesis: Finally, the insights that emerged through this quiet convergence were not just analytical findings, but lived truths and personal history of a teacher's professional odyssey.

In this triangulated approach, no single strand held the whole truth. Instead, meaning emerged through the interplay, like sunlight refracted through three panes of glass, each bending it slightly, each essential to the color it cast. The researcher's overall aim in choosing triangulation was to enhance credibility and reduce the risk of bias inherent in relying on a single perspective.

Findings

Early Teaching Experiences in Nigeria

The researcher started his ESL teaching career in Kano State, Nigeria. As nature dictates it, the beginning of every worthy enterprise is tough. His was not an exception. The researcher's first two years were challenging: He was struggling with classroom management, time management and work stress. This period of the researcher's career was marked by its own uniqueness: dynamic eye-opening experiences and staggering indecision—whether to go on in the teaching profession and make it his career or abandon it for some more lucrative jobs as did some of his friends. However, just like in any other society, in Nigeria white-collar jobs were and still are hard to come by. Therefore, the researcher continued working as an English teacher. The author began his career in multi-ethnic Nigerian classrooms, where all the students shared one thing in common: English. The cultural and linguistic diversity of his students was intriguing. The student population at the schools diverse, reflecting Nigeria's rich cultural diversity. English served as the lingua franca which created a unified medium for instruction and communication. Moreover, most schools had a no-vernacular policy that outlawed speaking any other language apart from English. This policy prohibited the use of any local languages and promoted English immersion.

Against the backdrop of that policy, it was not surprising if *immersion* emerged as the author's preferred method. The immersion technique required students to be continuously surrounded by English in all their academic and social interactions within the school environment. This sustained exposure was intended to develop their linguistic competence in a natural and seamless manner. The immersion approach yielded notable improvements in the students' English proficiency. Moreover, the students developed greater confidence in using English across various contexts, from academic settings to everyday interactions.

Teaching in a linguistically diverse context–such as Nigeria, the researcher encountered several challenges. One significant challenge was addressing the varying degrees of English proficiency among the students. A notable demographic within his classrooms consisted of students who could be arguably be considered as L1 speakers. English functions as their first language (L1) due to their familial linguistic practices at home, where "elite" parents did not use their native languages to "help" their children acquire English from infancy and used it as their primary means of communication. Having been exposed to English from birth, students from homes where English was the sole language of interaction demonstrated native-like fluency. Conversely, there were other students from rural or disadvantaged social backgrounds, who had a minimal exposure to English outside the school premises. It was not uncommon to find students from these two parallel groups learning side by side under the same roof.

Transition Process

Two key motivations drove the researcher's transition from teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to English as a Foreign Language (EFL): his ambition to further his education and his lifelong passion for exploring different cultures.

Firstly, the aspiration to advance his academic qualifications played a significant role. After a rewarding tenure of teaching ESL in Nigeria, the author recognized the importance of continuous professional development and realized that his first degree (BA English) was not enough. Consequently, he sought to pursue a master's degree that would not only deepen his theoretical knowledge and practical skills but also position him more favorably for career advancement. This ambition led him to Türkiye, where he enrolled in a master's program designed to enhance his

expertise and professional competencies. The decision to undertake graduate studies was guided by two main objectives: to advance professionally as an educator equipped with modern methodologies, and to gain extensive knowledge of educational theories. However, as fate would have it, the author bagged his MA in English literature not ELT.

Secondly, the author's love and curiosity about other peoples' cultures, along with the idea of living abroad and engaging with a different culture was another motivation. Teaching EFL in Türkiye presented an unparalleled opportunity to engage with a different linguistic and cultural context. Furthermore, the author's cultural exploration was not merely a personal quest but also a professional endeavor to gain insights into diverse educational landscapes at the international level. Comprehending the cultural peculiarities of language learners in Türkiye facilitated a more effective adaptation of his teaching strategies and made him a better-prepared and more competent EFL teacher. The author had to own up that transitioning from teaching ESL in Nigeria to teaching EFL in Türkiye presented several challenges and necessitated significant adjustments. These challenges encompassed various pedagogical, cultural, and linguistic dimensions, each requiring thoughtful adaptation and resilience from the researcher's side as a teacher.

Challenges

(Mis)use of Translation

Sometimes, a bit of translation in a language classroom could aid learning by saving the teacher's priceless time and facilitating learners' understanding of the concept. But, as with everything, too much translation is bad. In the Nigerian ESL context, translation was minimal, as students used to communicate in English. It was not merely discouraged but explicitly prohibited by many school administrators and educators. Translation, or more broadly the use of any Nigerian local language by an English teacher within the school premises, was considered a taboo by some teachers, and a grave offense by others. However, if we give the matter a second thought, this overzealousness would be understandable if not justifiable. If all subjects are taught in English and social interactions are carried out using English as the medium, what excuse could an English teacher–who should act as a role model by all and sundry–have for using a "vernacular"? That was Nigeria.

On the contrary, in Türkiye, there is a heavy reliance on translation, however, the relevant curricula in effect in Türkiye are action-oriented in line with the tenets introduced by The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Many English teachers primarily act as translators, focusing on direct word-for-word translation rather than promoting fluency and comprehension. This practice can hinder the development of natural language skills. For example, vocabulary lessons often involve translating lists of words rather than using them in context to enhance understanding. If it was a passage for reading comprehension, it would usually be translated into Turkish sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph during the reading activity. The author found this practice extremely challenging for two reasons. First, he did not possess sufficient mastery of the Turkish language and was therefore unable to translate even individual words, let alone entire paragraphs or passages. Second, the process was highly time-consuming. In addition, focusing on translation may reduce the emphasis on developing essential skills such as prediction, inference (understanding implicit meanings) and thinking directly in the target language. It can inhibit students from engaging critically with the text, as they may focus more on the mechanics of translation instead of the content and ideas. Thus, it can impede their ability to think critically about what they are reading.

Over-Emphasis on Grammar

In the Turkish EFL context, the instructional focus diverges sharply from the holistic language approach typical of the Nigerian ESL setting. Here in Türkiye, English grammar is often taught as a detached, self-sufficient linguistic phenomenon, isolated from the practical use of the language. Although the curriculum issued by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (2018) encourages English language teachers to introduce grammar inductively and in an integrated manner, there is a general tendency to prioritize the teaching of grammatical rules and structures—often at the expense of communicative competence. For an educator accustomed to the immersive, integrated language approach of ESL, this shift demanded a re-evaluation of one's professional outlook and teaching strategies. The author realized that he needed to develop techniques to bridge the gap between prescriptive grammar instruction and more dynamic, usage-based methods that promote real language "acquisition." The term *acquisition* appears in quotation marks to acknowledge the ongoing acquisition-versus-learning debate which lies beyond the scope of this study.

Excessive Focus on Exam

Another significant challenge was the pervasive, sometimes overwhelming, emphasis on exam-oriented teaching. The Turkish educational system places substantial weight on standardized testing, influencing classroom practices to become excessively test-centric while making learners and their teachers give little value to communication which is the goal of learning a language. In Nigeria, the author was used to teaching the content of the syllabus paying little attention to the exams except in the case of Senior Secondary Students in year three (SSSIII) who were preparing to take the Senior Secondary Certificate Exam (SSCE) and Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). The Nigerian ESL students were determined to learn (how to use) English in both their academic and social lives. In Turkiye, reverse is the case as most students believe they can do without English in their academic and social lives. In the early years of the author's career in Turkiye he use dto be baffled whenever students asked him to skip "irrelevant" topics and focus on the exam topics. However, that surprise has now disappeared after the author discovered the real status of the English language in the country.

Minimal Use of English

Whether in the classroom or outside the school, a student's success as a foreign language learner can be measured by their success or failure to communicate in the target language. The limited use of English both within and outside the school environment is discouraging. Unlike the ESL context in Nigeria, where English was a common communication medium, in Türkiye, English is rarely spoken, even within the four walls of the classroom. This scarcity of English usage hindered students' opportunities to practice and develop their language competencies. To counteract this, the researcher had to create a classroom environment that maximizes English exposure and motivates his students without contradicting the social realities of an EFL context. Some of the key strategies he has been deploying include using code-mixing and code-switching to accommodate the linguistic reality of bilingualism (as it is not practically easy to make English the exclusive means of instruction in the classrooms), incorporating more English in instructions; encouraging peer-to-peer English conversations, supplementing the syllabus by adding some activities (such as poetry recitation/presentation) and using multimedia resources to simulate an immersive language experience.

Rewards

Professional Growth

Being an L2 speaker of English who also teaches ESL and EFL, one *needs* (or is supposed) to be a melting pot of different cultures to "function" well as an international practitioner. In today's globalized world, intercultural competence is an invaluable professional skill for ESL and EFL teachers as it enables them to engage effectively in culturally diverse classrooms. The author's understanding of the Turkish culture and educational practices has gradually improved. Every day he gained more appreciation of the customs of his students and become a better practitioner. This professional development aided him in choosing the content of his lessons and the methods to be employed. It played a significant role in making him both dynamic and innovative in his day-to-day classroom activities, his relationship with his students and colleagues.

Another professional reward is getting "connected" internationally. Working as an EFL teacher in Türkiye helped the researcher to build a network of professional contacts from around the world. Collaborating with Turkish colleagues and other expatriate teachers afforded the author the opportunity to exchange ideas and best practices. The experience of teaching in an international context is a key indicator of a teacher's accomplishment and an added value on one's resumé. It signifies a dedication to continuous professional growth and a willingness to operate beyond one's comfort zone.

Personal Growth

Just as it helps teachers in their professional lives, cultural awareness and intercultural competence widen EFL practitioners' horizons. Immersing oneself in the Turkish culture, learning Turkish history and traditions, and witnessing an exhilarating lifestyle of one of the world's most magnificent ancient empires enriches the researcher's personal life; it broadens his worldview, too. Whenever the author personally reflects on how certain customs and traditions used to appear to him in his first year as an expatriate teacher in Türkiye and how he has not only become accustomed to them, but also been actively participating in and enjoying the same practices, he feels a great sense of personal accomplishment. Overcoming language barriers, cultural shocks, and misunderstandings rewarded him with a strong sense of independence, self-reliance, and resilience. The author's experiences as an EFL teacher in Türkiye have helped him cultivate an appreciation for multiculturalism; they helped him develop a facet of his personality responsible for artistic sensitivity—that part of one's personality that makes one feel at home with, and even enjoy, the cultural practices of another culture entirely different from one's own.

Role Modelling/Mentoring

It is one of the rarest pleasures of the teaching profession to wake up and find some youngsters trying to model their lives based on yours. The author argued that the actual pleasure comes from two things. The first is the feeling of self-accomplishment when others emulate you. The second is realizing you have, or are helping someone else find, their way in this maze we call life. Saying Türkiye is more developed than Nigeria is pointless; living a happy, meaningful life has little to do with a country's GDP. It is particularly true with the youths, who have very limited exposure in life and migrant teenage students, who are struggling to establish their identities. Sharing his personal stories of overcoming challenges and achieving success has given hope to many "hopeless" adolescent students, both among the Turkish and other nationalities like

Afghanis, Yemenis and Syrians. The author's success story inspired them, and many began actively involving him in their lives, considering him their role model.

Reducing Stereotypes and Prejudice

To some extent, all human beings are racist (Appiah & Gutmann, 1996). The real difference is the point where each one of us stands on the continuum of racism, from the mild or benign beginning to the malignant end. When we employ some concepts of racism to explain or describe people well without derogation, our intention–being harmless–justifies our action. We sound innocent. Discussing and debunking common stereotypes about Africa and Africans is one of the author's achievements. Through the analysis of diverse media representations of Africa, discussing the continent's rich history and achievements, and highlighting modern developments against the background of authentic historical documents, most of his students abandoned their previous stereotypical and prejudiced views of Africans. The teacher also encouraged the students to utilize the strategies of critical thinking to sift the chaff from the grain in this era of (mis)information flood.

Discussion

The author's early teaching experiences in Nigeria highlighted significant challenges related to classroom management, language policy, and socio-economic factors. These challenges are not peculiar to him as many newly-inducted teachers were found to experience disillusionment when they met the reality of teaching profession. Bano, Noreen, and Bashir (2019) found that many beginner-teachers were willing to leave the profession for better paying jobs due to dissatisfaction with the financial benefits. The social realities of limited white-collar job opportunities and the pressure to persist in teaching despite initial doubts highlighted the economic and cultural dimensions shaping teacher motivation and retention in the author's country of origin When the author started his teaching career in 2009, there was no official induction program for the newly inducted teachers in Nigeria (Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria [TRCN], 2018). Some studies such as (Irshad, Ullah, & Shah, 2025) established a correlation between induction program for beginner-teachers and their ability to succeed in classroom management.

The strict no-vernacular policy, which enforced English-only use, reflects a widespread approach in many multilingual contexts. The aim is to maximize English immersion (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009), but such English-only policies have been criticized for marginalizing students' native languages and cultural identities. They also have the potential of hindering meaningful learning and engagement (García & Wei, 2014; Cummins, 2000). The researcher's reliance on immersion techniques emerged as his only practical solution which aligns with the cconventional ELT practices in multi-cultural backgrounds (Ellis, 2015). The diverse proficiency levels of the student population challenged the author to come up with a pedagogical technique to handle the situation. As the author succeed in overcoming the challenge through the use of differentiated instruction, his adaptability increased. Teachers develop their personal identities by overcoming challenges they face in their classrooms (Toköz, 2023).

The researcher's transition from teaching ESL in Nigeria to EFL in Türkiye wasn't just a career move. It was a deep turning point in his professional life. Furthering his education was part of it, as many in this field know too well: if you don't keep learning, you're left behind. However, that wasn't the whole story. There was also something less visible, his lifelong urge to see how other people live, to learn what cannot be found in books, to stand on different soil and have a

first-hand experience of what it means to be an expatriate teacher of a foreign language. That's where things got complicated. The classroom changed. The students changed. And slowly, the teacher changed too. What had once been familiar (lesson planning, code-switching, even small jokes in class) had to be rethought, sometimes painfully. He wasn't just adding degrees or qualifications; he was slowly unlearning parts of himself to make room for new ones. So, this transition speaks not only to professional growth but to the way a teacher's identity bends, stretches, and sometimes breaks in new cultural spaces. It's not always neat. But it's real.

The author didn't set out to explore other cultures because someone told him to. It was something he had always been drawn to, even before he had the words for it. Later, he found out that what he was experiencing had already been written about. Researchers like Varghese et al. (2005) had shown how cross-cultural experiences shape teacher identity. But reading about it is one thing. Living it is something else. When he moved from Nigeria to Türkiye, many things he had taken for granted began to shift. His language, his teaching style, even his understanding of the classroom. He had to adjust, not just professionally but personally. There were mistakes. There was learning. And not all of it was easy. Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) mention resilience. That word fits, but so do others: confusion, hesitation, small moments of doubt. Change didn't come all at once. It came slowly, in pieces, sometimes without him noticing. Johnson and Golombek (2002) describe international mobility as a kind of renewal. That may be true, but so is the struggle to find balance between two systems, two sets of expectations. Some days felt clear. Others didn't. But he kept going. He kept reflecting. He tried to make sense of it all, as Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) suggest teachers must do.

The (mis)use of translation has placed undue value on it within the Turkish EFL context. The researcher often remarked, half-jokingly, that to succeed as an English teacher in Türkiye, one needs Turkish more than English. This approach often leads to a superficial grasp of English. It limits students' ability to think and communicate directly in the target language. After a series of woeful attempts at making English an exclusive language of instruction in his classroom, the researcher realized that he was incapable of conquering a whole system. That was when he began to employ strategic code-mixing and code-switching as pedagogical tools. He started translating the essential English idioms to assist the students in grasping a unique feature of the language. Just as it is undeniably true that English is an idiomatic language, it has been shown that even at the university level, EFL students' poor communicative skills could be associated with their shallow knowledge of the idiomatic expressions that are abundant in the English language (Dokchandra & Boonnoon, 2023). Meanwhile, he continued to emphasize activities that promoted thinking in English by encouraging contextual understanding and paraphrasing techniques, such as immersive reading and writing tasks. In this way, the researcher succeeded in minimizing his students' over-reliance on translation.

As per the researcher, this approach stifles creativity and limits opportunities for students to engage in meaningful, communicative activities. To address this, the researcher adjusted accordingly. Teachers adapt their teaching philosophies based on students' language needs and sociocultural dynamics (Othman & Aljuhaish, 2021). He struggled to find a balance between preparing students for exams and incorporating engaging, communicative activities that fostered authentic language use, reflecting the natural, real-life value of English. The author began designing lessons that aligned with exam requirements while still promoting interactive and practical language skills. He also redesigned his test formats so that, in addition to grammar, lexis,

and structure, all four language skills–reading, writing, speaking, and listening–were incorporated. It has been an arduous, time-consuming task; however, it has proven to be highly rewarding.

When the researcher discovered the undue emphasis that Turkish EFL educators and students put on exams, he began to incorporate all the four language skills in his exams. That was in 2021in the second year of his EFL teaching career in Türkiye, and two years later at the beginning of the 2023/2024 academic year when the Turkish Ministry for National Education (2023) introduced a "new" format of compiling the English language examination in which all of the four skills–reading, writing, speaking and listening–must be tested. The author was thrilled for that was the format he had been using. On many occasions, people described his exam questions as bulky, over-ambitious or hard. Even though he didn't cave in, he had to admit that preparing exam questions that would take into account not only the four skills but also his students' abilities and the yearly scheme of work was not easy. Evaluating the essay sections of EFL high school students is even more challenging. Despite these challenges, the satisfaction of witnessing his students' academic growth outweighed all the stress he endured.

Mohammadi and Yousefi (2019) highlighted differing perceptions between teachers and learners regarding grammar instruction and corrective feedback. Arif et al. (2024) also demonstrated the crucial role of grammar instruction in supporting language acquisition and communicative competence.Their findings emphasized the value of explicit grammar teaching. In contrast, this study revealed that grammar often feels disconnected from real communication and is overly emphasized in the Turkish EFL classroom. This research is in line with Çiçek and Kayaoğlu (2024) who found that excessive focus on grammatical accuracy does not yield the most significant gains in overall proficiency. It, therefore, suggests a need to bridge the gap between form-focused instruction and meaningful language use.

In the beginning, it was hard for the author to increase the use of the target language (TL) in his classrooms, but after some time, he began to deploy a strategic use of code-switching. The researcher witnessed first-hand that total exclusion of L1 does not always support learning, particularly among EFL learners. This practice of pedagogic code-switching proved helpful as it eliminated students' speaking anxiety and introduced them to the reality of bi/multilingualism. Supporting this, Shahidan and Shahrom (2023) found that students often benefited from occasional code-switching, especially in clarifying instructions or complex grammar points.

This study's finding is that the author's exposure to Turkish culture and the unique professional practices in Türkiye's EFL context has facilitated his professional growth. Othman and Aljuhaish (2021) discovered that exposure to diverse cultural and linguistic settings helps teachers acquire a more inclusive professional identity (p. 525), and an EFL practitioner's ability to navigate the cultural milieu is a crucial aspect of their professional identity (Ghyasi, 2024). Teacher personality and identity are not static but evolve through interaction, reflection, and sociocultural experiences (Pishghadam, Golzar, & Miri, 2022). The author argued that this study, too, is an indicator of this professional development because, as Yazan (2019) observed, autoethnographic studies promote professional growth among ESL/EFL teachers. Fraser, Nejadgholi, and Kiritchenko (2021) employ a computational lens using the Stereotype Content Model to map how warmth and competence shape stereotypical beliefs. The scholars demonstrated that presenting anti-stereotype examples can effectively reduce biased perception and prejudices. This resonates with my classroom experience: by sharing my life stories as an international teacher and inviting my Turkish EFL students to open up about what they've heard or read about Africa and Africans, I was able to reduce stereotypes and increase their critical reasoning ability. It

worked like presenting anti-stereotype examples in action, shifting their views through lived, personal connection. Meanwhile, the observed shift toward mentoring and facilitation reflects a broader pedagogical and professional transformations in which EFL teachers embrace empathetic, learner-centered roles in response to changing educational systems. This result reflected Alosaimi's (2023) argument that teacher identity is not fixed but adaptively shaped by external challenges and evolving socio-educational demands. The researcher's role as a mentor to some of his students did not only help the students in question to navigate their lives but also acted a social means that assisted him to adapt to both social and professional realities of his new environment.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic reflection prompted a number of profound questions the researcher had previously been unwilling (or perhaps unprepared) to confront. Two of these questions deserve mention here: 1) Why is he not a native speaker of English? And 2) As a second-language speaker of English who earns a living by teaching the language, what, precisely, is the nature of his professional role? In this sense, the study functioned as a form of personal archaeology, an excavation of the self.

By revealing some aspects of the author's unconscious, it succeeded in doing what a dream does, according to Sigmund Freud (for Freud, the dream is the royal road to the Unconscious, and it is deep inside the Unconscious that humans' wildest desires and fears reside). This study unearthed some of the author's ingrained fears; it revealed the appalling insecurities buried deep in a hidden corner of his psychic cellar and forced him to come face to face with aspects of his cultural Oedipus complex.

As an African, the author knows it as a fact that he was/is–will never be–English, even though he was made "British." This is not because the researcher has dark skin or an L1 other than English. Even those Nigerians who abandoned their ancestral languages and adopted English as their L1 were never—and will never be—English. At its best, their benefit is an exchange in which they gave one and received two halves; at worst, they were duped because they gave charcoal in exchange for snow. The exchange partner departs, and the snow melts. Every single English word they utter betrays the secret they have spent their entire life trying to hide: the fact that they are not English. So, it has nothing to do with the author having an L1, but everything to do with the fact that, for the researcher to be human, he did not have to be English. Being a native speaker of English has been invariably associated with professional complacency (Perry, 2024). For the second question, what this study did, after bringing up the question: *What does a formerly colonized person do when he roams the globe teaching the language of the colonizer?* was more of complicating the issue than proposing any solution to it. This question compelled the researcher to pose more critical yet pertinent inquiries, such as: What are the language ideologies that shape the researcher and his "personhood"? (For the first time in his life, the researcher sought to uncover the covert assumptions that shaped a crucial aspect of his professional identity). Although these ideologies are powerful and prevalent in our "everyday language use," most individuals remain unaware of the language ideologies that influence their personal identities (Yazan, 2019, p. 39). Did the British colonists assist the author when they taught him to speak their tongue? Or did he, in turn, facilitate the growth of their language and culture? The supremacy of the English language is intrinsically linked to the dominance of English culture (Phillipson, 1992; Canagarajah, 1999). Is the author being instrumentalized by powerful cultural forces as an ambassador for an imperialist agenda? He proclaims that he is helping his students become global citizens. But is he?

Or is he merely echoing the so-called civilizing mission claimed by British colonialists? In the introduction to this study, the author expressed pride in being a user and speaker of his mother tongue, unwilling to forsake his ancestors by abandoning their language. However, as the study progressed, his initial confidence completely dissipated. If he could traverse the globe to teach peoples a language and culture different from his own, where did he derive such enormous confidence to assert that he had not forsaken his ancestors? Thus, as the author reflected on his sociocultural background and his personal and professional identities through this autoethnography, he realized that he should not have made such a sweeping claim. Now, he is uncertain whether he remains loyal to his ancestors simply by using the language they once spoke or whether he is merely demonstrating obstinate conservatism, unable to appreciate that language is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The researcher confidently attests that writing autoethnography compels one to engage in a sense-making process (Adams & Ellis, 2022).

The question–who helped whom–continues to weigh on the researcher's psyche, as it applies not only to the colonized–colonizer relationship. The researcher used to believe that by teaching his EFL students the English language, he was helping them participate more fully in worldwide communication because English has become a global lingua franca. Granted, it is. The problem wasn't solved, however: who helps whom? Isn't the researcher perpetuating the imperialist ideology he claims to abhor? To illustrate this point further, consider an Indian EFL teacher and her Saudi students. She teaches them English language skills, which both the students and their parents believe will be useful for academic, professional, and personal growth in the future, as we live in an increasingly worldwide society. She is helping them engage in the broader world. Simultaneously, the students provide her with employment opportunities, often in a more conducive environment than she may find in her home country. Does this example illustrate a typical symbiotic relationship, where two parties (neither of whom is a native speaker of English) gain significant advantages due to the rise of the English language to the status of the world's lingua franca? The same situation applies to the researcher, and this is a disturbing feature of autoethnography. Because writing an "authentic" autoethnography involves exposing one's vulnerable self (Ellis, 2004), it may force one to admit or articulate some bitter truths about oneself, one's identity, or even one's existence. The researcher believes that is precisely what this study has done to him.

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Confidence Challenges in English Language Learning: Student Perceptions

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Abstract

English language learners (ELLs) in higher education face significant challenges from a lack of confidence in their English skills. In the United States, English Language Learners (ELLs) often struggle to achieve their learning objectives because of the insufficiently qualified English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors in their home countries. This qualitative study examined how English language learners (ELLs) in Indiana perceive the impact of non-native English as a second language (ESL) teachers in their home countries on their ability to achieve learning goals in U.S. adult education and college settings. The research involved 18 participants, given a questionnaire under pseudonyms for privacy. An inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, drawing from Krashen's natural order theory of language acquisition and Vygotsky's social development theory. The results revealed that experiences with non-native instructors impacted ELLs ' language proficiency and confidence in Western academic contexts. Recommendations for further research include evaluating language teaching materials, enhancing online practice opportunities, increasing the number of qualified English teachers in non-native regions, and creating social environments that support ELLs in practicing English. The findings revealed that improved language skills not only enhance capabilities but also increase interest in higher education, leading to better job prospects and social change across individual, family, academic, institutional, and societal levels. This study addressed the question: How do English language learners gain the confidence needed to complete higher academic learning? Understanding ELLs' experiences in non-native contexts is crucial for helping them achieve educational goals in the U.S.

Keywords: Adult ESL students, effective ESL instruction, ESL students in higher education, lack of confidence, obstacles faced by English language students, natural order in language acquisition, non-native English instructors, theory of social development

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Introduction

The United States serves as a melting pot for students globally to achieve their academic goals. It welcomes individuals with varying levels of English ability into higher education institutions. Many international students arrive with insufficient English language skills, which can hinder their academic progress in the U.S. educational system (Ahmed, 2019). The problem is that English language learners lack confidence in their English skills while achieving their learning goals in higher education. A range of obstacles, including a lack of confidence, can impede these students' achievement of their educational goals, sometimes leading to incomplete degrees (Ahmed, 2019). This study specifically examined 18 participants to investigate the impact of high-quality ESL instruction on the academic performance of English language learners (ELLs) in higher education. The topic of language learners' confidence is particularly critical, as many ELLs struggle to navigate their college studies due to confidence barriers related to the English language to achieve certain college levels (Kalinowska, 2023). Addressing the confidence challenges they face; ELLs can excel in their academic endeavors.

Literature Review

Confidence levels of English language learners

This study explored the challenges non-native English learners face and their impact on English language learners (ELLs). The literature review highlighted the essential skills ELLs require for effective interaction and discusses various teaching strategies, including the natural order language approach, to enhance learner confidence and proficiency. The position of social learning environments and the theoretical framework guiding these educational strategies are also examined.

Challenges Faced by English Language Learners

Teaching English as a second language (ESL) presents unique challenges, particularly for non-native English educators who may require additional qualifications (Acheampong, 2023; Murtada & Alsuhaibani, 2023). English language learners (ELLs) require linguistic proficiency, confidence, and practical communication skills to navigate their learning environments successfully. This study investigates ELLs' key challenges, and the instructional strategies teachers can employ to foster a more conducive learning environment to enhance confidence levels among ELLs.

ELLs encounter various barriers to effective communication, including ineffective interaction skills, pronunciation difficulties, motivation concerns, limited vocabulary, shyness, and low self-confidence in speaking (Ahmed, 2019; Lao, 2020). If not addressed efficiently, these encounters can substantially hinder their language acquisition process. This can cause "many English as a foreign language students likely to discover that pronunciation hinders their ability to communicate effectively (Alfallah, 2013; as cited in Alshaibani, 2023, p. 3)."

Supportive Learning Environment

Social learning environment is critical for ELLs to incorporate language skills effectively where learners can grow (Acheampong, 2023). Constructing such surroundings facilitates learners' practice of language skills without ridicule, thus enhancing their confidence and participation. Mature teaching approaches create a developing learning environment for ELLs.

Teacher Challenges and Professional Development

The multifaceted challenges educators face in teaching English language learners (ELLs or L1s) and the implications for professional development is an essential capacity of educating English language learners (L1s). Key issues include teaching experiences, content knowledge, and self-confidence can all play crucial roles in student self-confidence in learning. For students to engage in self-confidence and embrace the English language, the adoption of effective instructional strategies must be shaped by various factors that impact educators and their students.

The research identified core challenges teachers face, including classroom anxiety, student anxiety, and anxiety when mispronouncing certain vocabulary, insufficient content knowledge, and low self-confidence in their English-speaking skills (Andriani & Subekti, 2022). Horwitz (2001; as cited in Thrope et al., 2025, p. 3) explains anxiety "a subjective feeling of unease, discomfort, or tension." Such challenges are common among in-service and pre-service teachers, raising the need for dedicated professional development initiatives (Sammaphet & Wanphet, 2013; as cited in Andriani & Subekti, 2022). Alshaibani (2023, p. 2) explains, "obstacles faced by ESL instructors teaching pronunciation in schools included self-confidence, professional development knowledge, and instructional methodologies." Teachers' self-perceptions and lack of classroom readiness often complicate the landscape of English language teaching. Andriani and Subeki (2022, p. 534) reported, "English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers reported a lack of content-related knowledge and a lack of proper professional development in ESP teaching."

Student Engagement

Student engagement and motivation also play a significant role in learning outcomes. Dörnyei (2014; as cited in Derakhshan, 2025 p. 42) explains that "motivation is the main impetus and driving force that initiates and helps sustain second or foreign language (L2) learning". Research indicates that unmotivated students, particularly those struggling with self-confidence, show lower learning efficacy than those with a higher self-efficacy level (Flowedew, 1994; as cited in Zarzycki, 2020). Adopting natural inspiration among ELLs to enhance their learning experiences is crucial to their success. A noteworthy finding from the literature is that students welcome teachers who share analogous accents, as this acquaintance may lead to a more accessible learning environment (Zarzycki, 2020). The difficulties of educating English to non-native speakers necessitate a comprehensive approach that addresses the needs of educators and learners. Therefore, professional development for teachers is vital for overcoming self-perceived limitations that hinder student confidence levels.

Students' Perceptions of English-Speaking Confidence

To overcome linguistic barriers, native-speaking teachers must become confident in their teaching abilities to support language learners (L1s) and enhance their confidence and proficiency. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds often face stereotypes about their language abilities and social status, particularly when their accents reflect their mother tongue and they struggle to achieve the nuances of native-like proficiency in second language acquisition. Social and linguistic environments greatly impact language acquisition. Chu and Lou (2021, p. 27) discuss "mother tongues have a great influence on college students' English composition output, and this influence needs to be solved by better teaching methods than the present one." Learners are often labeled as fitting into a lower academic class due to their accents, which are characteristically influenced by

their mother tongues. This stigma can have a detrimental impact on students' self-esteem, confidence, and willingness to engage in academic settings.

Despite being fluent, the transfer of linguistic rules from their mother tongue often manifests in their speech and writing, rendering them vulnerable to miscommunication (Chu & Lou, 2021). This disconnect not only affects their ability to communicate effectively but also impacts their academic performance and confidence. Research indicates that native-speaking teachers can play a crucial role in bridging the language learning gap. Murtada and Alsuhaibani (2023, p. 697) indicate "83.4% of students agreed that 'pronunciation of English words became better' with native English instructors, while 68.4% supported the non-native English instructors." The use of a common language helps to create a supportive learning environment. Addressing language barriers can help students build confidence, overcome self-doubt, and achieve their goals, particularly in higher education settings, creating a supportive learning atmosphere (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022).

Krashen (1982) introduces the Natural Order Language Approach (NOL). The NOL approach has gained traction among ESL educators as a means to help learners develop conversational skills in a less inhibited manner. The learning strategy emphasizes the importance of engaging in natural conversation without the constant interruption of grammar correction (Febriani et al., 2021). The phase of learner conversation is crucial for building confidence at the early stages of language acquisition. Krashen (1982) further asserts that language learners should focus on simple English and cultivate self-confidence and motivation to achieve higher speaking proficiency (as cited in Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022). Scaffolding lessons through clear and effective language communication enables learners to understand and apply new concepts more effectively (Ghafar & Mohamedamin, 2023).

The theoretical frameworks that underpin these instructional strategies are critical for guiding English language educators. Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory emphasizes the importance of building new knowledge upon existing knowledge, a concept that is particularly relevant for educators seeking to support ELLs in their linguistic journey (as cited in Chauhan, 2023). Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory, including ZPD, also served as the theoretical framework for this study, examining how learners can develop language skills and gain confidence in social interactions (Clark, 2018).

Research Question

How do English language learners gain the confidence needed to complete higher academic learning?

Methodology

This qualitative research study explored the perceptions of English language learners (ELLs) and non-native adult learners regarding the educational obstacles and struggles they encounter while pursuing higher education in Western countries. A basic qualitative research design was employed to investigate the encounters and perceptions of 18 English Language Learner (ELL) students in Indiana across two college settings and one adult learning center setting.

Subsequently, receiving Institutional Review Board approval, contributors were contacted via email to provide informed consent. A convenience sampling method was used for administering the questionnaire (See Appendix A). Participants had to be 18 years or older and had previously learned English in their home countries, with those under 18 or who did not meet

this criterion excluded. Approval was sought from ESL department chairs to recruit participants, who then received clear instructions regarding the consent process, with the option for assistance through a scheduled Zoom call. Participants had two weeks to sign the informed consent and complete the questionnaire (See Appendix A), which could be responded in their native language if needed. Responses not in English were translated using Google Translate. To guarantee privacy, pseudonyms were appointed to participants, and all data remained private while still allowing for valuable insights. A follow-up email was sent if the first response was insufficient. Data were collected through a questionnaire (See Appendix A) with participants who have navigated their educational pathways from non-English speaking countries to U.S. institutions.

Participants

This study was conducted across three adult learning centers or community colleges in Indiana, which collectively enrolled 315 ESL students. A total of 18 participants currently enrolled in ESL courses were selected through convenience sampling. Each contributor provided informed consent preceding data collection (see Appendix G). Inclusion conditions consisted of participants aged 18 years and older who had previously learned English in their home countries and were either enrolled in or intended to enroll in a community college. Participants under 18 and those who did not learn English in their home country were excluded from the study.

Instruments

This study was conducted using a customized 19-question open-ended questionnaire instrument (See Appendix A), developed to address the specific research question and distributed to a sample population to gather information about learners' practices and the effect of educational environments on learning objectives and success. The questionnaire-generated responses supported the research question, which aimed to collect data on students' learning attitudes and interests using open-ended questions rather than a Likert scale (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

Procedures

Three ESL locations in Indiana were employed for this study, providing various perspectives from several counties. The target population consisted of ELLs from three Indiana learning institutes that offer ESL education. Following approval from the American College of Education Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were accessed via email to accept the informed consent form. It is critical to emphasize the importance of mitigating bias in research, as it can skew outcomes and lead to unequal research experiences. If bias remains unchecked, it can limit opportunities for specific groups to engage in fair research practices (Qizi, 2023). The participants' email addresses were acquired through the chairs or directors of the ESL programs. All invitations were sent to participants simultaneously to ensure an equitable response period. The primary focus was on ELLs enrolled in Indiana's three second-language learning institutions that conformed to the study's criteria.

Results

ELLs require support in adult learning centers and Western colleges because of the inadequate English instruction provided in their home countries. Higher learning institutions often see challenges stemming from insufficient English instruction in student's home countries. The shortage of trained ESL teachers and ineffective teaching of their academic aspirations creates

English language learning barriers. The literature review highlighted the necessity for skilled, native-speaking English educators and increased resources for those studying English in their home nations. Addressing this problem can help create a more inclusive environment for students who have struggled with English language education in their native contexts, allowing them to build their confidence levels. One participant said,

> "I have experience in writing research papers in English and have attended several international conferences. Nevertheless, I had to seek assistance from a native speaker and a co-writer to draft a paper. Although I felt prepared to present my research at these conferences, I was extremely anxious during the Q&A session afterward."

The study found that ELLs in the United States consider that education from native speakers improves their English language capabilities. Participants observed that native-speaking English teachers present effective teaching approaches, increasing learner confidence and reducing anxiety. In Addition, another participant shared her encounters from an adult learning center:

> "My English learning experiences in the United States are quite different from those in my country. Here, teachers assist students in grasping the language, assign homework, share important cultural events in the U.S., and allow practice with classmates to enhance their skills. We also have an online course focusing on pronunciation and listening."

Figure 1 illustrates the confidence challenges that ELLs face in their home countries before studying English in the U.S. Participants noted that the lack of native-speaking English teachers and limited opportunities to practice English with native speakers in their home countries were substantial barriers to their educational journeys. The need for more educational material in learners' programs to prepare them for higher education in the U.S. emerged as a significant barrier. These challenges underline the pressing need for increased resources and support for English Language Learners (ELLs) in their home countries to facilitate their academic success in the United States (Murtada & Alsuhaibani, 2023).

Another participant from an adult learning center felt undervalued at work due to language errors. This participant said,

> I took an English language course in Jordan before moving to the U.S. Each student only had two minutes to speak, which felt very limiting. When my company held meetings in English with other countries, I would write down everything I wanted to say and read from it. I was always anxious about being asked questions since I couldn't respond quickly in English. I remember disconnecting from a meeting once due to poor internet, but honestly, I was more overwhelmed by my inability to answer in English.

Tan et al. (2021) reported that the experience of feeling inferior in the workplace can be intense for non-native speakers dealing with speech patterns and pronunciation issues. This can lead non-native speakers to feel excluded and unappreciated, whether at work or among other adult learners and college students.

Table 1. *Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Birth Country	Ethnicity	Home Language	Highest Education	English 2nd 3rd Language	Fluent Language Spoken
1	F	Haiti	Haitian	Creole/French	Some HS	2nd	Creole/French

2	F	Egypt	Middle Eastern	Arabic	Bachelor Degree	2nd	Arabic
3	F	Haiti	Haitian	Creole/French	Some HS	2nd	French
4	F	Mexico	Latino	Spanish	Some HS	2nd	Spanish
5	F	Mexico	Latino	Spanish	Some HS	2nd	Spanish
6	F	Honduras	Latina	Spanish	High School	2nd	Spanish
7	F	China	Chinese	Mandarin	High School	2nd	Mandarin
8	M	Sudan	African American	Arabic	High School	2nd	Arabic
9	F	Mexico	Latino	Spanish	Bachelor's degree	2nd	Spanish
10	F	China	Chinese	Mandarin	Bachelor's degree	2nd	Mandarin
11	M	Democratic Republic of Congo	Tutsi Munyamulenge	Kinyamulenge	Bachelor's Degree	2nd	French, Swahili, kinyamulenge, kinyarwanda, Kirundi, and Lingala.
12	M	USA	Latino	Spanish	High School	2nd	Spanish
13	M	South Korea	Asian	Kireab	PhD	2nd	Korean
14	F	Brazil	Latina	Portuguese	PhD	3rd	Portuguese, Spanish, and English
15	F	Democratic Republic of Congo	Black	Kiswahili	High School	2nd	Kiswahili and Kinyarwanda
16	F	Jordan	White	Arabic	Bachelor's degree	2nd	Arabic
17	F	Korea	Korean	Korean	Bachelor's degree	2nd	Korean
18	F	Russia	Slavic	Russian	Bachelor's degree	2nd	Russian

*Table taken from my dissertation: Student Perceptions of the Impact of Quality English Language Teaching on College Retention

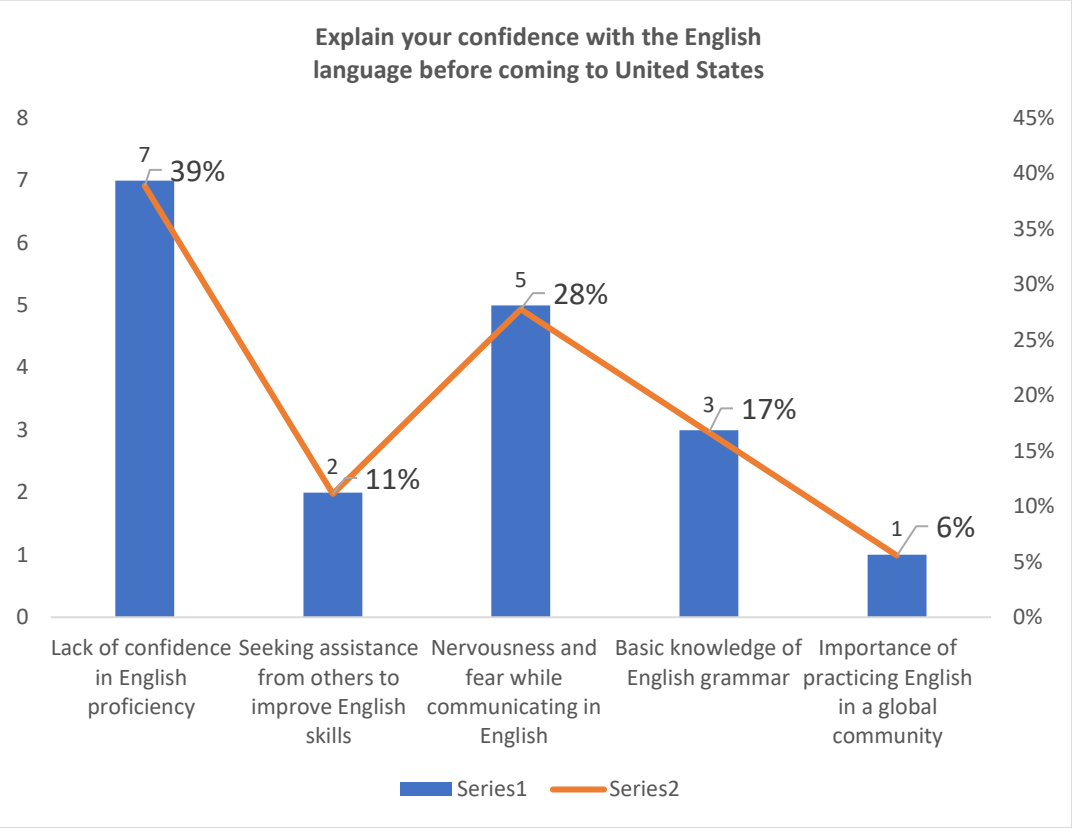


Figure 1. Confidence in English Language Learning.

Figure one is taken from my dissertation: Student Perceptions of the Impact of Quality English Language Teaching on College Retention

Discussion

The problem is that English language learners (ELLs) lack confidence in their English skills while achieving their learning goals in higher education. This qualitative study explored the perceptions of English language learners in Indiana regarding the influence of non-native ESL teachers from their home countries on their academic achievements in U.S. adult education and college programs. The study highlights the significant gap in the literature concerning the effectiveness of both trained and untrained educators in minimizing barriers for ELLs, as well as the academic resources that aid in college readiness. The universal learning model reveals a compelling necessity for effective language education among adult learners. ELLs frequently face considerable challenges in the United States due to a scarcity of capable ESL teachers in their home countries. This study aimed to understand how these students perceived the role of their previous educational experiences in achieving their educational goals while navigating U.S. adult education settings.

Previous research has predominantly focused on the practices of ELLs in the U.S. needing to sufficiently address the impact of prior ESL instruction from non-native instructors. Limited studies have explored the impact of trained versus untrained educators on language acquisition and the availability of effective preparatory materials for college readiness among English language

learners (ELLs). Employing a basic qualitative design, this study employed a convenience sampling approach to collect data from English Language Learners (ELLs) in Indiana (Roque et al., 2023). A total of 18 participants, ages 18 years or older and currently enrolled in adult learning centers, community colleges, or two-year universities, were selected based on their prior ESL education in their home countries. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire (See Appendix A) to assess perceptions of ESL learning and its implications for adult education.

The finding shows that English language instruction in the U.S. was more effective than English language learning in participants' home countries. Findings comprise enhanced language skills, expansion of proficiency, facilitating the interest of higher education, and leading to increased job opportunities. Other findings described encounters in home countries, such as frustration with non-native instructors, inadequate resources, and decreased confidence levels while learning English. Participants expressed that learning from native speakers has a significant advantage in aiding fluency, pronunciation, and overall confidence in language use. Some barriers that the participants reported are low confidence levels and ineffective teaching methods employed by non-native instructors. The findings show that while U.S. instruction benefits non-native speakers, various systemic issues in their home countries risk the quality of their educations. Qualified and experienced teachers play a vital role in fostering an inclusive atmosphere and effectively meeting the needs of ESL students. Enhancing access to native English-speaking educators can significantly boost students' language skills and self-esteem. Additional research should explore the expansion of effective instructional techniques and materials tailored to enhance the academic success of ELLs, to improve learning outcomes. Recommendations to address the identified challenges are resource distribution, teaching material, training for non-native instructors in the participants' home countries, and community support within learning institutions. Inclusive teaching methods and pedagogical training that accommodate different skill levels can help create a nurturing learning atmosphere.

This study's limitations are constrained by its sample size and the contexts in which it was conducted. Further research should include diverse populations and consider longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts. Implications for educational policy and practice leadership should focus on promoting high-quality ESL instruction globally, ensuring that native and non-native speakers are adequately supported to improve English language proficiency among learners. The problem is that English language learners (ELLs) lack confidence in their English skills while achieving their learning goals in higher education.

Conclusion

The Challenges and perceptions of English Language Learners in non-native Instructional contexts examined the experiences of English Language Learners with non-native English instructors in their home countries. They highlighted the resultant implications for their academic pursuits in Western educational institutions. Through the qualitative analysis of participants' responses, the instructional effectiveness and the confidence barriers ELLs face need supportive learning surroundings in their transitional journeys toward higher education.

The globalization of higher education has led to a surge in English proficiency among non-native speakers. ELLs often need to meet significant challenges due to differing instructional quality in their home countries. The study explored students' perceptions of their previous English education and the effect of these practices on their academic readiness and language acquisition in the U.S. A spectrum of practices with non-native English instructors, fluctuating from constructive

engagement to dissatisfaction stemming from insufficient teaching practices. Issues such as poor pronunciation, limited opportunities for language practice, and ineffective material explanations were prevalent. Murtada and Alsuhaibani (2023) highlight a significant lack of qualified English teachers in many regions, poses obstacles to ELLs academic advancement.

The theoretical framework of this study was portrayed from Krashen's (1982) theory of natural order language acquisition and Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory. Krashen advocates for immersive exposure to the target language, emphasizing the necessity of connecting conversations with interested native speakers. Krashen implies that efficient language learning transcends memorization of grammar rules and hinges on deep communication within a encouraging framework. Vygotski's focus on social interactions emphasizes the importance of scaffolding in cognitive development. The findings align with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept, implying that the lack of experienced instructors reduces ELLs' opportunities to connect with experienced English language speakers to develop their language skills effectively. This study illuminates ELLs' challenges in non-native instructional surroundings and their confident speaking skills. Additionally, learners highlight the pressing need for initiatives to minimize language acquisition barriers in home countries, thus empowering ELLs to thrive in higher education settings.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Thank you for being so willing to participate in this questionnaire. Please note that this questionnaire is entirely voluntary, and you are not obligated to answer any questions that you do not wish to. You agree to participate in this questionnaire by answering the questions. You may skip any question that does not pertain to your learning experience. Also, you are welcome to answer any questions in your native language.

Demographics

1. Name _____

2. Gender

   ☐ Male

   ☐ Female

   ☐ Other

   ☐ Prefer not to answer

3. Ethnicity _____
4. Home Language _____
5. Country of Birth _____

6. Highest level of education

   ☐ High School

   ☐ Associate degree

   ☐ Bachelor's degree

   ☐ Master's degree

   ☐ PhD

   ☐ EdD

   ☐ I prefer not to say.

Previous ESL Education outside the United States

7. Is English your first or second language?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. What languages do you speak fluently?
   _____
   _____
   _____

9. Explain your confidence in the English language before coming to the United States.
   _____
   _____

10. How many years of English training did you receive in your home country?

11. Was your English teacher in your home country a native or non-native English speaker?

12. Describe experiences with instructors in ESL institutions in your home country who were not native language speakers.

13. What books or materials did you use when learning English in your school in your country?

Current ESL Education in the United States

14. How long have you been studying in the United States?

15. Describe any obstacles you may have experienced learning English in your home country.

16. Is there a shortage of qualified English teachers in your home country? If so, how has this affected your academic progress in the United States?

17. How do English learning experiences in the United States differ from your previous English language learning experiences in your home country?

18. In what ways do you believe that your English language learning experiences in your home country and the United States contribute to your ability to succeed in your college degree program?

19. Give an example of how improving your English proficiency has positively impacted your confidence in your English studies.

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The Effect of Professional Licensing on English Language Teaching Practices and Teacher Motivation in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract
This study investigates the effect of professional licensing on English language teaching practices and teacher motivation in Saudi Arabia. The main aim is to examine whether licensing requirements influence classroom strategies and educators' enthusiasm toward teaching. The central research questions explore how licensing impacts teaching performance and motivation, and what implications this has for job satisfaction among English language teachers. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 1,084 English language teachers across Saudi Arabia. In the second phase, in-depth interviews with ten teachers were conducted to enrich and explain the survey findings. Results revealed a generally negative perception of professional licensing, with most teachers reporting minimal impact on their teaching practices and motivation. Only teachers aged 41–50 showed a statistically significant positive response. Financial penalties linked to licensing were found to reduce intrinsic motivation. The study highlights a misalignment between the intended purpose of licensing and teachers' perceptions of its value. It recommends decoupling licensing from salary-related consequences, enhancing communication about its benefits, offering targeted professional development, and providing more frequent and flexible assessments. These steps may foster a more positive attitude toward licensing and improve its effectiveness in supporting educational quality.

Keywords: Educational policy, English language teaching, pedagogical approaches, professional licensing, Saudi context, teacher motivation

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Introduction

The teaching of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia is essential for advancing both social and economic development (Al Mahmud & Khan, 2023; Saqlain et al., 2013). As English continues to dominate as a global medium for communication, education, and business, improving English proficiency among Saudi students is considered a national priority (Al Mahmud, 2023). In response, educational authorities have introduced reforms, including professional licensing for teachers, to improve teaching quality and promote accountability.

Professional licensing has been widely adopted across multiple professions, including medicine, engineering, and education (Al-Suwailem, 2002; Bajammal et al., 2008; Barzanji, 2024). However, despite its growing implementation in the education sector, there is limited empirical research investigating how licensing influences the actual teaching practices and motivational levels of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia. Although international studies (e.g., Larsen, 2013; Ghamrawi et al., 2023) have explored licensing in broader contexts, the specific implications for English language teaching in the Saudi educational system remain underexamined.

This research gap is especially important given that teacher motivation and pedagogical effectiveness are central to successful language education. There is a need to understand whether professional licensing enhances or hinders these elements in practice. Therefore, this study aims to explore how professional licensing affects English language teachers' instructional practices and motivation, offering insights that can inform policy reforms and improve educational outcomes in Saudi Arabia.

This research seeks to provide important insights into how professional licensing affects English language teaching (ELT) practices and teacher motivation in Saudi Arabia. The results could contribute to the current literature on the topic. Furthermore, the results may guide Saudi policymakers and educational institutions in devising strategies to improve professional licensing systems and boost teacher motivation.

This study explores the correlation between professional licensing and changes in ELT practices in Saudi Arabia, evaluate teachers' perspectives on how professional licensing influences their teaching methods, investigate the relationship between professional licensing and teacher motivation in ELT, and examine the effect of professional licensing on teachers' motivation and job satisfaction.

1. How does professional licensing impact English language teachers' teaching practice?
2. How does professional licensing impact their motivation?
3. What are the implications of professional licensing on teacher motivation and job satisfaction in Saudi Arabia?

Literature Review

Professional Licensing

Teachers require a teaching license to work legally in a specific area (Keller et al., 2016; Toktamysov et al., 2021). They can obtain this license by meeting educational and training requirements. Those who do not meet these requirements cannot legally practice (Klee, 2013). According to Wiseman et al. (2017), while issues such as teacher salaries and assessments have received considerable attention, the educational establishment has historically overlooked teacher preparation and licensing needs. It largely assumes that licensure is a critical and effective system for ensuring high-quality teachers (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1999). Palmquist (2013) highlighted the

importance of licensure by noting its significant impact when integrated into the civil engineering curriculum, underscoring its value for engineering students. Khan and Ahmad (2021) explained that teacher licensing typically follows one of two models: the university affiliation model or the independent authority model. In the university model, the university sets all standards and procedures for teacher certification. In contrast, the independent authority model has an external body, such as the Ontario College of Teachers, establishing the standards and procedures.

Professional Licensing and English Language Teaching

Every state in the United States provides its own unique version of either an initial certification or an additional certification (such as an endorsement or infusion) for English language teachers (Reeves, 2010). Gras and Kitson (2021) conducted a study in the United States, collecting data from state policies by sending questionnaires to 51 teacher certification boards. They investigated whether state policies include initial or add-on English as a Second Language (ESL) certification, offer a test-out option, mandate specific credit hours, and adhere to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) coursework standards. The findings showed a trend toward less demanding additional certification routes, with numerous states either ending initial certification requirements or permitting teachers to skip coursework through testing.

Additionally, few state policies align with TESOL guidelines, leading to a disconnect between current policies and evidence-based best practices in ESL teacher education, especially in the linguistic and cultural dimensions of learning a second language. Larsen (2013) conducted a study in the U.S. context, revealing that stricter licensing laws might cause some highly qualified new teachers to leave the profession. However, among teachers who remain in the profession for several years, stricter licensing tends to improve overall teacher quality at most levels. Student test scores also tend to be higher with stricter licensing, especially for top-performing students.

Professional Licensing in the Middle East

In the Qatari context, Ghamrawi et al.'s (2023) study unveiled a nuanced interplay of perspectives, where teachers appreciated clear licensure protocols and potential advantages for educational quality. Nonetheless, there was still a gap in recognizing how these protocols directly influenced their own professional development. Abdallah and Musah (2021) conducted a research study in the UAE context, exploring the influence of the licensing program on teachers' professional skills. They assessed the self-rated competencies of teachers from various UAE schools regarding licensing using reliable tests and statistical methods. Teachers rated their social skills highly but gave significantly lower ratings to their professional skills and growth. There was a notable correlation between test results and teachers' experience, but no discernible connection between assessment quality and factors such as gender or age.

Alqahtani (2018) examined ELT and educators in Saudi Arabia since the inception of English instruction in schools in the 1970s. He scrutinized ELT policies throughout different periods, encompassing Ministry of Education directives from 1970 to 2001 and 2000 to 2014, and the new ELT framework from 2014 to 2020. Al-Seghayer (2011) observed that determining the precise initiation date of ELT in Saudi Arabia is complex; however, most scholars concur that it formally commenced in 1928, a few years after the establishment of the Directorate of Education in 1923. Althubaiti and Alqurashi (2022) highlighted various approaches utilized in teaching English as a foreign language. Among the approaches they mentioned are the teacher-centered approach and the student-centered approach. More recently, Alasmari (2024) has undertaken a

research study with 23 new graduate teachers in the Saudi Arabian context. The findings of this study indicate that the novice teachers hold a negative attitude towards professional licensure exams.

Professional Licensing and Teacher Motivation

Alhamad (2018) conducted qualitative research involving novice teachers and found that challenges these teachers faced impeded their professional development. Notably, participants highlighted difficulties in handling students with low English proficiency and addressing negative attitudes toward learning English. Additionally, the author identified other significant challenges, including adapting teaching methods, establishing student-centered approaches, managing student behavior, planning courses, addressing individual differences, and communicating with parents.

Elyas and Al Grigri (2014) identified further challenges for English language teachers, such as the lack of development programs and in-service training, inadequacies in existing training programs, low student motivation, reliance on traditional teaching methods, limited use of teaching aids and technology, insufficient school resources, and scarcity of language laboratories.

Alhujaylan (2019) suggested that employing Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) could lead to more rapid improvement in students' writing skills compared to traditional methods. Bahanshal (2015) conducted a study involving Saudi high school students learning English and found that they tended to utilize specific strategies, such as inferring word meanings from context, consulting dictionaries, and memorizing new vocabulary, with greater frequency, often without conscious awareness. Conversely, they employed strategies such as note-taking and seeking assistance from others less frequently.

In Saudi Arabia, various organizations oversee professional licensing standards across fields such as engineering, medicine, and education (Al-Suwailem, 2002; Bajammal et al., 2008; Barzanji, 2024). Alhazmi et al.'s (2022) study demonstrated that participation in professional development programs significantly improved teachers' knowledge and skills. Furthermore, it indicated a moderate increase in awareness regarding specific practices among program participants. Hameedadin and Hill's (2024) comparative study highlighted a shortage of career development opportunities both at the college level and during in-service training in Saudi Arabia. The authors also noted the need for a standardized teacher evaluation system that includes constructive feedback and reflection. Teachers expressed negative sentiments about the current licensing program.

Methods

For this study, the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to collect the quantitative data to analyze the research problem through surveys and then use qualitative data to interpret the results (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

First, a structured questionnaire was distributed among English language teachers to capture their perceptions of professional licensing requirements and the effect on their teaching practices and motivation. There are several reasons for using surveys. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) described surveys as a cost-effective way to collect data from people spread out over a large area. Surveys are also useful in exploring people's opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. Second, I conducted interviews with the teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with professional licensing and its impact on their professional lives.

Participants

For the quantitative component, a structured questionnaire was distributed to 1,084 English language teachers across various regions of Saudi Arabia. The participants represented a wide range of educational qualifications and teaching experience levels, spanning from 1 year to over 31 years. A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed to ensure timely access to a large and geographically diverse group of teachers. This method was chosen due to its practicality in reaching participants through professional networks and online platforms, particularly within the time and resource constraints of the study. Although convenience sampling may limit generalizability, it was suitable for this exploratory research given the scale of participant involvement and the logistical challenges of conducting a nationwide study.

For the qualitative phase, purposeful sampling was used to select ten in-service English language teachers (five men and five women) for in-depth interviews. This method was appropriate for capturing rich, detailed insights from individuals with direct experience of the professional licensing process. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to select participants who varied in gender, experience, and educational background, ensuring a balanced and diverse perspective on the issues under investigation.

Procedures

A structured questionnaire was administered to 1,084 English language teachers across Saudi Arabia to assess their perceptions of professional licensing and its effects on teaching practices and motivation. The questionnaire comprised 35 Likert-scale items and included demographic questions covering age, gender, and years of teaching experience. Participants received a detailed invitation letter explaining the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. To ensure wide accessibility, the survey link was distributed via WhatsApp, and data collection occurred during the winter of 2024.

Following the survey, qualitative data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 purposively selected teachers (five men and five women). The interviews explored their understanding of the licensing process, its impact on their pedagogical practices and motivation, and their recommendations for improving the system. Each interview was audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed to identify key themes. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a nuanced understanding of the effects of professional licensing, informing actionable recommendations for policy improvement.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Categorical data, such as age, gender, and work experience, were furnished in tables and bar graphs. Numerical continuous data, such as the sum of the survey results, were summarized using mean and standard deviations and presented in a box and whisker plot. For the qualitative component, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was used to facilitate the coding process and to create categories. Five main themes emerged: (a) understanding and perceptions of the professional licensing process, (b) impact on pedagogical approaches, (c) effect on teacher motivation, (d) correlation between teacher motivation and professional licensing, and (e) recommendations for enhancing professional licensing influence.

Sample Characteristics

A total of 1,084 English language teachers participated in the study. A scale consisting of 35 statements was used to quantify the effect of professional licensing on ELT practices and teacher motivation in Saudi Arabia.

Results

Quantitative Findings

The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 (95% CI: 0.78–0.89). The overall mean teaching score for the participating teachers was 2.53, indicating unfavorable teaching practices and motivation because it fell below the neutral cutoff point of 3.00. The sample consisted of 1,160 male teachers (64.3%) and 644 female teachers (35.7%). In terms of age distribution, 128 participants (7.1%) were aged between 20 and 30 years, 692 (38.4%) were aged between 31 and 40 years, 832 (46.1%) were aged between 41 and 50 years, and 152 (8.4%) were aged between 51 and 60 years.

Regarding work experience, 124 teachers (6.9%) reported having 1–5 years of experience, 248 (13.7%) had 6–10 years, 540 (29.9%) had 11–15 years, 420 (23.3%) had 16–20 years, 364 (20.2%) had 21–25 years, 92 (5.1%) had 26–30 years, and 16 (0.9%) had over 31 years of experience.

Table1. *Baseline Demographics of the Study Participants*

Factor	Male teachers Mean. *SD*	Female teachers Mean. *SD*	*T* test value	*P* value
Count	1,160 (64.3%)	644 (35.7%)		
Age 20–30 31–40 41–50 51–60	52 268 280 20	76 424 552 132	$X^2 = 69.18$ (df = 3)	< 0.001
Work experience 1–5 years 6–10 years 11–15 years 16–20 years 21–25 years 26–30 years 31 years and more	68 168 304 316 216 72 16	56 80 236 104 148 20 0	$X^2 = 63.67$ (df = 6)	< 0.001
Certification as a professional is crucial for English language instructors in Saudi Arabia.	1.3	1.3	5.75	< 0.001
Setting for the license as a professional is essential for the optimal functioning of individuals in the workplace.	2.71	2.23	8.32	< 0.001
Professional licensing is a crucial element in augmenting the efficacy of the classroom environment.	2.72	2.01	11.62	< 0.001
The acquisition of professional accreditation has significantly enhanced my pedagogical approach.	2.83	2.16	10.91	< 0.001

Professional licensing has increased my teaching motivation and commitment to the teaching profession.	2.64	1.98	10.83	< 0.001
Professional licensing has enhanced my professional development.	2.64	1.99	10.72	< 0.001
Possessing a professional license has bolstered my self-assurance as an English language instructor.	2.81	2.39	6.95	< 0.001
Professional licensing has enhanced my capacity for self- evaluation with regard to my teaching abilities.	2.85	2.41	7.01	< 0.001
Teachers who possess professional licensing exhibit enhanced efficacy in their instructional practices	2.82	2.36	7.54	< 0.001
The existing professional licensing system in Saudi Arabia satisfies my requirements.	2.63	2.11	8.62	< 0.001
Maintaining a professional license has enabled me to remain current on the most recent teaching trends.	2.81	2.31	7.61	< 0.001
I agree that professional licensing should be linked to the annual stipend.	1.14	1.43	-7.42	< 0.001
It is reasonable for the Ministry of Education to use the results of the professional license as a measure of competitiveness.	2.08	2.42	-5.79	< 0.001
Total Perceptions of Professional Licensing	2.57	2.18	8.71	< 0.001
By participating in professional development, an educator remains current on the most recent trends in the field of education.	2.68	2.31	5.69	< 0.001
Professional licensing maintains teachers informed about the latest pedagogical approaches and practices that are critical for the holistic development of students and the success of the education.	2.73	2.33	8.34	< 0.001
Professional licensing maintains educators' interest in acquiring new knowledge and enhancing their pedagogical skills.	2.80	2.37	6.75	< 0.001
Professional development aids in the enhancement of educators' disposition, expertise, comprehension, and capabilities.	2.96	2.05	7.20	< 0.001
Professional development positively impacts educators' pedagogical abilities.	2.88	2.45	6.52	< 0.001
Professional licensing improves teachers' classroom management abilities.	2.68	2.34	5.39	< 0.001
Professional development facilitates the efficient implementation of curricula in the classroom.	2.75	2.42	5.14	< 0.001
Professional licensing provides the self-assurance necessary to confront novel	2.69	2.40	4.76	< 0.001

obstacles that may arise during teaching and learning activities.				
Professional licensing enhances the assessment and evaluation methods that educators use.	2.61	2.54	1.18	0.235
Total Professional Development Needs	2.73	2.38	6.74	< 0.001
Professional licensing has propelled me to teach English language effectively.	2.62	1.98	10.16	< 0.001
The professional licensing program has instilled in me a sense of pride and accomplishment in my teaching profession.	2.67	2.12	7.33	< 0.001
The challenges associated with professional licensing have diminished my enthusiasm for teaching English language.	2.81	2.46	5.56	< 0.001
The rewards and benefits associated with professional licensing have bolstered my drive to excel in teaching English language.	2.74	2.34	6.34	< 0.001
The professional license has served as a guide to remind me of my duties toward my job.	2.70	2.47	3.55	< 0.001
The professional licensing process has opened doors for me to get specialized in my teaching practices.	2.86	2.11	10.23	< 0.001
The professional licensing program has encouraged me to seek out ways to stay innovative and relevant in my teaching practices.	2.71	2.16	8.44	< 0.001
Professional licensing has contributed to my sense of belonging within the teaching profession.	2.70	2.08	9.46	< 0.001
Overall, professional licensing has had a positive impact on my motivation as an English language teacher.	2.71	2.11	9.21	< 0.001
The annual stipend is my only reason for taking the professional license.	4.43	4.56	-4.27	< 0.001
I will not prepare myself for the professional license test if it is not linked to the annual stipend	4.16	4.26	-3.66	< 0.001
Because I don't want to lose my annual stipend, I am motivated to get my professional license	4.71	4.82	-4.62	< 0.001
It is fair to link promotion to a higher position with the marks on the professional license test. For example, supervisor position, school principal position, etc.	2.06	2.27	-3.66	< 0.001
Total Teacher Motivation	3.07	2.76	7.54	< 0.001

Inferential Statistics

To investigate the effect of teacher-related background factors—namely gender, experience, and age—on professional licensing in ELT practices and teacher motivation, I conducted Poisson generalized linear regression analysis and summed and modeled the total scores from the survey responses. Table 2 presents the results. Among the factors examined, I found only the age group 41–50 years to have a statistically significant association with an increase in professional licensing in ELT practices and teacher motivation. The incidence rate ratio (IRR) for this age group was 1.70, indicating a 70% increase in teaching practice and motivation scores compared to younger teachers under the age of 30 years ($p = 0.043$).

Table 2. *Estimates for the Effect of Background Demographic Factors on Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Licensing*

Factor	IRR	95% CI RR	Estimate	*SE*	*T* value	*P* value
Gender: female	2.00	0.50 to 7.99	0.69	0.701	0.779	0.377
Age: 31–40 years	1.3	0.153 to 2.93	0.269	0.342	0.619	0.431
Age: 41–50 years	1.70	0.12 to 2.78	0.549	0.293	3.49	0.043
Age: 51–60 years	1.47	011 to 2.35	0.389	0.260	2.24	0.134
Work experience: 6–10 years	0.63	0.129 to 2.55	−0.459	0.763	0.340	0.560
Work experience: 11–15 years	0.589	0.57 to 2.1	0.639	0.793	0.446	0.504
Work experience: 16–20 years	0.528	0.144 to 2.7	0.558	0.761	0.700	0.403
Work experience: 21–25 years	0.573	0.231 to 4.73	0.472	0.748	0.537	0.573
Work experience: 26–30 years	0.397	0.067 to 2.55	0.050	0.773	0.397	0.563
Work experience: 31+ years	1.05	0.47 to 3.54	0.053	0.053	0437	0.324

Note: IRR = incidence rate ratio; CI = confidence interval; *SE* = standard error

Qualitative Findings

Ten in-service teachers (five men and five women) were selected to participate in the study. In the interview, they were asked open-ended questions, and their responses were recorded and transcribed. After the transcripts were read thrice, codes and themes were generated from the interview material. The following five main themes emerged from the interviews: (a) understanding and perceptions of the professional licensing process, (b) impact on pedagogical approaches, (c) effect on teacher motivation, (d) correlation between teacher motivation and professional licensing, and (e) recommendations for enhancing the influence of professional licensing.

Regarding participants' understanding of the professional licensing process in Saudi Arabia, they all knew about the license and the process of getting it. Ali stated, "I know how to get the professional license. I also know all the requirements for this process." However, most of the participants were unhappy with the license and process. I was curious to know about the effects of professional licensing on their pedagogical approaches. Many of the participants stated that professional licensing had no effect on their teaching practice. Only two said that they benefited from the preparation process for the professional license. They said they had implemented different strategies and approaches in their classes because of the licensing process. Faisal stated, "When I was preparing for the professional licensing, I was learning new strategies and approaches. Later, I used those strategies in my classes."

The impact of professional licensing on participants' motivation was also studied. They had mixed opinions about it. While some mentioned that they had been motivated to get the professional license just for the sake keeping their annual salary stipend, others said that they were not much interested in getting the license and obtained it only because it was compulsory for them

to get it. One of the participants stated, "If the professional license is not obligatory, I will not think of getting it. Also, if it is not linked with the annual salary stipend, I will not even think about it."

Further, the participants were asked about their views of the correlation between teacher motivation and professional licensing. All of them mentioned that the only negative motivation was making the professional license mandatory by linking it with their annual stipends.

The final part of the study was interesting. The participants were asked for their recommendations on ways to enhance the influence of professional licensing on teachers' motivation in Saudi Arabia. Most responded that getting the professional license should be optional. Amani stated, "I think [the] professional licensing should be optional." They further stated that the Ministry of Education should provide a specific curriculum to cover testing for the professional license. They stated that the ministry should conduct the test monthly. They also complained that linking the professional license with the annual stipend was not fair and suggested that the license should have no connection to the stipend. One of the participants stated, "The Ministry of Education should not link the professional licensing with the salary stipend. They should keep it separate. They should give bonuses instead."

Discussion

This study investigated the effect of professional licensing on ELT practices and teacher motivation in Saudi Arabia. The first research question was "how does professional licensing impact English language teachers' practice"? Professional licensing has been used by various organizations (Webster, 2020). Klee (2013) argued that a prospective practitioner could obtain a license by satisfying a list of education and training requirements. The results of this study show that all participants knew what professional licensing was and how to fulfill the requirements to obtain it. However, some participants were unhappy with the requirements and procedures for getting the license. This finding supports Larsen's (2013) view that stricter licensing laws might cause some highly qualified new teachers to leave the profession. Van Cleef (2022) argue in favor of removing unnecessary barriers into the professional teaching. It is also noteworthy that English language teachers refused to abandon their traditional methods. Even after getting their professional license, they did not change their teaching practices. In other words, the license had no effect on their teaching. However, the literature indicates that professional development influences teaching. For example, Alhazmi et al. (2022) showed that professional development programs significantly enhanced teachers' knowledge and skills. Abdallah and Musah (2021) examined the impact of the licensing program on the professional skills of teachers in the UAE and found that the participants' social skills improved but their professional skills did not improve as much.

The second research question was "how does professional licensing impact English language teachers' motivation"? In many contexts, professional licensing is compulsory for teachers. Klee (2013) stated that those who were unable to fulfill the licensing requirements could not practice lawfully. The findings of this study are consistent with Klee. Most of the participants mentioned that they were motivated to obtain the professional license because it was compulsory. However, financial incentives motivated other participants. In this study, only participants aged 41–50 years were associated with a statistically significant increase in professional licensing for ELT practices and teacher motivation. The mean overall teaching score for teachers was 2.53 (indicative of unfavorable teaching practices and motivation because it is below 3, which is the cutoff point for neutral teaching practices and motivation).

The third research question was "what are the implications of professional licensing on English language teachers' motivation and job satisfaction in Saudi Arabia"? The primary motivation for obtaining a professional license is to avoid financial penalties rather than a genuine desire for professional growth. Participants perceived the link between professional licensing and the annual salary stipend as a negative factor affecting teacher motivation. Their suggestions in this regard played an important role in improving the quality of professional licensing in Saudi Arabia. For example, they suggested that there should be monthly instead of yearly exams for professional licensing. They also were opposed to making professional licensing a mandatory requirement. The professional licensing body appeared unable to convince them of the value of professional licensing. Ghamrawi et al., (2023) found participants in their study acknowledged that the licensure protocols were clear and recognized the potential benefits for improving educational quality. However, it seems that the clarity of these protocols and their perceived advantages were not fully addressed.

One notable finding is that only teachers aged 41–50 demonstrated a statistically significant positive response in both teaching practices and motivation. This may be explained by two factors:

- **Experience**: Teachers in this age group often have over 15 years of classroom experience, which may help them contextualize the licensing process more constructively and apply insights to their teaching.
- **Career stage**: These teachers are likely at a mid-to-late career stage, where they are more invested in professional growth and career advancement, making them more receptive to licensure as a formal recognition of their status. This observation aligns with international studies such as Larsen (2013), which noted that stricter licensing requirements may deter new teachers but strengthen quality among veteran ones.

Compared with UAE and Qatari findings, the Saudi context shares several patterns—especially the sense that licensing does not adequately support professional development. However, unlike the UAE case where social skills were rated higher than instructional skills (Abdallah & Musah, 2021), the Saudi findings revealed that even affective dimensions like motivation suffer when licensing is tied to penalties rather than rewards.

In sum, this study contributes new empirical evidence on the disconnect between the goals of licensing policies and the lived experiences of English language teachers. While licensing is theoretically positioned as a strategy to improve teaching quality and motivation, in practice it may achieve the opposite unless accompanied by adequate support structures, clear benefits, and intrinsic motivators.

Recommendations

Building on the relevant past studies, the following four recommendations are proposed to enhance the quality of professional licensing for teachers in Saudi Arabia:

Enhance the Clarity and Communication of Licensing Benefits

In this study it was found that although teachers understood the licensing process, many of them were not convinced of its value. Establishing clear communication channels to explain how licensing can improve educational outcomes and benefit teachers' professional growth could help in garnering more support. This could include workshops, informational sessions, and detailed guidelines that outline the benefits of professional licensing beyond just compliance.

Develop Targeted Professional Development Programs

Although participants noted little to no impact of the licensing process on their pedagogy, research shows that effective professional development can enhance teaching skills. By designing licensing preparation programs that include practical, evidence-based teaching strategies, teachers can see direct improvements in their classroom practices, thus increasing the perceived value of the licensing process.

Decouple Licensing from Financial Penalties

Many participants stated that their motivation for obtaining the license was primarily to avoid losing financial incentives. To foster intrinsic motivation, the Ministry of Education should consider alternative incentives such as professional development credits, career advancement opportunities, or bonuses for achieving licensure, rather than penalize those who do not obtain it.

Implement Flexible and Frequent Licensing Assessments

Participants suggested that monthly exams would be more beneficial than annual exams. Frequent assessments can reduce the pressure associated with a single high-stakes test and provide more opportunities for teachers to demonstrate their competence. Additionally, offering assessments throughout the year can better accommodate teachers' schedules and make the process less burdensome, thereby improving overall participation and success rates.

In making these recommendations, the aim is to address participants' concerns and align with best practices in professional development and teacher motivation. By implementing them, the professional licensing process in Saudi Arabia could become more effective and positively impact teachers' pedagogical practices and motivation.

Limitations

The present study was focused exclusively on English language teachers in Saudi Arabia, which may restrict the applicability of its findings to other educational contexts or subject areas. Specifically, the experiences and perceptions of teachers in disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) may differ significantly, especially regarding how licensing influences instructional methods and motivation. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results beyond English language education.

Additionally, the study employed convenience sampling for the quantitative phase, which, while practical and efficient, may have introduced sampling bias. Teachers working in rural or remote regions may be underrepresented in the sample due to limited access to professional networks or online survey distribution channels. This potential underrepresentation may affect the comprehensiveness of the findings, especially considering the unique challenges rural educators might face in relation to licensing access, preparation, and perceived relevance.

Finally, both the survey and interview components relied on self-reported data, which are inherently subject to biases such as social desirability, selective memory, or subjective interpretation. These factors may influence how teachers perceive and report the impact of licensing on their professional practices and motivation. Future studies could benefit from including classroom observations and document analyses to triangulate the data and enhance validity.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study provides important insights into the perceptions and experiences of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia regarding the effects of professional licensing on teaching practices and motivation. The findings reveal a notable gap between the intended goals of licensing reforms and their actual impact in classroom settings. While most teachers understood the licensing process, many expressed dissatisfaction with its implementation, citing limited influence on pedagogy and a heavy reliance on extrinsic motivation driven by financial penalties.

The study showed that only teachers aged 41–50 appeared to benefit from the licensing process in terms of improved motivation and professional engagement—suggesting that career stage and experience may influence how licensing is perceived and utilized. Comparisons with studies from the United Arab Emirates and Qatar further underscored regional challenges in aligning licensing with meaningful professional development and teacher empowerment.

To improve the effectiveness of licensing policies, the study recommends greater clarity in communicating the benefits of licensing, more targeted and practice-oriented professional development, the removal of financial penalties, and the introduction of flexible, more frequent assessments.

These reforms can help transform professional licensing from a procedural requirement into a tool for genuine teacher growth. Future research could explore the longitudinal effects of licensing reforms, particularly their impact on teaching quality and student learning outcomes over time.

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When East Meets East: Thai EFL University Students' Attitudes towards the Non-native English-Speaking EFL Teacher

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Abstract
This study investigated the attitudes of Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students towards their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher, who is a non-Thai national. For the quantitative approach, data were collected by distributing questionnaires to seventy-two first-year students (N=72) from two different university faculties, focusing on two specific areas: general attitudes and teaching English language skills. The questionnaire comprised forty-three Likert scale items and an open-ended question. The data were analyzed using the SPSS program, employing means, standard deviations, and Independent Samples t-tests. The findings revealed that most students showed positive attitudes towards their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher in terms of teacher characteristics and personality, good preparation for class, and students' happiness in class. Moreover, students also indicated that they appreciated the non-native English-speaking EFL teacher teaching reading, listening, and speaking skills regarding teaching English language skills. The results also indicated no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of Thai EFL university students from the two faculties toward a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher. The advantages or disadvantages that students indicated regarding learning English with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher were discussed. The study also outlined its limitations and offered recommendations for future research.
Keywords:, English as a foreign language (EFL), non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), non-native English-speaking EFL teachers, students' attitudes, Thai EFL university students

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Introduction

Regarding English language teaching (ELT) issues, Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) are still commonly and currently required to teach English in most academic institutions in Thailand, according to job advertisement websites all around the country. Concerning the evidence from previous studies, there were asymmetrical numbers of NESTs who teach English in academic institutions. For example, there were four non-native English speakers for each native English speaker, according to Kachru (1996). A similar situation exists at my university, where it has been quite difficult to recruit NESTs for long-term permanent English teaching positions. To address this issue, the executive team hired NNESTs—both Thai EFL teachers and international EFL instructors—who are fluent in English and have experience teaching the language. As a result, additional teaching positions are still needed to accommodate the large number of EFL students at my institution. Currently, Canagarajah (1999) posited that 80% of the world's English language teachers are non-natives. It appeared to be valid until now. In other words, an increasing number of teachers in the field of English language teaching (ELT) are non-native English speakers. Moreover, Butler (2007) and Evrim (2007) confirm that the majority of English language learners are taught by NNESTs. Notably, English is widely used for international communication. In the Asian context, there is an equal chance for both native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) to teach English. Noticeably, Waterworth (2016) mentioned that a growing number of NNESTs are teaching English in various parts of Asia, particularly within the ASEAN region.

As a result, the global number of English learners continues to grow steadily, including in Thailand, where English is taught as a foreign language. Phothongsunan (2017) mentioned that "English teachers teaching at the university level in Thailand represent non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) from various nationalities, not only Thai.". This is consistent with research context as it investigated Thai EFL university students' attitudes towards their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher (Korean teacher). Throughout my research, the terms "non-native English-speaking EFL teacher," "non-Thai EFL teacher," and "Korean EFL teacher" were used interchangeably to refer to a non-Thai instructor teaching English to Thai EFL learners. It is beneficial to conduct this study as it can reflect what students think about how well their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher behaved and performed in class. Interestingly, this is a unique and uncommon case at my academic institution, as it marks the first time a Korean EFL teacher has been chosen to teach English to Thai EFL students. Significantly, it can broaden the worldviews and provide a new direction for recruitment. In addition, it is also essential for the executive team to consider this issue when recruiting qualified NESTs and NNEST teachers who are most suitable for professional teaching positions in the future.

Based on the reasons mentioned above, this study aims to elaborate on the following questions:

1. What are the Thai EFL university students' attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher?
2. Is there any significant difference in attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher between Thai EFL university students majoring in Agricultural Product Innovation and Technology and those majoring in Engineering?
3. What advantages or disadvantages do Thai EFL university students identify regarding learning English with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher?

Literature Review

One of the heated debatable issues in the field of ELT, the disparity between native and non-native English-speaking teachers has been widely discussed for more than two decades (e.g., Medgyes, 1994; Braine, 1999; Liu, 1999; Benke & Medgyes,2005; Alseweed, 2012; Ma, 2015; Wang & Fang, 2020) and not yet found the absolute answer for the question "Who is the best teacher?". Traditionally, it inevitably refers to Kachru's three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle (Kachru, 1992). The Inner Circle includes countries where English is used as a native language and as a first language (L1) among people, such as the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The Outer Circle refers to countries that were formerly colonized by the British Empire. People in these countries commonly use English as a second language in social life or the government sectors; for example, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Kenya, and others. The Expanding Circle represents countries where people use English in universities and other academic institutions to communicate effectively in English daily and for international business reasons. Countries such as the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, Korea, and Thailand are classified within the "Expanding Circle.". Since this model was first introduced with the term "World Englishes" in 1985, it has sparked a massive wave of debatable issues, including the differences between NESTs and NNESTs. Medgyes (1994) suggested that while NESTs and NNESTs vary in their language proficiency and teaching styles, both can be effective teachers in their own unique ways. To support this, consistent with the recent study by Deng et al. (2024), students perceive both NESTs and NNESTs as equally effective, though each group possesses distinct strengths and weaknesses. The study also found a positive correlation between students' motivation and their perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs. Currently, these issues remain debatable as many researchers attempt to examine how students perceive their NESTs and NNESTs in various contexts and aspects (e.g., Cheung, 2002; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Benke & Medgyes, 2005; Walkinshaw & Duong, 2012; Sung, 2014; Ma,2015). Therefore, students' perspectives are highly valuable for researchers seeking to gain deeper insights into their views on teachers from multiple angles.

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of native- and non-native English-speaking teachers, outstanding aspects that students perceived towards their NNESTS would be their proficiency in student's L1(first language) and sharing the same culture, their knowledge of students' learning difficulties, the students' experience in understanding their teaching, and in communication. In contrast, strong English proficiency and effective facilitation of student learning are perceived as key strengths of NESTs. Moreover, Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) also found that students perceived NESTs as models of pronunciation and correct language use, and they are repositories of cultural knowledge. Ma's (2012) study emphasized these various aspects, which explored students' perceptions in Hong Kong. This is similar to the study of Tsou and Chen (2017), who conducted quantitative research with 184 Taiwanese students, and found that NNESTs were perceived to be superior in their student's first language proficiency, their knowledge of students' learning difficulties, and, generally, in communication. Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) also found similar results when they conducted research with 20 university students in Vietnam and Japan. The study revealed that students viewed NNESTs as effective in teaching grammar and appreciated their ability to use the student's first language when needed. To support this idea, Ma (2015) conducted research with 196 secondary school students and conducted 10 student group interviews in Hong Kong, and found that NNESTs were better at assisting students with examination preparation; meanwhile, lessons taught by NESTs were perceived as creating a

more relaxed and engaging classroom atmosphere. In parallel, Adara (2019) also reported that the participants believed that NESTs were more effective in teaching speaking skills, pronunciation, and cultural knowledge. However, the participants showed more relaxed attitudes when they had been taught by NNEST due to shared L1 and teachers' understanding of learning English as non-native speakers. Additionally, NNESTs were considered more effective at teaching grammar than NESTs. Concerning the drawbacks, students viewed NESTs as weak in explaining grammar and noted some cultural differences. In contrast, some studies have shown that NNESTs are perceived to give more homework, consistently correct errors, and provide realistic assessments of learners (Benke & Medgyes, 2005).

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 72 Thai EFL undergraduate students who had the experience of being taught by a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher who was Korean. Purposive sampling was used in this study, which primarily involved participants who had studied English foundation courses with non-native English-speaking EFL teachers. They were all mixed-ability freshmen from a state university in Bangkok from two different faculties. The students, enrolled in the Engineering (EG) and Agricultural Product Innovation and Technology (AI) programs, were required to complete Foundation English as a compulsory course. There were twenty-two full-time English teachers, but adjunct instructors were needed to teach all 6,000 to 7,000 first-year students. Consequently, it was necessary to employ a large number of adjunct instructors who were non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). Notably, this marked the first time we recruited a single non-native English-speaking EFL teacher from Korea, who speaks English fluently. Additionally, she has experience teaching English to EFL students and taking English language teaching courses. She has been living in Thailand for more than one year, and she has also been studying the Thai language to communicate more effectively.

Instruments

This study utilized a questionnaire consisting of three main sections. The first section gathered demographic information, including students' age, gender, and the number of years they had been studying English. The second part was a 33-item questionnaire adapted from previous studies by Alseweed (2012) and Chun (2014), these were developed to ensure the classroom was suited to the teaching and learning environment. The third part was a 10-item questionnaire examining students' attitudes towards non-native English-speaking EFL teachers in terms of teaching English language skills. Additionally, the questionnaire included an open-ended question to complement the responses. The questionnaire was translated into Thai to ensure participants' understanding, and its accuracy was verified through back-translation by three language teaching specialists who reviewed the Thai version for meaning. Experts rated the relevance of all items to their categories by employing the IOC (Index of item-objective congruence). The items met the criteria with scores ranging from 0.88 to 1.00, indicating acceptable validity. Regarding reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the 33-item and 10-item questionnaires, yielding values of .858 and .918, respectively, indicating a high level of reliability. Quantitative data were collected using 43 five-point Likert scale items administered to 72 Thai EFL undergraduate students, who had experience learning from a non-native English-speaking teacher (a Korean EFL instructor). Concerning ethical considerations, permission was obtained from the Korean EFL teacher to distribute the questionnaire to her students. Furthermore, students were asked to sign a consent

form to confirm their agreement to participate in the research. The researcher also assured them that their identities would remain confidential and guaranteed that all personal data would be kept private and not disclosed publicly.

Data Analysis

After collecting all participant responses, the data were compiled, processed, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Frequency, mean, average, and standard deviation were used to analyzed the students' data. The second and third parts of the questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively for means and standard deviations and presented in tables based on the following ranges:

4.21-5.00	means	Very high
3.41-4.20	means	High
1.81-2.60	means	Moderate
1.81-2.60	means	Low
1.00-1.80	means	Very low

Results

Results from a questionnaire

Part one: Personal data

This section addresses three research questions. The findings are presented in two quantitative sections, followed by qualitative results. After collecting all participant responses, the data were compiled, calculated, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were organized into three categories: personal information, students' attitudes toward their teacher, and the teaching and learning of English language skills, as shown in Tables One, Two, and Three, respectively.

Table 1. *Personal information of participants is shown in frequency, percentage, and mean*

			N=72
Data	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	$\overline{X}$
Faculty			
AI	39	54.14	
EG	33	45.83	
Gender			
Female	46	63.89	
Male	26	36.11	
Age			19
Experience of learning English (year)			13

Table One presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. Of the total, 54.14% were from the Faculty of Engineering (EG) and 45.83% from Agricultural Product Innovation and Technology (AI). In terms of gender, 63.89% were female and 36.11% were male. The average age of the participants was 19 years, and they had an average of 13 years of English language learning experience.

To answer research question number one: "What are the Thai EFL university students' attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher?", the data on students' attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking teacher were analyzed by mean, standard deviation as presented in Table Two (See Appendix A).

Table Two presents the overall mean score of students' attitudes toward the non-native English-speaking teacher, indicating a high level of positivity ($\bar{x}$=4.17). Among 33 items of students' attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking teacher, the third highest mean scores were "A non-native English teacher is friendly and provides a relaxed learning environment." (Item 6), "A non-native English teacher is thoroughly well-prepared for class", and "On the whole, I feel happy when I study with a non-native English teacher." (Item 33) respectively ($\bar{x}$= 4.94, 4.83, and 4.67). These items were at a very high level.

Part 3: Students' attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher regarding teaching English language skills

To address research question one, the data on students' attitudes toward a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher's instruction of English language skills were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, as shown in Table Three.

Table 3. *Mean and standard deviation of students' attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher regarding teaching English language skills*

No.	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher's regarding teaching English language skills	$\overline{X}$	SD.	Meaning
34	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can teach listening and speaking skills effectively.	4.32	.688	Very high
35	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can provide constructive feedback to help students improve their listening and speaking skills.	4.29	.680	Very high
36	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can teach reading skills effectively.	4.33	.628	Very high
37	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can provide constructive feedback to develop students' reading skills.	4.25	.764	Very high
38	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can teach writing skills effectively.	4.08	.818	High
39	A non-native English teacher can provide constructive feedback to develop students' writing skills.	4.04	.830	High
40	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can teach grammar learning skills effectively.	4.28	.755	Very high
41	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can provide constructive feedback to develop students' grammar skills.	4.14	.775	High
42	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can teach vocabulary learning skills effectively.	4.18	.757	High
43	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can provide good feedback to develop students' vocabulary learning skills.	4.26	.731	Very high
	Total	**4.22**	**.566**	**Very high**

Table Three shows that the overall mean score of students' attitudes toward the non-native English-speaking EFL teacher's instruction of English language skills was very high ($\bar{X}$ = 4.22). Among 10 items of students' attitudes towards non-native English-speaking EFL teacher, the third highest mean scores were "A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can teach reading skills effectively." (item 36), "A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can teach listening and speaking skills effectively.", and "A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher can provide constructive feedback to develop students' listening and speaking skills." respectively ($\bar{X}$= 4.33,4.32, and 4.29). These items were at a very high level.

Part 4: The relationship between AI and EG students' attitudes towards their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher

To address research question two, 'Is there any significant difference in attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher between Thai EFL university students majoring in Agricultural Product Innovation and Technology and those majoring in Engineering?', the data were analyzed using SPSS with mean, standard deviation, and an Independent Samples T-Test. The results are shown in Table Four below.

Table 4. *The relationship between AI and EG students' attitudes towards their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher*

N=72

Statements	**Faculty**	**n**	**Mean**	**SD.**	**t-test**	**p-value**
Students' attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher	AI	39	4.23	.342	1.544	.128
	EG	33	4.09	.408		
Students' attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher regarding teaching English language skills	AI	39	4.29	.560	1.170	.246
	EG	33	4.13	.560		

An Independent Samples T-Test was conducted to examine significant differences between AI and EG students' attitudes toward their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher, considering both the teacher personally and her teaching of English language skills. One variable from the population of each faculty was compared. The significance value (P > 0.05) indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the attitudes of Agricultural Product Innovation and Technology and Engineering students toward the non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.

Results from an open-ended question

To answer research question three: "What advantages or disadvantages do students identify regarding learning English with a non-native English-speaking teacher?" In addition to the quantitative findings presented in Tables Two, Three, and Four above, these results may also address research question one and align with the insights gathered from the open-ended question. An open-ended item in the questionnaire was employed to obtain more in-depth and valuable insight into the students' attitudes. An open-ended question was included in this study to gather students' opinions about their teacher, with the goal of eliciting richer and more detailed responses. Then, they could describe their opinion in the blank provided. Content analysis was conducted using frequency and percentage, as presented in Tables five and six.

Table 5. *Additional students' opinions are shown in frequency and percentage*

Data	Frequency	Percentage
Responses	28	38.89
Non-response	44	61.11
Total	72	100

Table 6. *Frequency and percentage of additional students' opinions about their non-native English-speaking teacher*

Students' opinions	Frequency	Percentage
The teacher is cute and friendly	8	29.63
The teacher's English pronunciation is easy to understand	7	25.93
The teacher created a relaxing classroom atmosphere and helped reduce stress and language anxiety	6	22.22
Cultural exchange: Teacher shares a Third language and culture between Thai and Korean	6	22.22
Total	27	100

As shown in Table Five, 28 of the 72 students (38.89%) shared their opinions about their non-native English-speaking teacher. Statistical analysis revealed that students exhibited positive attitudes toward their non-native English-speaking teacher, as indicated in Table Six. Following the teacher's personality, eight students (29.63%) reported that "Teacher is so cute, kind, open-minded, punctual, and friendly". Concerning the advantages that students identified, seven students (25.93%) indicated that the teacher's English pronunciation is easy to understand. To support this, some students wrote, "We are Asians, so we can understand each other quite well. Moreover, she is cute, kind, calm, and listens to us patiently. She can teach and explain the lessons slowly and clearly, especially when we have questions to ask.". Furthermore, six students (22.22%) posited that their teacher "…created a relaxing classroom atmosphere and helped reduce stress and language anxiety". Some students asserted that studying English with a non-native English-speaking teacher could reduce anxiety, nervousness, and boredom while increasing relaxation and confidence. Regarding cultural exchange, six students (22.22%) stated that "Teacher shares Third language and culture between Thai and Korean". Some students also commented, 'It is quite interesting that a non-native English-speaking teacher makes an effort to communicate in Thai as much as possible, and also teaches us a third language (Korean) along with cultural differences, so we learn a lot from her.'

However, based on students' opinions, some disadvantages were noted in their attitudes toward their non-native English-speaking teacher. When comparing studying with NESTs and NNESTs, some students remarked, 'Although I can understand what a non-native English-speaking teacher teaches, I sometimes struggle to follow her pronunciation of certain English words.'. Regarding exam preparation, one student indicated, "NNEST tries to communicate with us, but she should inform us more about the guidelines to prepare for the exam. Thus, students can prepare themselves in advance. Moreover, NNEST should give us more sentence examples, including grammar explanations.".

Discussion

To answer research question one: "What are the Thai EFL university students' attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking teacher?", it can be discussed as follows:

According to the purpose of the study, this study attempts to investigate Thai EFL university students' attitudes towards their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher who are Korean. Findings from both the closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires indicated that even low-proficiency students held highly positive attitudes toward their NNEST, as reflected by the high overall scores in Tables Two and Three. Particularly, the results showed the third-highest mean score in three items, which were "A non-native English teacher is friendly and provides a relaxed learning environment.", "A non-native English teacher is thoroughly well-prepared for class", and "On the whole, I feel happy when I study with a non-native English teacher." respectively. When the Korean teacher taught English to Thai EFL students, they recognized that she was not Thai and could not communicate using their first language (Thai). However, both the teacher and students could adapt to each other effectively. Statistically, the evidence showed that students perceived that their NNEST was friendly, well-prepared for class, and also created a relaxed learning environment. This aligns with the open-ended responses, in which students described the teacher as 'cute, kind, open-minded, and friendly.'. In this case, it depends upon the teacher's nationality, personality, and appearance. Supporting this view, Al Muabdi (2021), in a study conducted in the Saudi context, suggested that 'methodology and teachers' personalities are more important than their nativeness'. The teacher's Korean nationality may have contributed to her appeal, as Korean culture and language are highly popular due to the influence of media and social networks, including Korean dramas, K-pop idols, and influencers. It likely helped foster a strong teacher-student relationship. Additionally, it likely captured students' attention and fostered better understanding between the teacher and students. The positive relationship would encourage them to learn and communicate with their Korean teacher. These results correspond to the outcomes from Braine (1999) and Thomas (1999), who expressed that although students will initially perceive NESTs as perfect models in language learning, as they become better acquainted with qualified, competent NNESTs, students often enjoy learning in their classes, knowing that NNESTs better understand their language problems and needs.

Concerning teaching English language skills, as can be seen from the evidence from the responses to the questionnaire, most students highly agreed that their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher has confidence in using English for communication efficiently. Despite the Korean teacher's limited fluency in Thai, she and the students could still able to understand each other well. Most students agreed that their teacher could teach reading, listening, and speaking skills effectively. Similar to Mahboob's (2004) study, students believed that NNESTs are good at teaching reading, listening, and grammar skills. Responses to the open-ended question revealed that, since the Korean EFL teacher could not explain lessons in Thai, she sometimes used body language to help students understand the material. In terms of pronunciation, some students expressed that the Korean teacher's pronunciation might be easy to understand; however, it would be better to study with NEST according to the different pronunciations between NEST and NNEST. This is similar to Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2005) study, they found that students tended to favor NESTs for their pronunciation, but they perceived that NNESTs were more empathetic and better at anticipating their students' language difficulties. Students preferred NNESTs when studying grammar and learning strategies. Conversely, as seen in this study, NNEST is a non-Thai EFL teacher, unlike Thai EFL teachers, so she could not explain grammar explicitly in Thai. Students claimed that she tried hard to learn Thai and communicate in Thai with students. These reasons explain why most students strongly agreed that they could understand their teacher's explanations.

According to research question two: "Is there any significant difference in attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher between Thai EFL university students majoring in Agricultural Product Innovation and Technology and those majoring in Engineering?", it can be discussed as follows:

As shown in Table Four, there was no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of Thai EFL university students from Agricultural Product Innovation and Technology (AI) and Engineering (EG) towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher. It showed the reliability that although students came from two different faculties, their attitudes towards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher would be the same. That was probably because their teacher treated them equally regardless of the students' language proficiency and which faculty she taught. The findings confirmed a shared consensus between the two student groups, revealing positive attitudes toward their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher in various aspects.

Regarding research question three: "What advantages or disadvantages do students identify regarding learning English with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher?", it can be discussed as follows:

Evidence from the responses to the closed-ended and an open-ended questionnaire revealed that the most students have a positive relationship with their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher. However, there was the emergence of both advantages and disadvantages that students identified regarding learning English with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher. The benefits of being taught by a non-Thai, non-native English-speaking EFL teacher are discussed from various perspectives based on the findings of this study. It is worth noting that hiring a Korean EFL teacher to teach Foundation English to Thai students could be beneficial, as both the teacher and students share a common Asian cultural background and use English as a foreign language to communicate. Consequently, these findings align with the suggestions of Medgyes (1994), Cheung (2002), Mahboob (2003), and Koksal (2006). In this study, the Korean EFL teacher could empathize with students' needs and challenges and effectively anticipate and address language difficulties despite not sharing the student's first language. On the contrary, as Medgyes (1994) mentions, there would be benefits from their ability to use the students' mother tongue. In this instance, the case is exceptional because the teacher was a non-Thai EFL instructor from the expanding circle (Kachru, 1992). Therefore, the teacher and students had to use English as the medium of communication in the classroom rather than the students' native language (Thai). Specifically, the Korean EFL teacher possessed some background knowledge of the Thai language, which helped create a more enjoyable and relaxed classroom environment, as noted by several students in their open-ended questionnaire responses. Most students reported that being taught by a Korean EFL teacher helped reduce nervousness, language anxiety, and boredom while also boosting their confidence in speaking English. Moreover, students were happy to have a chance to learn a third language and cultural exchange, so the opportunity to communicate in three languages (English, Korean, and Thai) has arisen. The findings of this study align with the research conducted in the Iraqi context by Ahmed and Osam (2022), who found that non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) were perceived as more capable of building strong connections with students, showing empathy, and understanding their needs and challenges.

Nevertheless, some drawbacks were noted in being taught English by a Korean EFL teacher. As can be seen from the findings, some students posited that somehow, they could not understand the Korean EFL teacher's English accent and pronunciation. They believed that English should be taught by NESTs to ensure exposure to native pronunciation and various accents. Similar to what

Watson & Pojanapunya (2009) found in their study, students preferred being taught by NESTs, especially in pronunciation areas. One potential disadvantage of being taught by a Korean EFL teacher is her limited ability to speak and understand the students' first language (Thai). In this case, students' language proficiency also plays a role, as low proficiency levels can make it more challenging to understand the teacher's instruction. This finding contrasts with previous studies (Madrid and Canado, 2004; Walkinshaw & Oanh, 2014), which reported that students preferred NNESTs because they could understand the students' first language (L1), reflecting different contextual factors.

In terms of exam preparation, students suggested that the teacher should inform them more about the guidelines to prepare for the exam. So, students were able to prepare themselves in advance. Additionally, the teacher should provide more sentence examples along with grammar explanations. Previous research (Benke & Medgyes, 2005) has identified that NNESTs were often perceived as assigning more homework, consistently correcting errors, and assessing learners realistically. However, the findings in this study showed no evidence that the Korean EFL teacher assigned excessive homework or consistently corrected errors.

Conclusion

In summary, the study's results revealed that most students held positive attitudes toward their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher, appreciating her characteristics and personality, thorough class preparation, and the enjoyable learning environment she created despite not sharing the students' first language. Additionally, students valued her instruction in reading, listening, and speaking skills. The analysis showed no significant difference in attitudes between students from the two faculties. The findings highlighted both advantages and disadvantages of being taught by a Korean EFL teacher. Advantages included her empathy for students' needs and challenges, fostering a relaxed classroom atmosphere, and facilitating cultural exchange. Disadvantages included limited use of students' first language and accent and pronunciation issues, especially with lower-proficiency students.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This study explores Thai EFL university students' attitudes toward their non-native English-speaking EFL teacher, a Korean national. However, certain limitations of the study should be acknowledged. Firstly, this study was carried out with a relatively small sample size, limited to students from only two faculties at a state university in Thailand. Secondly, all participants shared similar characteristics and studied Foundation English with a single non-native English-speaking EFL teacher from Korea. Therefore, the findings may not apply to all non-native English-speaking EFL teachers in Thailand. Lastly, the study relied solely on closed- and open-ended questionnaires as its research instruments. For future research, incorporating additional methods is recommended. Qualitative approaches, such as classroom observations and in-depth interviews, could be used to triangulate the data and provide more comprehensive insights. The findings of this study are expected to be valuable to administrators, stakeholders, and researchers when planning the recruitment of non-Thai EFL teachers in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Table 2. *Mean and Standard Deviation of students' attitudes tow+ards a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher*

No.	Statements	$\overline{X}$	SD.	Meaning
1	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher is confident in using English effectively for communication.	4.54	.604	Very high
2	I feel comfortable studying English in a class with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.	4.53	.649	Very high
3	I feel anxious and uncomfortable when I study with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.	4.18	1.012	High
4	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher knows students' language skills needs.	4.33	.805	Very high
5	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher is thoroughly well-prepared for class	4.83	.444	Very high
6	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher is friendly and provides a relaxed learning environment.	4.94	.231	Very high
7	Having a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher helps reduce my fear of talking to foreigners outside the classroom.	3.86	.997	High
8	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher has difficulty understanding what students ask and cannot answer students' questions explicitly.	4.03	1.100	High
9	I miscommunicated with my non-native English-speaking EFL teacher and had trouble understanding her accent.	3.97	1.126	High
10	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher usually uses a variety of teaching methods.	4.04	.759	High

11	I had opportunities to practice English in a class taught by a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.	4.10	.790	High
12	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher explains English lessons to us clearly.	4.36	.678	Very high
13	I can understand my non-native English-speaking EFL teacher's pronunciation clearly.	4.26	.839	Very high
14	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher used innovative teaching strategies to help students learn better.	4.21	.749	Very high
15	I often feel frustrated because my non-native English-speaking EFL teacher cannot speak Thai fluently.	3.99	1.239	High
16	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher should practice speaking Thai to facilitate easier communication with students.	3.33	1.199	High
17	It is beneficial for low-proficiency students to study English with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.	3.97	.888	High
18	My English proficiency level is not suitable for studying with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.	3.93	1.179	High
19	If I could choose a teacher, I would choose a course taught by a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.	3.29	1.093	High
20	I have confidence that I have a good relationship with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.	4.61	.662	Very high
21	When students do not understand what they learned, a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher allows students to ask questions.	4.57	.747	Very high
22	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher often teaches English only from textbooks.	3.17	1.267	High
23	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher is strict with classroom discipline.	3.28	1.091	High
24	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher speaks with a clear and easily understandable English accent.	4.24	.831	Very high
25	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher is well-prepared and explains the cultural perspectives concerning English-speaking countries.	4.35	.675	Very high
26	The non-native English-speaking EFL teacher frequently corrects errors in English usage.	3.99	1.104	High
27	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher is well-prepared for students' preparation for the exams.	4.42	.622	Very high
28	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher often explains the meaning of English words using gestures.	4.17	1.021	High
29	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher often asks students to work in pairs or groups.	4.26	.949	Very high
30	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher often assigns a lot of homework.	4.15	.974	High
31	A non-native English-speaking EFL teacher helps students practice and encourages them to speak English in the classroom.	4.25	.795	Very high
32	I have a positive attitude towards learning English with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.	4.63	.615	Very high
33	On the whole, I feel happy when I study with a non-native English-speaking EFL teacher.	4.67	.650	Very high
	Total	4.17	.377	High

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Exploring Students' Perceptions of Assessment and Testing Practices and Their Impact on Learning Outcomes in Moroccan Higher Education

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Abstract
Education research emphasizes the significance of students' perceptions of assessment. This study aimed to investigate how students perceive the assessment tasks designed by their professors and to examine the relationship between these perceptions and their learning outcomes (i.e., grades) across three Moroccan Faculties of Letters and Humanities. The study is particularly important as it provides valuable feedback to test designers within these faculties and supports efforts to improve the quality of assessments for common core students. Furthermore, it aims to raise professors' awareness of the impact that test quality has on student performance and encourage more thoughtful and research-informed approaches to assessment design. In this regard, the study answers the following research questions: How do Moroccan students in the departments of English studies at the faculties of letters and humanities perceive the assessment tasks designed by their professors concerning the validity, reliability, authenticity, washback, and practicality of assessment tasks? Is there a relationship between students' perception of assessment and their performance? To investigate the five variables associated with students' perceptions of assessment, 526 higher education students completed the adapted Students' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ). The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to demonstrate the overall perception of students. In addition, multiple regression of the five scales on students' grades was used to measure the relationship between students' perception and performance. The results revealed that students across the three Faculties had a positive perception of assessment. However, no significant relationship was found between students' perceptions of assessment and academic performance.

Keywords: Assessment criteria, learning outcomes, Moroccan higher education, perception of assessment, students' performance

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Introduction

Classroom assessment is a key component of the teaching and learning process. Many researchers have explored how classroom assessment contributes to student learning (Harlen & Crick, 2003). In this context, the assessment tasks assigned in the classroom convey significant messages to students about their value, importance, and relevance (Alkharusi et al., 2014). This perspective arose from the need for assessment practices to align with 21st-century requirements (Othman & Bouyakoub, 2020). It was also the result of a shift toward constructivist learning approaches (Van de Watering et al., 2008) and the integration of innovative learning environments, including co-regulation techniques and their influence on learning outcomes (Ajmal et al., 2024). Moreover, it is a reaction to traditional approaches, prioritizing rote learning and passive memorization of grammatical rules and language items. In this context, Beg et al. (2024) investigated the integration of the Rotation Model into the ESL curriculum. They found that it significantly enhances language learning outcomes by employing active, dynamic instructional strategies that effectively manage cognitive load. Given the profound impact of assessment on learning, the effectiveness of educational programs largely depends on the quality of assessment practices (Van der Vleuten et al., 2017). High-quality assessment encompasses various aspects of evaluation, including language assessment criteria (Leeuwenkamp et al., 2019). When students understand the advantages of quality assessment and the negative consequences of poor assessment, they develop their perceptions of its value (Leeuwenkamp, 2019).

Students' perceptions of assessment hold great importance for several reasons. As the primary source of information for evaluating assessment methods, students' attitudes and viewpoints provide valuable insight into the quality of classroom assessment (Rahman, 2020). Their active participation in assessment also makes the learning process more engaging and meaningful (Rahman, 2020). According to Dhindsa et al. (2007), examining students' perceptions encourages teachers to adopt more authentic and realistic evaluation approaches in the future. Furthermore, students' perceptions of assessment influence their learning and impact their overall success in the classroom (Mussawy, 2009). Accordingly, educational institutions should integrate students' perceptions into assessment design to ensure quality practices that foster improved learning outcomes (Leeuwenkamp, 2019).

Despite the growing body of international research on student perceptions of assessment, the specific ways in which students perceive assessment tasks—and how these perceptions influence learning outcomes such as academic performance or grades—remain insufficiently explored. Thus far, this relationship has not been specifically examined within the Moroccan context. This is a notable gap, as Moroccan higher education presents a particularly compelling case for investigation. The system is undergoing significant educational reforms and characterized by a diverse linguistic and cultural landscape. Moreover, it is increasingly shifting toward more student-centered approaches in English language teaching and learning. These unique contextual factors may shape how assessment practices are perceived and experienced by students, which calls for the need to study this setting on its terms rather than relying solely on findings from other

educational systems. Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to address the identified gap by exploring how students in Moroccan higher education perceive assessment tasks and how these perceptions relate to their learning outcomes.

This study holds considerable significance for two key reasons. First, it offers test designers in Moroccan faculties of Letters and Humanities critical insights and constructive feedback regarding the quality and effectiveness of the assessments they develop for common core students. By evaluating these tests, the study helps identify strengths and weaknesses in their design, thereby guiding improvements that can lead to more valid, reliable, and fair assessments. Second, the study heightens university professors' awareness of how the quality of assessments directly influences student performance. It emphasizes the pivotal role that well-constructed tests play in accurately measuring students' knowledge and in shaping their academic experience. Drawing attention to these effects, the study encourages professors to adopt more reflective and research-based approaches to test design. To reach this objective, the study seeks to answer the following research questions :

RQ 1 - How do Moroccan students in the departments of English studies at the faculties of letters and humanities perceive the assessment tasks designed by their professors concerning the validity, reliability, authenticity, washback, and practicality of assessment tasks?

RQ 2- Is there a relationship between students' perception of assessment and their performance?

Literature Review

The Relationship between assessment and learning

The relationship between assessment and learning can be understood by examining the evolution of language testing and teaching methodologies over the past century. Historically, language instruction has been shaped by developments in linguistics, psychology, and second language acquisition (Richards & Rogers, 2016). In this context, language-testing practices have evolved alongside shifts in teaching methods (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Traditional testing methods have been shaped by older paradigms like behaviorist learning theory, which treated testing as separate from instruction and relied heavily on formats such as multiple-choice and open-ended questions (Shepard, 2000).

In recent decades, the role of assessment in learning has shifted due to adopting a more constructivist learning paradigm, leading to the development of new learning environments (Van de Watering, 2008). The most significant change in the perception of assessment is the concept of using it as a tool for learning (Dochy & McDowell, 1997). Rather than primarily serving to assign grades and measure students' achievement of predefined objectives, there is now broad recognition that assessment plays a vital role throughout the entire learning process (Brown et al., 1994; Gibbs, 1999). Assessment influences learning for several reasons. First, it offers students valuable insights into their learning progress, goals, and strategies to achieve them (Watkins et al., 2005). In addition, how students perceive assessment influences how they prepare for it, which can positively or negatively impact their learning outcomes. (Nevo, 1995; Gielen et al., 2003).

Students' perception of assessment

In today's information-driven world, teachers must help their students take an active role in managing and monitoring their learning. This shift toward a more learner-centered approach calls for a fundamental change in students' roles within the teaching and learning process. To align with students' evolving role as "partners" in learning (Stiggins, 2001), teachers must adopt a perspective that takes into consideration the student's viewpoint (Horwitz, 1989). Likewise, curriculum designers should consider students' experiences and perspectives on their learning environment (Ekbatani, 2000; Lindblom-Ylanne & Lonka, 2001). In language testing and assessment, students are also recognized as key stakeholders (Ericson & Gustafsson, 2005). As a result, research has increasingly focused on students' perceptions of assessment, revealing that assessment tasks in the classroom send powerful messages about their importance (Black & Williams, 1998; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2001, 2002; McMillan & Workman, 1998). For example, a study by Dhindsa et al. (2007) on Bruneian secondary school students' perceptions of assessment tasks found that students generally viewed these tasks as transparent and aligned with classroom teaching and objectives despite reporting low levels of consultation, authenticity, and diversity in these assessment tasks.

Similarly, Rahman (2020) explored students' perceptions of grammar assessment at the English department of the State Islamic University of Ar-Raniry. Sixty-nine fourth-year English students participated in the study by completing the Students' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ), which evaluated the alignment of grammar assessment with planned learning, authenticity, transparency, and students' classroom capabilities. The findings indicated that students perceived only a slight alignment between grammar assessment and the intended learning outcomes. They also noted a lack of transparency regarding the purpose, authenticity, and forms of assessment. Additionally, the results revealed that students' performance in taking the assessment was generally unsatisfactory.

In a study involving 198 tenth-grade students in Oman, Alkharusi (2013) discovered that a high level of authenticity and transparency in assessment was positively associated with students' self-efficacy and perception of task value. Similarly, Alkharusi et al. (2014) conducted research with 411 secondary school students in Oman. They concluded that students who perceived the assessment environment as learning-oriented also reported a strong alignment with classroom instruction and high levels of authenticity, student consultation, and diversity in the assessment process.

In the Moroccan context, El Hadari and Khartite (2024) examined the perspectives of both professors and students regarding assessment practices in higher education, with a specific focus on English departments. Their study aimed to explore three main aspects: the extent to which end-of-term examinations support teaching and learning, the key challenges that impede effective assessment for learning, and the potential for adopting alternative assessment methods to enhance assessment quality. One of the study's major findings was a significant lack of alignment between course objectives, instructional approaches, and the assessment tools used to evaluate student learning. More specifically, while the instructional framework is modular, the assessment methods employed are predominantly summative and linear. Additionally, the study revealed that the practice of sharing feedback with students is almost absent.

In a slightly different study, Bouziane and Rouijel (2024) investigated the perceived benefits of assessment among Moroccan university students. Their findings indicated that although most students believed the tests they took met the standards of practical assessment, some

expressed doubts about their quality and relevance. The study also highlighted instances of good practices in alternative assessment and feedback. However, some students reported that they did not experience concrete benefits from their assessments. In other words, there is a gap between assessment design and its intended educational impact.

Students' perception of assessment and learning outcomes

In addition to examining assessment practices and testing, research has also focused on the relationship between students' perceptions of assessment tasks and performance. Leeuwenkamp et al. (2019) explored how students' perceptions of assessment quality were related to learning approaches and outcomes. They used six criteria to assess students' perceptions: the effects of assessment on learning, fairness, conditions, interpretation of test scores, authenticity, and credibility of assessment. The study revealed that students' perceptions of the conditions of assessment were correlated positively with their learning outcomes.

Research stresses the significant impact of students' perceptions on their academic performance. De Kleijn et al. (2012) found that a strong interpersonal closeness with supervisors positively correlates with improved learning outcomes, including higher final grades. Similarly, Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) demonstrated that students who perceive assessment as a means of taking responsibility for their learning tend to achieve better academic results. These two studies highlight that students' views of interpersonal relationships and assessment practices influence their motivation, learning strategies, and overall performance. Positive perceptions— such as seeing assessment as a constructive tool and feeling supported by supervisors—can lead to enhanced academic achievement. In the Moroccan context, existing research on assessment has primarily focused on the perspectives of students and teachers. However, to the researcher's knowledge, no studies have explored the relationship between students' perceptions of assessment and their performance in end-of-term examinations within the Departments of English Studies at Moroccan Faculties of Letters and Humanities. The present study was undertaken to address this gap in the literature by examining whether students' perceptions of assessment have a measurable impact on their academic achievement.

Materials and Methods

Participants

The participants in the present study were Moroccan university students from the departments of English studies in the faculties of letters and human sciences at Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, Hassan II University Ain Chock in Casablanca, and Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra. Five hundred and twenty-six students from these institutions filled out the Students' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) during the fall term exams of the academic year 2022/2023. Purposive sampling was selected as the most appropriate method for this study, as it allowed for the intentional selection of students with relevant experiences and insights into assessment practices in Moroccan higher education. Specifically, students filled out the questionnaire immediately after finishing their exams to ensure that their responses reflected their

perceptions of the assessments conducted during the same academic year. This approach helped ensure that the data collected was contextually grounded and closely aligned with the research objectives.

Research Instruments

The researchers employed the Students' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) as the primary instrument in this study to investigate students' perceptions of the assessment process across six key dimensions: validity, reliability, authenticity, practicality, and two aspects of the washback effect—namely, (1) the effect of assessment on study methods and (2) the effect of assessment on the content studied. The questionnaire, originally developed by Dorman and Knightley (2006), was adapted for the purposes of this study and comprised 28 items.

Before the final administration of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with a group of students selected from the study sample. The questionnaire was administered to 15 students from Hassan II University of Ain Chock. Based on the feedback obtained during the pilot phase, some modifications were made to the students' questionnaire. These changes primarily involved rewording certain items and adjusting the scale format. Specifically, the word 'assessment' was replaced with 'tests' or 'testing', and the original response scales were completely removed.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the instrument used in the study, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated. The result was highly satisfactory, with a value of 0.84 for the Students' Perception of Assessment Questionnaire. This value indicates a relatively high level of internal consistency, suggesting that the instrument is reliable and appropriate for data collection.

Findings

The data collected in this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics to show students' overall perceptions as measured by the questionnaire. The five scales were validity, reliability, authenticity, practicality, and washback effect. In addition, multiple regression of these scales' scores on students' grades was calculated to measure the relationship between students' perception and performance.

Students' perception of assessment tasks

Table one presents students' perceptions of the validity of assessment tasks. The first five items on the SPAQ questionnaire in Table one addressed the validity of assessment tasks in the departments of English studies at the three faculties under investigation. Items one, two, and three evaluated the congruence of assessment tasks with planned learning or content validity. In addition, items four and five examined the face validity of the tests administered to students in these departments. The scores of participants' responses in the three faculties were almost similar and exceeded (M = 3.35) for content validity and (M = 3.50) for face validity. This result indicates that students perceived the assessment tasks designed by their professors as similar to what they do in class. Students also perceived the tests designed by their professors in the three faculties as having a satisfactory level of face validity.

Table 1. *Students' perception of the validity of assessment tasks*

	Moulay Ismail Faculty			Ain Chock Faculty			Ibn Tofail Faculty		
	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD
1. Exams at my Faculty are about what I have done in class.	207	3.63	1.02	159	3.45	1.02	160	3.63	0.85
2. I am tested on what the teachers have taught me during the semester.	207	3.90	0.91	159	3.68	1.03	160	3.93	0.91
3. Exam questions are about topics that have been covered in class.	207	3.61	0.97	159	3.35	1.00	60	3.63	0.91
4. The formats of the tests are expected and well constructed with familiar tasks.	207	3.61	1.06	159	3.52	1.05	160	3.92	0.82
5. The items in the tests are straightforward, uncomplicated, and can be accomplished within the allotted time limit.	207	3.61	1.06	159	3.52	1.05	160	3.78	0.96

Note. SD: Standard Deviation

Table two presents students' perceptions of the reliability of assessment tasks at the three faculties. According to the scores in this table, all the mean values exceeded (M = 3.10), which means that students considered the assessment tasks at the three Faculties reliable.

Table 2. *Students' perception of the reliability of assessment tasks*

	Moulay Ismail Faculty			Ain Chock Faculty			Ibn Tofail Faculty		
	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD
1. The tests I sit for have clear directions for scoring/ evaluation.	207	3.35	1.16	159	3.20	1.14	160	3.45	1.19
2. They have uniform rubrics for scoring/ evaluation.	207	3.60	1.13	159	3.31	1.13	160	3.61	1.07
3. They contain items/ tasks that are unambiguous to me.	207	3.36	1.03	159	2.99	1.07	160	3.10	1.16

Table three presents students' perceptions of the authenticity of assessment tasks. Among the 5 Likert scales in this table, all authenticity items exceeded half of it (M = 3). Accordingly, it could be claimed that the assessment tasks at the three faculties were perceived as authentic.

Table 3. *Students' perception of the authenticity of assessment tasks*

	Moulay Ismail Faculty			Ain Chock Faculty			Ibn Tofail Faculty		
	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD
1. I am asked to apply my learning to real-life situations.	207	3.55	1.09	159	3.45	1.14	160	3.71	1.03
2. My English final exams are meaningful and useful.	207	3.36	1.12	159	3.10	1.15	160	3.16	1.19
3. I find exam tasks relevant to the real world.	207	3.56	1.11	159	3.21	1.04	60	3.54	1.07
4. English final exams test my ability to apply learning.	207	3.53	1.10	159	3.51	1.00	160	3.70	1.02

5. Exams at university examine my ability to answer every day questions.	207	3.16	1.09	159	3.23	0.99	160	3.38	1.03

The results in Table four present students' perceptions of the practicality of assessment tasks. Unlike the previous criteria, which generated similar results among participants in the three faculties of letters and humanities under study, the item's mean score at Ain Chock Faculty indicated that the students perceived the assessment tasks as impractical. Items three and four, for instance, scored less than (M = 2.50). This result indicates that, according to students, exams at this Faculty were not conducted smoothly and lacked sufficient resources to ensure proper testing conditions.

Table 4. *Students' perception of the practicality of assessment tasks*

	Moulay Ismail Faculty			Ain Chock Faculty			Ibn Tofail Faculty		
	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD
1. All the printed materials are accounted for.	207	2.96	1.19	159	2.85	1.27	160	3.43	1.16
2. The allotted time is enough to finish all the exam questions.	207	2.83	1.08	159	2.97	0.99	160	3.25	1.05
3. The administration of exams is carried out smoothly and efficiently.	207	3.14	1.00	159	2.48	1.02	60	3.19	1.07
4. There are enough teachers to invigilate in exams.	207	3.59	0.97	159	2.43	1.00	160	3.55	1.12
5. There are enough materials and resources to administer the tests in good conditions.	207	3.28	1.20	159	3.08	1.20	160	3.65	0.85

Table five presents the scores related to students' perceptions of the effect of assessment tasks on their studied content at the three Faculties under study. The results show that the mean of score items exceeded (M = 2.50), with the lowest mean score being (M = 3.43). This result indicates that students at the three institutions agree that the assessment tasks designed by their professors affect the content they study.

Table 5. *Students' perception of the effect of assessment on their studied content*

	Moulay Ismail Faculty			Ain Chock Faculty			Ibn Tofail Faculty		
	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD
1. All sections of courses/ modules are of equal importance to me.	207	3.61	1.00	159	3.51	1.21	160	3.96	0.89
2. When studying my courses, I focus more on the final exam than learning goals.	207	3.89	0.84	159	3.30	1.16	160	3.63	0.93
3. I prioritize learning the reviewed points in courses based on the priorities of final exams.	207	3.71	0.95	159	3.43	0.99	60	3.93	0.84

4. The supplementary materials that I study are influenced by the final exams.	207	3.63	1.01	159	3.51	1.04	160	3.78	0.97
5. I expect my professors to place greater emphasis on the topics that will be covered in the final exams.	207	3.48	0.92	159	3.51	1.07	160	3.47	1.18

The last Table in this section (Table six) presents the scores related to student' perceptions of the effect of assessment tasks on their studying methods at the three faculties of letters and humanities. The results show that all the means of score items exceeded (M = 2.50), with the lowest score being (M = 3.13). This result indicates that students at the three faculties agree on the effect of assessment tasks on the studying method they adopted.

Table 6. *Students' perception of the effect of assessment on their studying method*

	Moulay Ismail Faculty			Ain Chock Faculty			Ibn Tofail Faculty		
	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD	Num	Mean	SD
1. Final examinations influence my method of studying.	207	3.33	1.06	159	3.62	0.98	160	3.59	1.08
2. I try to study based on previous final exams.	207	3.46	1.10	159	3.32	1.11	160	3.13	1.17
3. I spend less time on sections that are less likely to appear in the final exams.	207	3.58	0.89	159	3.71	1.12	60	3.75	1.03
4. I study based on the final examinations.	207	3.45	1.10	159	3.45	1.11	160	3.17	1.20
5. I try to learn test-taking strategies.	207	3.49	1.22	159	3.51	1.15	160	3.51	1.09

The relation between students' perception of assessment and learning outcomes (grades)

Parameter estimates: Age, Faculty, and Gender

This section deals with parameter estimates of age, Faculty, and gender on language assessment principles (authenticity, practicality, validity, reliability, and washback effect).

Validity

Since validity has a very significant effect on the quality of the tests, it was also importance to study the effect of Faculty, gender, and age on validity items. As displayed in Table seven, the impact of Faculty on these items was highly significant for items two and three at Ain Chock Faculty and item 4 at Ibn Tofail Faculty. Gender effects on validity items two and five was also substantial; however, there was no effect of age on validity items.

Table 7. *Faculty, gender and, age effects on validity items and their Nagelkerke index*

	Item1		Item2		Item3		Item4		Item5	
	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]
Ain Chock	-0.43	0.28	-0.45	0.01	-0.53	0.006	-0.22	0.24	-0.36	0.06
Ibn Tofail	-0.13	0.49	0.09	0.63	0.05	0.77	0.51	0.01	0.13	0.49

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Gender	0.26	0.10	0.34	0.03	0.09	0.55	0.27	0.09	0.42	0.008
Age	-0.02	0.36	0.02	0.34	0.004	0.90	0.02	0.34	-0.05	0.06
Nagelkerke Index	0.01		0.02		0.02		0.03		0.03	

Note. [a]Est: Estimte, [b]p: P value. Bold values are significant at a 5% probability.

Reliability

Another primary criterion of language assessment investigated in this study was reliability. Three items were included in the questionnaire designed for students in the three Faculties under study. Table eight represents faculty, gender, and age effects on items' reliability and Nagelkerke index. The results revealed a significant impact on item two reliability at Ain Chock Faculty and item three reliability at Ibn Tofail Faculty. However, gender and age did not affect reliability items.

Table 8. *Faculty, gender, and age effects on reliability items and their Nagelkerke index*

	Item1		Item2		Item3	
	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]
Faculty Ain Chock	-0.63	0.001	-0.09	0.63	0.14	0.45
Faculty Ibn Tofail	-0.13	0.48	0.28	0.14	0.38	0.04
Gender	0.10	0.50	-0.06	0.67	-0.11	0.46
Age	-0.04	0.15	-0.04	0.09	-0.03	0.18
Nagelkerke index	0.02		0.01		0.01	

Authenticity

Table 9 presents the effects of Faculty, gender, and age on authenticity item' and Nagelkerke index. The results showed that the p-values of items 3 and 5 at Ain chock Faculty were less than 0.05, which means that the effect of this Faculty on these two items' authenticity was significant. However, the p-value of all the other items at Ibn Tofail Faculty was more than 0.05, which means that this Faculty had no effect on any items' authenticity and their Nagelkerke index. Finally, the impact of age on item 4 authenticity was also significant (p = 0.04).

Table 9. *Faculty, gender, and age effects on items' authenticity and their Nagelkerke index*

	Item1		Item2		Item3		Item4		Item5	
	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]
Ain Chock	-0.30	0.10	-0.52	0.06	-0.57	0.003	-0.20	0.28	-0.40	0.03
Ibn Tofail	0.10	0.59	-0.10	0.58	-0.32	0.09	0.26	0.17	-0.27	0.15
Gender	-0.30	0.60	0.54	0.73	0.07	0.62	0.13	0.29	0.11	0.46
Age	-0.01	0.54	-0.20	0.49	0.03	0.22	-0.06	0.04	0.02	0.45
Nagelkerke Index	0.016		0.17		0.23		0.20		0.12	

Practicality

Table 10 presents Faculty, gender, and age effects on practicality items and their Negelkerke index. The results showed that the impact of Ain Chock Faculty was highly significant on items

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three and four and significant on item five practicality. In addition, the impact of Ibn Tofail on the practicality of Items one and two was highly significant. As for gender, its effect on item four was significant, whereas gender did not affect other practicality items. Finally, the impact of age on practicality items was highly significant for items two and five.

Table 10. *Faculty, gender, and age effects on practicality items and their Nagelkerke index*

	Item1		Item2		Item3		Item4		Item5	
	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]
Ain Chock	-0.16	0.37	0.25	0.17	-1.26	0.00	-2.07	0.00	-0.37	0.05
Ibn Tofail	0.71	0.00	0.70	0.00	0.04	0.83	-0.18	0.37	0.50	0.01
Gender	-0.06	0.67	0.09	0.95	0.10	0.51	0.32	0.05	0.27	0.09
Age	-0.02	0.39	-0.06	0.02	0.01	0.63	-0.01	0.66	-0.07	0.01
Nagelkerke Index	0.45		0.04		0.10		0.21		0.05	

The Washback

The last assessment principle investigated in the present study was the washback effect. In this study, this criterion of language assessment was dealt with in two different ways: the washback effect on students' studied content and students' studying method.

The Washback (effect on studied content)

The results in Table 11 showed that the p-value of items 2 and 3 at Ain Chock Faculty and items 2 and 5 at Ibn Tofail Faculty was less than 0.05, meaning a highly significant effect of the two faculties on the cited washback items. The results also revealed that age had a considerable effect on washback item four.

Table 11. *Faculty, gender, and age effects on items' washback (content) and their Nagelkerke index*

	Item1		Item2		Item3		Item4		Item5	
	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]
Ain Chock	-0.05	0.78	-1.05	0.00	-0.64	0.001	-0.27	0.15	0.14	0.45
Ibn Tofail	0.004	0.98	-1.29	0.00	-0.32	0.10	-0.33	0.08	0.45	0.02
Gender	-0.24	0.12	0.08	0.60	0.02	0.86	-0.03	0.85	0.10	0.53
Age	0.03	0.24	0.01	0.64	-0.01	0.57	-0.05	0.05	0.001	0.97
Nagelkerke Index	0.008		0.10		0.02		0.012		0.013	

The Washback (effect on studying method)

The last table in this section concerned Faculty, gender, and age effects on washback items (effect on studying method). The results displayed in this table (Table 11) showed a highly significant effect of Ain Chock Faculty on washback item one as well as a substantial effect of Ibn Tofail Faculty on the washback items one, two, and three. Similarly, gender had a substantial effect on washback item two. Finally, Age had a significant effect on washback item four.

Table 12. *Faculty, gender, and age effects on items' washback (method) and their Nagelkerke index*

	Item1		Item2		Item3		Item4		Item5	
	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]	Est[a].	P[b]
Ain Chock	0.54	0.06	-0.19	0.31	0.36	0.06	-0.03	0.87	-0.01	0.95
Ibn Tofail	0.84	0.00	0.45	0.02	-0.44	0.02	0.32	0.10	0.20	0.29
Gender	0.18	0.26	-0.39	0.01	0.11	0.46	-0.11	0.48	0.12	0.44
Age	0.05	0.07	0.009	0.76	0.03	0.24	-0.07	0.008	-0.03	0.21
Nagelkerke Index	0.04		0.032		0.033		0.025		0.009	

Instead of dealing with the 28 items, standardization of the variables allowed us to deal with only five concepts. This data reduction was conducted using cluster analysis under the distance ward method, as demonstrated in the Dendrogram below. The discrimination thread in this Dendrogram was around seven, which resulted in well-defined clusters based on which we used the scores displayed in Table 12.

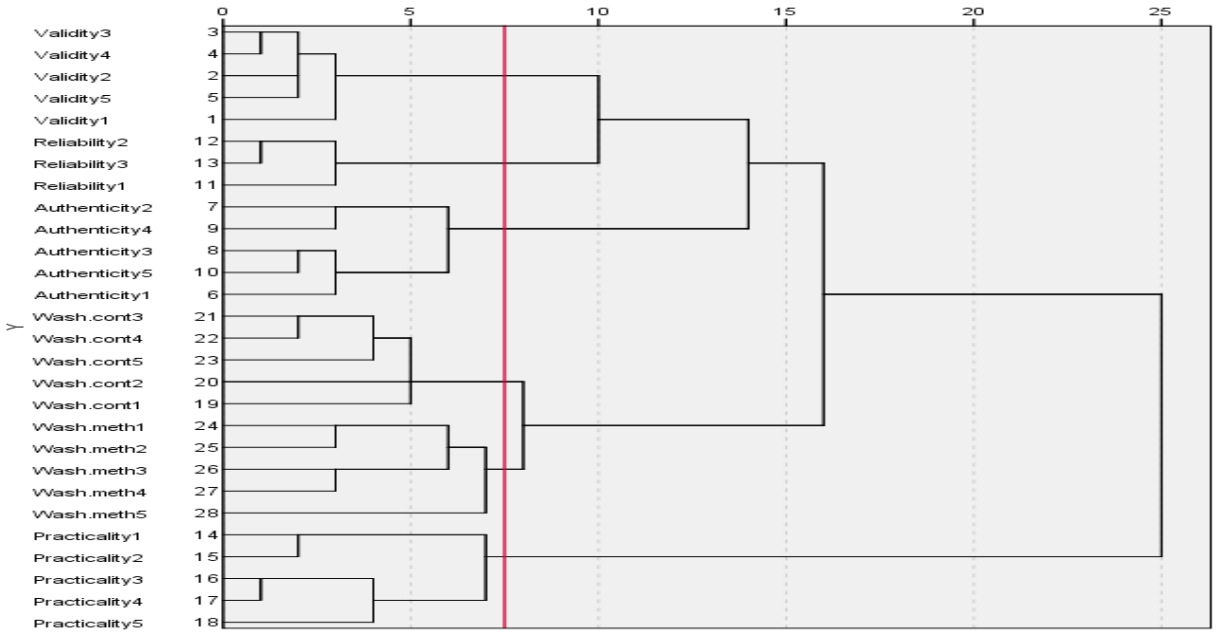


*Figure 1***.** Dendrogram representing Ward distance

Table 13. *Effect of faculty, gender, and age on validity, authenticity, practicality, reliability, and washback scores*

	Validity		Authenticity		Practicality		Reliability		Washback	
Source	Obs. F	P value	Obs. F	P value	Obs. F	P value	Obs. F	P value	Obs. F	P Value
Faculty	8,615	0,001	5,318	0,005	28,733	0,001	2,130	0,120	1,774	0,171
Gender	8,055	0,005	2,444	0,119	1,421	0,234	0,009	0,923	0,025	0,874
Age	0,166	0,684	0,166	0,683	3,507	0,062	5,508	0,019	0,010	0,919

The results in Table 13 showed a highly significant effect of Faculty on validity, authenticity, and practicality scores. In addition, gender also had a significant impact on validity scores. However, age did not affect any language assessment criteria, which were also used in this study as an element of students' perception of assessment.

The last table in this section (Table 14) presents multiple regressions of validity, authenticity, practicality, reliability, and washback scores on students' grades. The results showed that apart from validity, which had a significant effect on students' grades, the other elements representing students' perception of assessment did not impact grades.

Table 14. *Multiple regression of validity, authenticity, practicality, reliability, and washback scores on students' grades*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	P value
Validity	0,148	0,050	0,141	2,955	0,003
Authenticity	-0,057	0,044	-0,063	-1,275	0,203
Practicality	0,065	0,041	0,075	1,587	0,113
Reliability	0,051	0,069	0,036	0,738	0,461
Washback score	-0,033	0,035	-0,043	-0,938	0,348

To explain the nature of the relationship between validity and students' grades, for instance, the following graph represents a simple scatter of grades by validity.

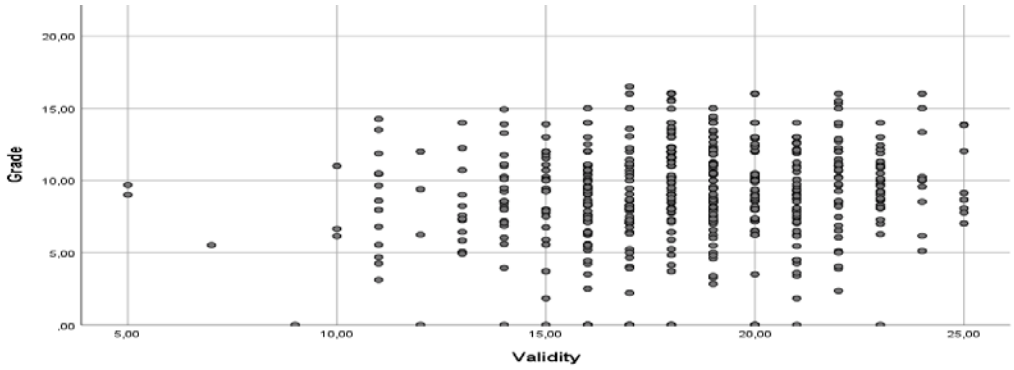


Figure 2. Simple Scatter of Grade by Validity

The distribution of the points on the scatter, which are dispersed and do not follow any particular direction, provides a visual representation of the relationship between the validity of assessment tasks and students' grades.

Discussion

This study addresses two critical questions related to how Moroccan university students perceive the assessment tasks designed by their professors and how this perception relates to their academic performance. As previously mentioned, validity, reliability, authenticity, practicality, and washback were the five key factors influencing students' perceptions of assessment. The

Washback concept was examined regarding how assessments impact students' study methods and the content they focus on.

In response to the first research question, the average scores of students on the five-scale assessment questionnaire indicate that none of the items received the maximum score. However, most scales reached acceptable scores in the three faculties. The study, for instance, showed that students perceived authenticity to have the highest mean in the three faculties (M = 3.67 at Moulay Ismail faculty, M = 3.50 at Ain Chock Faculty, and M = 3.77 at Ibn Tofail Faculty). In fact, "there has long been an agreement over the idea that authenticity is an important quality for the test development." (Lynch, 1982, p. 11). Morrow (1991) emphasizes the paramount importance of authenticity, while Wood (1993) also regards it as one of the most crucial aspects of language testing. Bachman and Palmer (1996, p. 23) describe authenticity as a "critical quality of language tests." Gulikers et al. (2008) propose that authenticity is subjective and often tied to an individual's personal experience. Students' perceptions of the authenticity of assessment tasks align with the findings of Gao (2012), who argues that for assessments to reflect real-life situations, it is essential that teachers and other stakeholders involved in assessment design fully understand the real-world contexts that are most relevant to students. In contrast, studies by Dhindsa (2007) and Rahman (2020) reported a perceived lack of authenticity in assessment tasks, as reflected in their investigation of students' perception of assessment tasks.

Alongside 'Authenticity,' students in the English studies departments at the three faculties also rated 'Validity' relatively high (M = 3.67 at Moulay Ismail Faculty, M = 3.50 at Ain Chock Faculty, and M = 3.77 at Ibn Tofail Faculty) compared to other scales. This result suggests a strong alignment between assessment tasks and classroom instruction. Many participants indicated that the assessments they undertake cover topics that were discussed in class. When students know they will be tested on the material they have studied, they tend to feel more motivated and eager to invest time and effort in class-related activities (Brookhart & Bronowicz, 2003). Similarly, in a study on students' perceptions of Mathematics tasks, Gao (2012) highlighted the importance of informing students about how assessments align with the goals, objectives, and activities of their learning program. However, when assessments are not aligned with these goals and the teaching process, it can undermine students' learning (Segers, 2009).

Practicality had the lowest scores, especially at Ain Chock Faculty (M = 2.76). In this respect, Bachman and Palmer (1996) caution that practicality should be given the same importance as the other assessment criteria when designing language tests. The complexity of investigating the practicality of assessment tasks is related to the number of stakeholders associated with this criterion. The practicality of language tests is reflected in the perspectives of test takers, test designers, and the conditions under which the tests are administered. According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), a practical test considers the time and effort required for both its design and scoring. Additionally, it should be manageable for the test taker, allowing completion within appropriate time limits.

Practicality was examined within the broader framework of Test Usefulness, which comprises six key criteria for language assessment. Bachman and Palmer (1996), who developed this framework, defined practicality as the balance between the resources needed for designing, developing, and administering the test and the resources available for these activities. They identified three key types of resources necessary to ensure the practicality of language tests: human

resources (such as test administrators, writers, and scorers), material resources (including word processors, tape and video recorders, and computers), and time (for both test development and completion of specific tasks). However, to our knowledge, no studies have been published on the practicality of assessment tasks within the Moroccan context.

Reliability is another crucial aspect of assessment quality. A test can only be considered valid if it is reliable (Al Noor, 2020). Despite the different methods used to measure the reliability of assessment tasks, researchers agree that reliability refers to the consistency of test scores (Harris, 1969; Gronlund, 1977; Coombe et al., 2007; Brigui, 2017). Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) determined three criteria for a test to be reliable. The test should have clear directions, uniform rubrics for scoring, and clear items and tasks. Accordingly, the results in Tables 4, 5, and 6 showed that students in the three faculties perceived the assessment tasks as reliable. The scores were (M=3.43) at Moulay Ismail Faculty, (M=3.16) at Ain Chock Faculty, and (M=3.49) at Ibn Tofail Faculty. This fact means that the assessment tasks at these faculties have clear directions and uniform rubrics for scoring. In addition, these tasks contain relatively clear items. Some factors may affect the reliability of language tests. Sattler (2001) emphasized that test length is a key factor in determining the reliability of tests, asserting that longer tests tend to be more reliable. Hughes (2003) identified scoring as another source of unreliability in language tests. Additionally, Li (2019) emphasized that test conditions can significantly influence test outcomes.

The last criterion investigated in this study was the washback effect on students' study content and method. Regarding the first type of washback, results showed that the assessment tasks affect students' study methods. In the three faculties, the scores of the five items included in this scale exceeded (M = 3.00). This result means that students in the three faculties were more concerned with getting good grades in final exams than with pedagogical aims. For this reason, they focused more on points that were more likely to appear in final exams. The items used to measure the effect of assessment tasks on studying content generated similar results in this study. All the items in the three faculties also exceeded (M = 3.30), indicating that the assessment tasks affect students' studying content. Students often approach their studies and attend classes with previous final exams in mind, ultimately dedicating more time and effort to topics they believe are most likely to appear on these exams.

These findings align with the results of many other studies (e.g., Andrews et al., 2002; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Ferman, 2004; McNamara, 2000; Hemmati & Soltanpoor, 2014), all of which concluded that the washback effect could significantly influence learners. These findings supports Messick's conception of validity, which includes both the value promoted by the test and its impact on individuals (Fulcher, 2010). In other words, students tailored their study methods around previous final exams, focusing more on sections likely to appear in future tests. As a result, their study strategies would have changed entirely if the design and structure of the final exams had been different.

The findings in this study were supported by other studies investigating the washback effect. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) conducted a study that examined the influence of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) on classroom teaching. The researchers concluded that TOEFL affected the content of the course. Hemmati and Soltanpour (2014), whose study aimed to investigate the washback effect of university-level final examinations on Iranian

distance learners' study methods and content, reached similar results. These results indicated that final exams had a significant impact on students, influencing both the content they studied and the methods they used.

Our results indicate that students across the three faculties perceive all sections of their courses or modules as equally important (M = 3.61 at Moulay Ismail Faculty, M = 3.51 at Ain Chock Faculty, and M = 3.96 at Ibn Tofail Faculty). This perception highlights the inherent significance of all course content. Students' overall perceptions are most likely influenced by the nature of the final exams. From the researchers' experience as educators, it is common practice to inform students that any part of the course may be included in the exams, contributing to their perception of uniform importance. In other institutions and due to the methods of assessment design, teachers find themselves testing details and marginal points. In Ibn Tofail University, for instance, exams designed for common core students use only multiple-choice questions (Brigui, 2017). Because some tests are designed using more than 30 questions, teachers may find themselves testing most of the points included in the course sections. These practices confirms what Alderson & Wall (1993) stated regarding the influence of testing on teaching and learning, noting that a test causes language teachers and learners to do things "they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test." (p. 117).

Concerning the second research question, the study found that students' overall perception of assessment negatively affected their learning outcomes. The only factor influencing assessment scores was validity, though it explained only a small portion of the variance in students' performance. The remaining factors—authenticity, reliability, practicality, and washback—did not significantly correlate with students' grades. This lack of correlation might be because students do not prioritize assessment criteria, leading to a disconnect between their perceptions and actual behaviors. Leeuwenkamp and Brink (2007) argue that not all assessment criteria are crucial for ensuring student satisfaction. Additionally, students may not fully understand these criteria or how they impact their perceptions and performance. To gain a deeper understanding of how students form perceptions of assessment quality, further research is needed to explore these views in greater depth, which aligns with the findings of Bouziane and Rouijel (2024), whose study revealed that although students generally regard their assessments as satisfactory, several key areas—such as validity, feedback, and the overall impact on learning—still require significant improvement.

The methodology adopted in this study may have influenced the results obtained. Firstly, students were asked to provide their perceptions of assessment tasks in general without specifying particular programs or modules. Future research could investigate whether students' perceptions of assessment quality vary across different modules. Secondly, the study sample included students from various levels of study (semesters 1 through 4) and other faculties of letters and humanities at three Moroccan universities (Moulay Ismail University, Hassan II University, and Ibn Tofail University). To obtain more precise insights, future research could apply the SPAQ to specific Faculties and targeted assessment programs.

Other factors that could account for the results of this study may be specific to the Moroccan context. To better understand the relationship between students' perceptions of assessment quality and their grades in Morocco, it is essential to focus on the Moroccan educational context. Relating students' performance of assessment tasks to the assessment quality criteria might not give us a clear relationship between their perception and performance. Students may sometimes have a negative perception of assessment quality but still get high grades, and vice versa. Additionally, participants' attitudes toward scientific research can also play an important role and potentially influence the results. Furthermore, students might not have read the items in

the questionnaires attentively. More attention should, therefore, be given to the choice of participants and piloting of the questionnaire to ensure that students know the study items well.

Conclusion

This study aimed to gain deeper insights into Moroccan university students' perceptions of assessment tasks in the English studies departments at Moroccan faculties of letters and humanities. It also examined the relationship between students' perceptions of assessment and performance. The findings revealed that students perceived the assessment tasks at the three faculties as having a satisfactory level of validity, reliability, and authenticity. However, the practicality of these tasks was questioned, with notable dissatisfaction reported by students, particularly at the Ain Chock Faculty. Additionally, the study found that the assessment tasks designed by Moroccan professors influenced both the content students studied and their study methods.

Surprisingly, there was a discrepancy between students' overall perceptions of assessment tasks and testing across the three faculties and their learning outcomes. This finding indicates that not all variables related to students' perceptions of assessment tasks are related to their performance or learning outcomes. Moreover, the variables that do relate to students' learning outcomes account for only a small portion of the variance. While these results do not diminish the importance of students' perceptions of these variables, they highlight the need to integrate students' views on all assessment criteria to ensure the quality of testing and assessment practices in Moroccan higher education.

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The Role of Intercultural Communication in the Acquisition of Slang Vocabulary in English

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Abstract
Intercultural communication is a historical and cultural phenomenon that has accompanied the development of mankind. The cultural diversity of every nation can be explained to a large extent by the ways of communication that have always taken place in history through contact. In terms of learning foreign languages, intercultural communication plays a leading role. The aim of the present study is to analyse the role of intercultural communication in the acquisition of slang vocabulary in English. The significance of the given study is in highlighting the crucial role of intercultural communication in enhancing the acquisition of English slang in order to support a development of more effective, culturally integrated language teaching methods. The method of the study was based on a cross-sectional survey among language students with different levels of English proficiency. The main findings of the study demonstrate that a natural communicative environment can create conditions for learning English slang. Working with native speakers allows for better integration into a new language environment. The study of linguistic variation is necessary at the very beginning of learning a foreign language. The role of teachers in this process is a leading one. It is they who should organise and regulate changes in students' linguistic and cultural adaptation. To conclude, the intercultural integration plays a leading role in the cognitive integration of slang acquisition. The further use of this study will open up new perspectives in the didactics of English language teaching.
Keywords: Cognitive integration, communicative competence, language variation, linguocultural adaptation, socio-cultural context.

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Introduction

As is known, the complex situation in the modern political, economic and social world brings the problems of intercultural communication to the forefront. Researchers studying intercultural communication are faced with more and more questions that are very difficult to solve. Despite the fact that numerous studies are devoted to intercultural communication in language learning and slang as a linguistic phenomenon, there is still a lack of research focused on promoting the acquisition of slang vocabulary in English through intercultural communication. When addressing formal language acquisition, scholars ignore the informal, socially embedded nature of slang and how cultural immersion and interaction with native speakers influence its learning. The proposed article aims to overcome these gaps by investigating the relationships between intercultural experience and the development of communicative competence in the use of slang. There are still open questions in the research on interculturality despite the rich scientific base on intercultural communication in terms of periodic contact between representatives of different cultures (Bondar et al., 2020). In the scientific literature, the authors identify five types of interculturality. The key one is experimental interculturalism, which is actually related to the perception of different registers of a foreign language. Experimental interculturality is compared to the constant changes that occur at the level of language, experimenting with attempts to communicate in the sense of simply transferring knowledge or skills of native speakers. The starting point in this process is the student and his/her awareness of his/her own difficulties and problems in perceiving intercultural language nuances.

The perception of different language registers begins at the very beginning of learning a foreign language by creating a common culture that is formed during classes and intercultural exchanges. An intercultural approach to language learning requires the active participation of the student. The perception of interculturalism is based more on subjective and emotional aspects than on pure knowledge. In this context, Devadze et al. (2022) structured intercultural transit into three stages. However, the present study aims to analyse students' reflections on their own language and culture to identify the differences between their native language and English in the context of learning slang.

According to Awadh and Shafiull (2020), respect and equality are the foundation of any intercultural exchange. To organise interaction and respect in the classroom, the teacher should combine the teaching of language and intercultural competencies. Only such a symbiosis can ensure discussions between interlocutors with different social and cultural identities, avoiding stereotypes and prejudices.

Accordingly, misunderstandings and difficulties are possible during asymmetric exchanges in the sense of language learning separated from intercultural competence (Vainola, 2024). Incorrectly formed stereotypes, perceptions and prejudices about other cultures can be a significant obstacle to the development of effective communication competence.

Modern didactic practices suggest using this approach from the beginning of foreign language learning, even before an individual faces intercultural challenges in real life (Prima et al., 2024). It is important to put students in context from the beginning. This way, they can create connections in the classroom, share their opinions and show empathy for the diverse experiences of their colleagues.

However, the cultural differences of the target language become more apparent in the language environment. Studying and practising the language with native speakers helps overcome the difficulties of understanding the language's nuances, promoting unity and intercultural ethics.

This approach is best for learning slang vocabulary. The language environment creates an atmosphere of trust. Students can experiment with new language forms without difficulty, thus enriching their vocabulary.

Intercultural communication is closely related to learning a foreign language. Not only do cultures and traditions spread their ideologies through culture, but they also transmit them through language, which is an important tool of communication. Undoubtedly, intercultural communication plays a crucial role in understanding and mastering lexical features, including slang, which is an integral part of a living language.

Slang emerges on the boundaries of a particular social group. Slang vocabulary is a manifestation of cultural differences and, at the same time, a means of self-expression. According to Katsouda et al. (2024), different cultures are manifested through linguistic differences. Slang can reflect cultural values and social norms. First of all, it serves as a tool for building the identity of speakers.

As part of learning English, mastering slang vocabulary is the first step towards integration into the language environment. However, cultural barriers make this process much more difficult. Stereotypes and prejudices significantly impact the perception and use of slang. At the same time, learning slang requires understanding its cultural context, as slang is an indicator of behavioural norms transmitted through intercultural interaction.

From the perspective of intercultural communication, slang vocabulary is particularly interesting because it often reflects stereotypes, social categories and ideas typical of a certain group of speakers. Scientists emphasise that stereotypes can influence linguistic behaviour, discourse content, and expectations during interaction (Vakarov, Redko, Hodiashchev, Tkachuk & Yemets, 2024). Slang is a way to get closer to another culture and emphasise one's uniqueness. It is through the analysis of stereotypes that students have the opportunity to develop their intercultural competence. It will allow them to better integrate into the new language environment.

The aim of the study is to analyse the role of intercultural communication in learning English slang vocabulary and to identify effective approaches to teaching slang vocabulary in a multicultural environment. The paper focuses on how stereotypes and intercultural interaction affect the understanding and use of slang.

The working questions of this article are as follows:

1. What is the theoretical context for studying slang and its relationship to intercultural communication?
2. How do regional and cultural variations of British and American slang influence the acquisition and use of slang in intercultural communication?
3. What are the practical methods of integrating slang vocabulary into the educational process, considering the peculiarities of intercultural interaction?

Thus, the scientific relevance of this article is to reveal the importance of intercultural communication as a key element in learning English slang vocabulary. The integration of intercultural aspects in English language learning allows students to recognise social norms and the identity of speakers.

Thus, slang vocabulary should be seen as a tool for understanding the cultural context. Overcoming stereotypes and barriers in intercultural interaction contributes to the formation of effective communication competence of students.

The practical significance of the results of the work lies in the introduction of innovative teaching methods, where language and intercultural competence are symbiosis.

Literature Review

Culture and language

The process of globalisation, which initially dominated only the economic sphere, has subsequently led to profound transformations. Economic, social, political and cultural shifts affect interethnic and interfaith relations (Sobolenko et al., 2024; Aljuaid, 2024). Culturally, globalisation tends to undermine minority cultures, cultural homogenisation, change the national model of values and the emergence of hybrid cultural forms (Hubal, 2023). Increasingly, scholars are discussing cultural globalisation, which is a specific set of values and beliefs that spread across the globe (Dobrolyubska et al., 2024). The need to promote intercultural communication is obvious in the context of the new realities. Intercultural communication includes two fundamental concepts - culture and language, meaning and correlation (Yamin, 2025).

The term “culture” has a long history in language, derived from the Latin colere, meaning “to gather, to tend fields or livestock” (Smith et al., 2018, p. 25). According to Causadias (2020), agriculture itself has this original meaning, the cultivation of land, reminding us of the beginnings of agrarian civilisation and humanity's settledness. Later, the meaning of "culture of the spirit" was formed by analogy (Newsom, 2020). Diachronically, the concept of culture has recorded numerous interpretations due to the extremely broad nature of the cultural sphere. A comprehensive presentation of the concept of culture through the prism of multiple definitions is provided (Trnka & Lorencova, 2022; Krotik & Morhun, 2021). The authors structure the concept of culture into seven categories: enumerative, descriptive, genetic, normative, historical, functional, behavioural, and symbolic. From the semiotic point of view, culture is a system of signs and practices of signification through which a person encodes his or her experience and transmits it (synchronously and diachronically) (Luhrmann, 2020). Thus, culture appears to us as a set of languages, symbols and meanings integrated into the communication process. The main means of culture is language.

According to Kim (2020), language and culture are products of the human spirit. They jointly shape the spirituality of each community, and culture here encompasses all intellectual aspects of civilisation. According to Strathern and Stewart (2020), culture is the accumulation of knowledge and experience, and language plays a leading role in social interaction.

Language, as a cultural code encompassing ethnicity and socio-cultural patterns, is at the heart of the communication process (Ortiz et al., 2020; Boichenko, et al., 2023). In communication theory, this is defined as the basis for the exchange of cultural values, the formation of shared meanings and the transmission of social heritage. Outside of communication, culture does not exist.

British slang has a long and rich history, with different forms of slang evolving over the centuries. The most famous form of British slang is the rhyming slang of Cockney, which originated in the 19th century among working-class residents of East London (Ruano-García, 2022; Kulichenko, et al., 2018).

In the early 20th century, British slang evolved by introducing new words and expressions from various sources, including the military and other subcultures. This led to the development of new forms of slang, such as "Polari", a slang language used by gay men and artists in the 20th century. In the 1960s and 1970s, British slang underwent another significant transformation with the emergence of youth culture and the counterculture movement (Drummond, 2020). The emergence of new musical genres, such as rock and roll, and the influence of American culture led to the creation of new slang (Pilipei & Pylypenko, 2020).

Today, British slang continues to evolve and adapt to new cultural and social changes.

Contemporary slang includes various slang terms, from regional dialects to internet jargon.

One of the most common aspects of the British language is the use of slang words and expressions, which are widely used in everyday conversation. According to Trach et al. (2020), since slang words are colloquial expressions that are not usually found in standard dictionaries but are part of the everyday language of a particular group or region, they are better learned in a language environment.

British slang words often add humour, sarcasm or irony to a conversation (Thompson et al., 2020). They can also establish a sense of belonging or identity within a group. It should be noted that while some British slang terms may have similar meanings to American slang, they often have different connotations or associations. English slang often likes to twist the original meanings of familiar words to give them a new meaning (Sydor & Nanivskyy, 2018).

There is a misconception that slang is not a collection of vulgar words (Shahlee & Ahmad, 2022). However, slang is more similar to everyday English. To master slang vocabulary, it is important to master the current and permanent registers, but you also need to know colloquial and informal terms (Scholkmann, 2020). This allows you to adapt to any situation. In the language environment, you may encounter these unusual phrases of speech when corresponding with an English speaker or even during an informal exchange with colleagues during an internship abroad. The English taught in school and commonly used in everyday life are different (Mamurova, 2021).

Qizi (2021) in his work emphasise that topics in textbooks often focus on formal registers, so many students have great difficulty understanding English from native speakers, even if they have a good understanding of written English.

Slang is almost exclusively used orally, so the best way to learn it is to be surrounded by native English speakers.

Slang in sociolinguistics

Communication ensures a language's dynamism, development and spread (Poplavskyi et al., 2020). At the same time, culture becomes a social indicator through communication. From this perspective, learning English slang vocabulary in intercultural communication plays a key role. Nowak & Wierzchoń, 2020) define slang as a reflection of cultural characteristics and a means of self-expression for speakers. To master slang as part of learning a foreign language, it is necessary to understand its socio-cultural context (Korneiko et al., 2023). Slang vocabulary is an indicator of a particular culture's behavioural norms and values (Kharitonenko, 2022). British slang vocabulary has gained worldwide recognition and is now frequently used in popular music, television, and films (Jalilbayli, 2022).

Thus, this vocabulary presents a challenge for English language learners (Lin et al., 2025). These words often have different meanings than their standard English equivalents. In their didactic study, Huang and Xia (2021) highlighted the advantages of learning slang in intercultural communication as the ability to adapt to a new environment and quickly expand relationships. The same idea raises in this paper, however there are steel some research gaps. The limited discussion of digital slang (social media, gaming, Gen Z dialects), which is crucial for modern learners is omitted, as these positions form an enormous scientific research corpus and can be included in prospects for future research. Thus, this study is important in terms of the slang knowledge that helps increasing the accuracy in expression and preventing misunderstandings, as well as promoting a sense of belonging and deep connections with the culture and traditions of the language being studied. The knowledge of the slang allows the better understanding of local

history and past events.

Methodology

The present study aims to identify patterns in the learning of English slang and its adaptation to language competence. The proposed study used a simultaneous cross-sectional design with the implementation of a qualitative methodological approach. This combination made it possible to collect context-dependent and authentic data in the context of learning English slang as a separate linguistic register. The cross-sectional design involved the study of participants' experiences at the research stage. This made it possible to compare the language skills and peculiarities of perception of slang expressions in different groups with different levels of knowledge. Since this approach was chosen because of the need for a detailed analysis of the respondents' language behaviour, students learned English in direct communication with native speakers.

Participants

The general characteristics of the focus group for the study were as follows (Table One):

Table 1. *Level, description and study conditions of respondents*

Level of English Proficiency	Description of Respondents	Study Conditions
One year of learning	Beginners selected to confirm that slang should be introduced at the beginning of language learning	Intensive English course with bi-weekly video communication with native British speakers
Two years of study	Respondents with basic knowledge and an initial understanding of informal vocabulary	Natural communicative environment facilitating slang acquisition
Three years of study	Respondents actively using slang in communication with developed communication skills.	English teachers assessed changes in students' speech and collected data on slang usage in independent learning
Total Participants	20	Members of the Priority Foreign Language Club

Source: authors' own development.

It should be noted that for this qualitative, exploratory study, a sample size of 20 participants is appropriate. Such a small number is aimed at identifying patterns and trends in the acquisition of English slang through intercultural communication. The emphasis in the work was more on in-depth observation and thematic analysis in a controlled learning environment than on broad generalization. The sample size was also dependent on the fact that all participants were members of the Priority Foreign Language Club. This ensured a homogeneous context in terms of motivation, access to native speakers, and engagement in language learning. Thus, the small sample allowed for a deep, context-specific understanding of slang acquisition at different levels of language proficiency.

Research Instruments

Methods and tools for collecting and analysing data: questionnaires, observation and video communication software.

The questionnaire contained ten closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions. The questions aimed to identify the level of understanding and use of English slang. Teachers observed the participants' online communication with native speakers and assessed student speech changes. The Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms organised online meetings between respondents and native speakers.

Research Procedures

At the preparatory stage, a questionnaire was developed to assess the level of students' slang knowledge, and video communication between respondents and native speakers was organised.

The main stage included teachers' observations of students' communicative behaviour during online communication. A total of 10 sessions were held over 5 weeks. The next step was a questionnaire distributed to 20 students who participated in the video calls. An informal conversation was held among the respondents to get additional feedback on the use of slang.

Data Analysis

The data analysis included comparing the questionnaire results between the three groups of students and determining the frequency of slang expressions depending on the level of study. Finally, the findings and additional information from the teachers were summarised.

Thematic analysis of the collected data allowed us to identify the main trends in the development and use of English slang among respondents.

Criteria for analysing questionnaires:

- (scale from “never” to “very often”) - by the frequency of slang used in speech**.
- (scale from “I do not understand at all” to “I understand completely”) - by the level of understanding of slang expressions.
- General assessment of the effectiveness of video communication with native speakers.

Using the qualitative method - during observation and informal conversations, teachers used to identify key patterns in students' speech.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed in the study. All participants gave their verbal consent to voluntarily participate in the study. The educational process was not disrupted during the experiment. The work was characterised by natural communication without imposing additional learning loads.

Results

The results showed the success of 20 respondents. The focus group was divided according to their level of English. The first group consisted of beginners - 1 year of study. This group was selected to confirm the hypothesis that slang should be learnt at the initial stage of language learning, along with typical activities. The next group was made up of participants with basic knowledge. They had been learning the language for 2 years. This group was to help analyse how understanding and learning informal vocabulary works for people with established communication

skills. The last group studied English for 3 years. The participants were selected to study the process of active use of slang. All participants communicated with native speakers via video twice weekly during an intensive course. This methodology created a natural communicative environment for learning slang. Teachers were tasked with observing changes in the groups' speech.

To assess the role of intercultural communication in the acquisition of English slang, the results were analyzed in groups, which indicated the level of English proficiency. Beginners had (1 year of study), intermediate students (2 years) and advanced students (3 years).

Beginners (1 year of study) demonstrated limited understanding and minimal use of slang. 80% of the respondents surveyed reported that they rarely or never used slang in communication. However, several participants were motivated to learn slang at the beginning of their studies. One novice noted:

Student Gr. 1: *"At the beginning of my studies, I hardly understood slang. However, I was interested in hearing new words from native speakers of the British language. This motivated me to learn slang so that I could speak like them"*.

For most participants, slang was discovered through video communication with native speakers and on social networks. 55% of the novice participants believed that regular contact with native speakers made slang more accessible.

Students with an average level of knowledge (2 years of study) demonstrated a growing awareness and initial ability to use slang in context. 60% understood slang "well" or "partially". For 45%, slang use occurred "sometimes" or "often". Participants also noted the usefulness of informal dialogue:

Student Gr. 2: *"Using slang became natural for me, as we spoke with native speakers from the UK"*.

Participants with an average level of knowledge used films and social networks more to learn slang. However, most of them mentioned that communication with native speakers was the most effective method for developing authentic slang use.

Participants with a high level of language proficiency (3 years of study) actively used slang and demonstrated confident, contextual understanding. 70% of participants used slang "often" or "very often". Their use was spontaneous and stylistically appropriate. 90% of them noted that contact with native speakers led to fluency in slang and an understanding of cultural nuances.

Student Gr. 3: *"I insert slang into conversation when talking to friends or for jokes. It makes me sound less academic and more natural."*

This group also demonstrated metalinguistic awareness, noting the differences between British and American slang, which some found confusing but enriching.

This allowed obtaining more accurate data on the acquisition and use of slang vocabulary (Figure One):

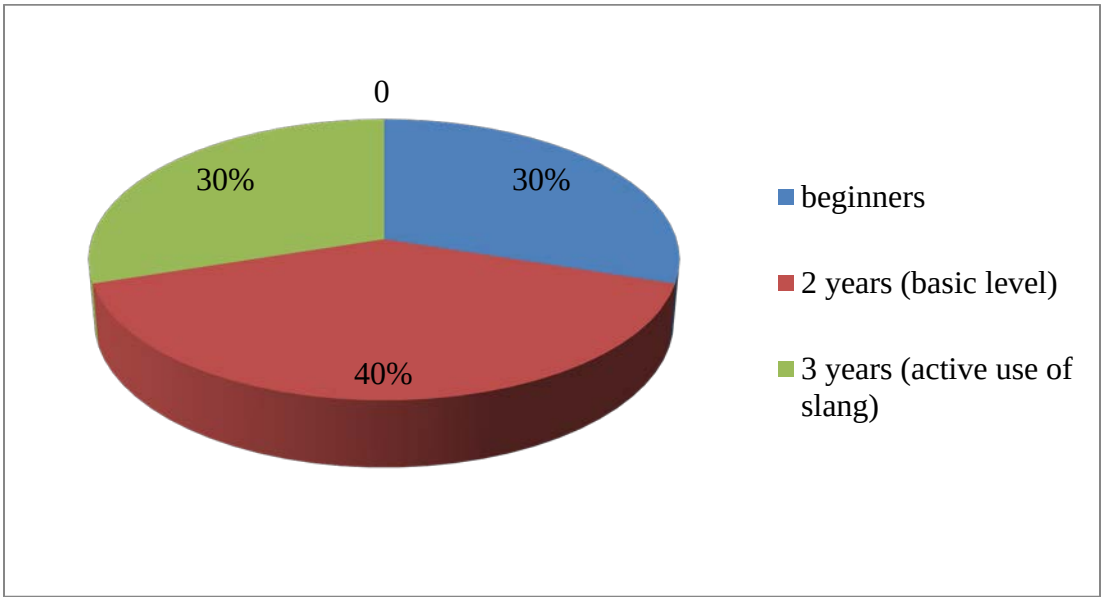


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by level of proficiency.

Table Two (Appendix A) presents a sample questionnaire that allowed us to summarise the observations and additional information from teachers.

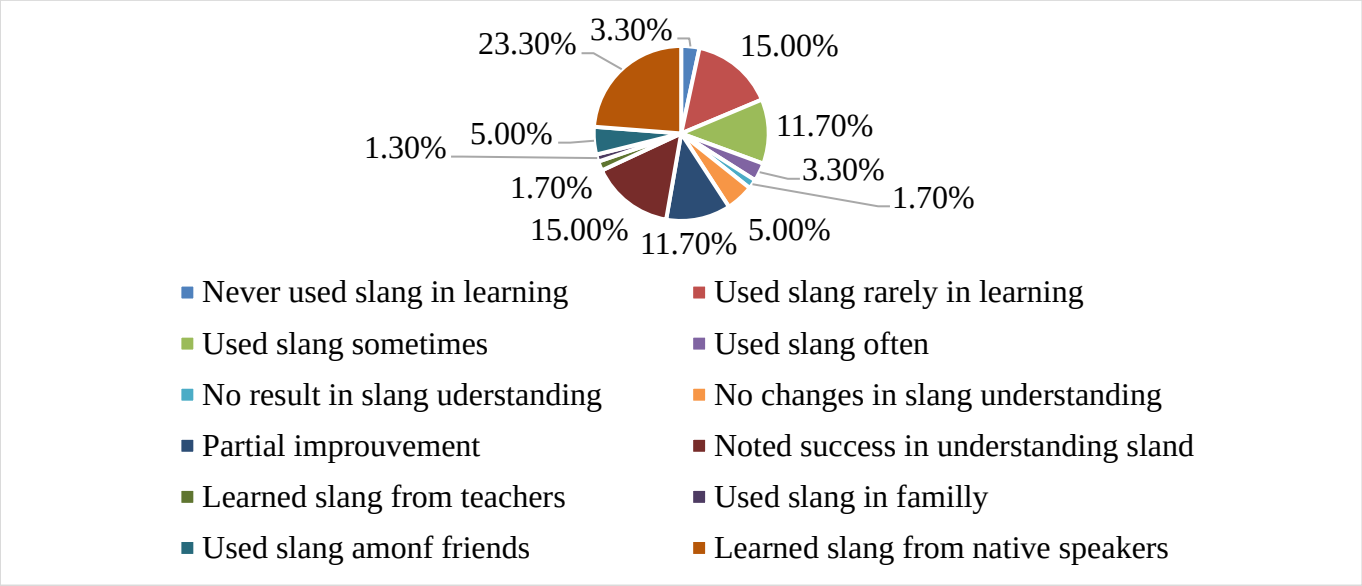
The answers of the 20 participants were as follows: 30% of the focus group started learning English in the first year. 40% already had a B1 level, which they covered in two years of learning English. 30% had been studying English for 3 years and were already actively using slang in their communication. When asked how often they used slang in everyday communication, 5% of participants never used it, 15% rarely, 35% sometimes, 30% often and 15% very often. The perception of slang when working with native speakers showed different results. 10% of participants did not understand the slang, 30% partially understood it, 40% had a satisfactory understanding of slang vocabulary, and 20% had an excellent understanding of slang. Additional information on the impact of working with native speakers: 55% of participants noted its benefits, 30% indicated a partial impact, 10% abstained from answering, and 5% said they did not see any significant impact on their vocabulary acquisition. Social media, videos, and films were the primary sources of slang for 45% of participants. 25% of the respondents had live communication with native speakers outside of the course, 20% of the participants accumulated slang from conversations with friends, and 10% learnt new slang words in English classes. Accordingly, 50% of the participants used English slang more actively in informal conversations with friends. 30% of participants accumulated slang in messages and chats, 15% of respondents learnt slang while watching films and videos, and only 5% in English classes.

Thus, based on the preliminary results, we can confirm the leading role of intercultural communication in the acquisition of slang vocabulary in English (Figure Two).

Understanding and correctly interpreting and using slang directly depends on the social environment. 70% of the participants most often learned about slang words from native speakers, 15% used it among friends, 10% even in the family, and only 5% from teachers. Video communication also proved to be effective. 45% of the participants noted success in understanding slang, 35% indicated only a partial improvement, 15% unfortunately did not notice any changes,

and 5% did not see any result. Slang and its use in learning situations is not common. 10% of participants used slang often, 35% sometimes, 45% rarely, and 10% never.

Figure 2. *Data of acquisition of slang vocabulary in English*



Source: authors' own development.

The most common slang words among the participants were (Table Three):

Table 3. *The most popular slang words among the surveyed participants*

Slang word	Explanation
	Greeting or thank you
Cheers	Bathroom or toilet
Chav	A young person from a lower stratum of society
	Irritable person
	Five-pound note
Naff	A term for something unfashionable or tasteless
Codswallop	A word for nonsense
Dodgy	Suspicious or unreliable
Mate	An informal word for a friend
Nitwit	Be a little bit silly
Daft	A little bit stupid
Tacky	Old-fashioned or tasteless
Bollocks	A swear word for "nonsense"
Gobsmacked	Surprised or speechless
Trolleyed	Drunk or poisoned
Skint	No money
Easy peasy	Easy
Brolly	Umbrella
Cheeky	Being a little silly

Source: authors' own development.

In the survey results, 80% of the participants also considered communication with native speakers a key factor in learning and understanding slang. 65% saw greater efficiency from watching films and videos. 50% believe that knowledge of slang is a way to integrate into informal communication.

Thus, the results confirm that slang is most often used in a friendly environment by 80%. Collaboration with native speakers contributes to 80% of the slang acquisition. For 45% of participants, social media is a source of slang expressions. 60% of participants avoid using slang in the academic environment.

The study's results confirmed the importance of intercultural communication in the cognitive integration of English slang, and its acquisition with native speakers is especially effective.

In the context of the presented results, Ramos (2023) emphasises the importance of intercultural communication competencies. The author defines them as cognitive, emotional and behavioural skills. These skills enable effective communication and interaction in an intercultural environment. Cultural adaptation plays a key role in Dronia (2022) in the context of mastering slang vocabulary. Intercultural communication helps to gain a deeper understanding of linguistic features; the context of expression uses and their socio-cultural significance.

Discussion

It is well known that in recent decades, humanity has undergone major socio-cultural changes affecting all spheres of life. Therefore, communication is the core through which people exchange information and expand their cultural and social space. Today, we can talk about a kind of social order for research into the problem of intercultural communication, since many people face problems of intercultural misunderstanding caused by differences in culturally specific norms and rules of communication.

In response to the first research question about the theoretical context for studying slang and its relationship to intercultural communication, the results of the work demonstrated that slang is not just a lexical phenomenon. It is embedded in social norms, humor, identity, and dynamics of speakers. Therefore, it is inseparable from the culture in which it is used. This confirms previous research that has highlighted slang as a reflection of both linguistic and intercultural fluency, where understanding slang also means understanding the context, register, and intention of the speaker.

In her study, Ishikawa (2025) identifies eight core competencies necessary for successful intercultural communication and fundamental to effective slang vocabulary acquisition. According to the author, such competencies as cultural awareness, empathy, tolerance for uncertainty, cognitive flexibility, delayed judgement of others' behaviour, problem-solving skills and networking skills allow you to adapt to the language environment, perceive new lexical items and correctly interpret their meaning.

In a similar work, Jackson (2019) refers to the role of intercultural communication in foreign language learning. This is especially true for the acquisition of informal vocabulary. Cong-Lem (2025) addresses similar issues in her work, taking into account the sociopragmatic aspect of communication in the context of multiculturalism. The scientist emphasises the importance of multilingualism and civic awareness of the speaker.

In response to research question 2, on how regional and cultural differences in British and American slang affect the acquisition and use of slang in intercultural communication, it can be argued that regional differences in slang create difficulties, especially at the initial and intermediate

levels of language acquisition. In the study, participants indicated that they were confused by slang variations. However, such a contrasting learning background was particularly interesting for participants with a high level of language proficiency. This is because they have already developed metalinguistic awareness and can adapt their use depending on the context. The findings of the proposed work echo the literature, which emphasizes the importance of understanding language variations as part of intercultural competence.

According to Brauer (2024), intercultural competence is, first and foremost, an awareness of the existence of different cultures, which is very helpful in developing language skills. This awareness includes understanding possible communication misunderstandings due to cultural differences, such as language registers and connotations. Medynska et al. (2023) emphasise the difficulty of learning slang. A contrastive analysis revealed that slang words have similar meanings but different cultural referents. Grabowska and Ucherek (2025) equate slang to the cultural load of the lexicon or lexical culture. This view coincides with the concept of cultures leading to communicative difficulties that arise not only because of linguistic differences but also cultural ones, which in turn leads to misunderstandings (López-García & Morales-Cabezas, 2024; Elejalde Sáenz, 2020).

Language occupies a leading place in the system of intercultural communication. The word reflects not the objects and phenomena of the surrounding world themselves but how the linguistic personality sees them through the prism of the picture of the world that exists in their consciousness and is determined by their culture (Turchyn et al., 2023).

Learning slang through intercultural interaction and socialisation plays a key role. Intercultural interaction and socialisation in the country of the target language allows students to become aware of the cultural contexts of their own and other language communities (Juanda et al., 2024; Esmail et al., 2020). These statements correlate with the idea of Swartz et al. (2025), who argue that language competence is formed through social interaction and communication skills are inextricably linked to sociolinguistic competence.

Noviyenty (2022). In his study, he argues that communicating in a foreign language requires not only vocabulary but also understanding the communication strategies of native speakers. In this sense, the student must know the grammar and adapt their speech according to the context and register. Terui and Hsieh (2019) agree. The author emphasises the importance of culture as knowledge in general and the practical ability to navigate the social codes of a language community.

In response to research question 3 on practical methods for integrating slang vocabulary into the educational process, it can be said that the most effective of them is live interaction with native speakers. Also effective are watching films, videos and social media content. Participation in informal conversations in peer groups is popular. Our results are consistent with previous studies. They emphasize the importance of isolated vocabulary lists, which are crucial for the acquisition of socially appropriate slang use. Thus, mastering slang as a linguistic competence is a dynamic process. It requires constant improvement. Difficulties often encountered by people from different cultures arise from a lack of understanding of social norms and perceptions (Floccia et al., 2020). In a linguistic environment, slang should be perceived by taking into account the language register, language level, and language repertoire. Of course, when learning a foreign language, students will inevitably experience difficulties related to cultural and linguistic differences. However, these difficulties still contribute to the awareness of intercultural differences. Language is a powerful means of regulating people's activities in various spheres of

life (Singer, 2025). The study of youth language, namely slang, is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of expanding international contacts. Of course, students have difficulties due to the incomprehensibility of many terms that they did not have to familiarise themselves with in classes. One such difficulty is considered to be slang, which is a linguistic formation that is an integral part of the social dimension of life. Therefore, through the analysis of cultural codes and stereotypes, students are able to develop intercultural competence. This contributes to effective integration into the new language environment.

The cultural load of vocabulary is revealed when learning a foreign language. In a new cultural community, a student may experience a kind of culture shock (Hauer & Kondrak, 2020). This is especially true when learning English slang. After all, its use depends on social and cultural contexts, and the concept of the hierarchy of language knowledge plays a leading role in its understanding, in which knowledge of slang is a sign of integration into the language environment.

Understanding and knowing slang involves students in a natural foreign language environment, contributes to the development of their intercultural language competence, and provides a unique opportunity to engage in an active dialogue of cultures in order to avoid various kinds of curiosities, language errors, and possibly communication failures, the prevention of which should be paid attention to.

Thus, the results of the proposed work emphasise the role of the intercultural approach for effective language acquisition. The intercultural aspect allows for analysing, explaining, and interpreting words that change their meaning depending on the cultural context. Slang, as a linguistic unit, has a strong cultural load. Mastering slang is an integral part of intercultural communication that requires understanding social contexts.

Limitations of the study

The proposed article has strengths, but some limitations should be addressed. The time frame limits the ability to assess long-term changes in students' slang acquisition and language competence. The small sample size of 20 participants. The results may be representative of a broader population of English learners. Slang is a dynamic phenomenon, and the study did not directly address cultural and regional variations in slang usage. The limitations described offer avenues for future research and methodological improvements to further understand the role of slang in foreign language acquisition.

Conclusion

The presented cross-sectional study confirmed the working question that cultural differences of the language being studied become clearer in the language environment and that learning and practising the language with native speakers help to overcome the difficulties of understanding the nuances of the language, promoting unity and intercultural ethics. This intercultural approach is a strategy for accessing meaning and acquiring informal vocabulary, the perception of which is linked to cultural understanding. Learning slang is problematic for understanding outside of a cultural approach in a classroom. The type of culturally rich slang vocabulary can be specific to communication skills. However, working with native speakers is a strategy for acquiring culturally charged vocabulary when the latter is identified in intercultural exchange.

Intercultural communication allows students to build their language repertoire. The study's results prove that ethnolinguistic thinking contributes to the acquisition of the slang system of the

target language. On the other hand, if the cultural load occurs during unsuccessful communication, the student may be in a stressful situation. In this case, it is the role of the teacher that is leading. The teacher looks for the fastest solution in the context of teaching and makes corrections in communication with students.

Despite the full disclosure of the presented issues, certain limitations should be considered to obtain even more accurate and generalised conclusions about the role of intercultural communication in the acquisition of slang vocabulary. It is possible to expand the sample of participants. The few respondents may not have provided accurate results for analysing slang vocabulary acquisition. It is possible to extend the duration of the observation and compare the impact of different communication environments.

Practical recommendations

Thus, intercultural communication opens up new opportunities for mastering slang and further scientific research and refinement.

Further prospects in this area are to study the increase in participants' motivation when working both in a linguistic environment and with native speakers. Future research should also pay attention to the purely linguistic aspect of this topic. It is possible to focus on lexical analysis from the perspective of English slang. All these perspectives can reveal the issue of learning slang English, which will be relevant for teachers and methodologists in this field.

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Appendix A

Table 2. *A sample questionnaire on the role of intercultural communication in the acquisition of slang English vocabulary*

Question	Possible answer
How often do you use English slang in your communication?	Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very often
How well do you understand English slang expressions?	I don't understand at all I partially understand I understand well I fully understand
Do you think that talking to native speakers helps you learn English slang?	Yes, it helps a lot It helps, but not always Neutral Almost no effect No effect at all

Where have you heard new slang expressions?	Communicating with native speakers Social media, videos, films In communication with friends In English classes
Where do you use English slang most often?	In conversations with friends In messages and chats When watching a film or video During English lessons
With whom do you feel more comfortable using English slang?	With friends With native speakers With teachers With the family
Has video communication with native speakers affected your understanding of English slang?	Yes, it has significantly improved the understanding of Partially improved Almost no impact No impact at all
Do you use slang in your classes?	Yes, often Sometimes Rarely Never
Open question	Write five English slang words or expressions that you use most often
Open question	What slang expressions have you heard from native speakers but don't fully understand yet?
Open question	How do you think intercultural communication affects your slang learning?

Source: authors' own development.

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Validating a Critical Thinking Questionnaire for Young Adolescents: A Preparatory Study for a Longitudinal Research

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Abstract
In the context of globalization, education systems, including those in Slovakia, are increasingly tasked with creating productive learning environments that integrate life and academic skills. Thus, we aim to validate and establish the reliability of an adapted questionnaire designed to measure the development of critical thinking among young adolescents in Slovakia. The study employs a mixed-methods research which included expert evaluations, pilot testing, and a statistical analysis to assess both the content validity and the internal consistency of the instrument. The research addresses a significant gap in educational studies, as no existing tool currently meets this specific need in the Slovak context. Grounded in a comprehensive theoretical framework, the research explores critical thinking as an essential educational skill. It examines cognitive, moral, and psychological characteristics of young adolescents to ensure the tool's demographic relevance. The adapted questionnaire demonstrated a strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81) and positive expert validation ratings, confirming its suitability for the targeted population. The findings have established a reliable instrument for assessing critical thinking development and contribute to the broader discourse on enhancing educational practices. The study concludes with some recommendations for future research on applying the validated tool in educational settings to measure critical thinking development of young adolescents over time and to include targeted interventions into Slovak school curricula.

Keywords: Critical thinking questionnaire, English as a foreign language, instrument validation, and development, young adolescents, intervention program, reading comprehension, assessment, Slovak educational context

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Introduction

Critical thinking (CT) is considered an essential skill in the 21st century and has long been a subject of interest in educational, psychological, and psycholinguistic research. The stated research focus reflects a broader trend in education that seeks to prepare students not just for academic success but for active and well-informed fitting in the global society. Rather than simply acquiring relevant knowledge, students now critically evaluate information, make decisions, and solve problems creatively. In response to these demands, instructional strategies have evolved significantly. Several studies (Sarkoohi et al., 2024; Song, 2024; Li et al., 2024; Orosz et al., 2024) indicate that current studies focusing on the development of CT have emphasized innovative approaches to CT development among students in various fields. The studies have highlighted that developing students' CT abilities and attitudes requires intentional action rather than just assuming they will grow naturally. To prioritize the development of CT skills, it is a must for educators to intentionally include issues related to the development of CT in curricula and address them through targeted training for both the pre-service and in-service teachers. This trend is evident in recent studies that have underscored the importance of innovative and interactive methods in achieving these goals (Alzubi & Singh, 2024; Alhamami, 2024).

While technological advances have transformed teaching practices, the challenge of measuring CT outcomes has remained unchanged. Existing measurement tools are often limited in scope or fail to address the unique developmental, cultural, and linguistic needs of specific student populations. For example, standardized assessments designed for one context may not fit or transform effectively to others, which leads to inaccuracies or superficial evaluations of CT abilities. As a result, research on CT comes with significant constraints. Without reliable and appropriate measurement tools, it is difficult for educators and researchers to measure the actual impact of their instructional efforts. This disconnect has slowed the progress in understanding how CT develops, what factors influence its growth, and how educational practices can support its development more effectively.

In Slovakia, as in many other countries, this gap is particularly evident in the education of young adolescents. While there is a growing focus on integrating CT development into teaching practices, the existing tools for measuring these skills are often outdated or do not match the specific cultural and educational context. This shortfall limits the ability to track the progress of educational reform. Therefore, educators and researchers face significant obstacles in aligning teaching practices with measurable outcomes, leaving a critical gap between theory and practice.

The study seeks to address this gap by testing the suitability of an adapted version of Honey's (2004) critical thinking questionnaire for the Slovak lower secondary school context. More specifically, it examines whether the tool offers valid and reliable data from assessing young adolescents CT development, while taking into account their cognitive profiles and sociocultural background. In doing so, the research contributes to a broader effort to equip educators with a tool providing reliable data for evaluating and enhancing critical thinking instruction.

Literature Review

Research on integrating the mobile game *Lumosity: Brain Training* into the educational process for first-year philology students has demonstrated that interactive environments can significantly enhance critical thinking (CT), even with limited screen time (Song, 2024), which aligns with the growing recognition of gamification and digital tools as the effective strategies for engaging students and promoting their cognitive skills. Similarly, a study on Philosophy-Based

Language Teaching has revealed its potential to develop CT and student engagement in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning settings, supported by positive thematic analyses and improved academic performance (Li et al., 2024). The link between CT and EFL learning is increasingly emphasized, as English language proficiency is the cornerstone of global communication and academic success. According to Li et al. (2024), improving language skills can impact academic performance and personal development, particularly when coupled with strategies that enhance self-esteem, teacher support, and CT, effectively reducing language-related anxiety and shyness.

Despite these advancements, the questions about optimizing the approaches and understanding their long-term impact on students' CT development remain unanswered. Current research studies on CT in education have predominantly focused on adolescents and older school-age students (Orosz et al., 2024; Maree et al., 2023). For instance, Orosz et al. (2024) have explored how family interventions emphasizing prosocial values, such as empathy, cooperation, and respect, enhance older adolescents' (15–19 years) ability to identify fake news. The importance of socio-emotional contexts in CT development has thus been recognized. Similarly, Maree et al. (2023) have investigated the *Street Smarts Talk* model in New Zealand, demonstrating its positive impact on the development of CT among minority and disadvantaged students. These findings emphasize the necessity of tailored educational interventions to address diverse needs.

Recent research supports the effectiveness of interactive and digital learning environments in developing CT. Gökpinar and Yıldız (2025) have demonstrated that using 3D visualization in chemistry lessons significantly enhanced secondary school students' CT skills and scientific attitudes. Their findings have suggested that immersive digital tools can play a transformative role in developing higher-order thinking abilities in educational contexts. Similarly, Zakaria, Hashim, and Zakaria (2023) conducted a systematic literature review on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in English as a Second Language (ESL) educational settings and found that AI-assisted learning environments positively influenced the development of CT dispositions among pre-service teachers.

Although the studies highlight contemporary strategies for developing CT of older students, they also reveal a significant lack of research focusing on younger adolescents, particularly those in compulsory education (ages 13–15) in Slovakia. The development of CT during this stage of life is crucial, as it is concerned with pivotal periods of cognitive, academic, and personal growth (Stranovská & Ficzere, 2021). This lack suggests an opportunity for further research in understanding how innovative and interactive educational methods can nurture the CT skills of younger students. Filling in this lack contributes to valuable insights into the developmental trajectory of CT and equips pedagogical practices tailored to the early adolescent auditorium. While international tools designed explicitly for measuring CT exist (Honey, 2005), their applicability to the Slovak educational context is limited due to differences in cultural, linguistic, and curricular phenomena. The lack of a culturally and contextually relevant assessment tool raises a significant challenge for educators and researchers aiming to evaluate and develop CT skills in a specific population.

Developmental Characteristics of Young Adolescents

Adolescence, often described in the literature as a *storm and stress* period (Gadušová et al., 2020), represents a transformative phase marked by significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and moral changes. For younger adolescents, typically aged 13 to 15, this period of life

characterizes self-discovery, emotional volatility, and the development of foundational cognitive and moral capacities that influence their future growth.

Physical and Cognitive Development

The physical changes associated with adolescence include rapid growth, pubertal development, and significant brain maturation, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, which governs planning, decision-making, and social behavior (Caskey, 2014). These shifts often lead to such issues as coordination difficulties or discomfort with the uneven pace of maturation, which can impact self-esteem and peer relationships. Cognitive abilities advance, with adolescents developing abstract thinking, problem-solving, and metacognitive awareness. These capacities lay the groundwork for CT, enabling young people to analyze complex issues and engage them with multiple perspectives (Caskey, 2014). However, low motivation for academic activities, such as reading, remains a challenge that can be mitigated through tailored educational strategies.

Moral and Socio-Emotional Development

During early adolescence, individuals begin to set their moral frameworks, moving away from uncritical acceptance of adult principles and gradually constructing their value systems (Scales et al., 2011). This process is closely tied to their cognitive growth as they reflect on fairness, justice, and ethical dilemmas. Adolescents' idealism and sensitivity to equality often shape their interactions with others, fostering a transition from self-centered perspectives to considering and reflecting on the rights and feelings of others. Gender differences can influence moral reasoning, with boys often prioritizing justice and girls emphasizing interpersonal relationships (Caskey, 2014). Teachers play a crucial role in nurturing this development by creating educational contexts and situations that encourage the exploration and judging of moral dilemmas and the application of democratic values. Emotionally, younger adolescents experience heightened sensitivity, mood swings, and a growing awareness of themselves and their differences from others. These emotional fluctuations, often linked to self-criticism and a heightened response to external feedback, can affect decision-making and social interactions (Scales, 2010). Educators must acknowledge these emotional complexities and create a supportive atmosphere that helps in building resilience and self-awareness.

Challenges and Educational Strategies

Modern digital environments pose unique challenges for adolescent cognitive and psychosocial development. Immediate feedback and visual content from technology can undermine attention spans and memory retention, essential for reading comprehension and CT (Hellström & Beckman, 2021). Adolescent learners often display impulsivity and a tendency to prioritize short-term rewards over long-term planning, necessitating deliberate educational interventions. To address these challenges, teachers should focus their teaching efforts on developing CT through active learning strategies. Encouraging students to highlight key text segments, take notes, or create concept maps can deepen their understanding of reading material while reinforcing memory processes (Gadušová et al., 2020). Furthermore, activities integrating collaborative learning and community engagement, such as peer counseling or service projects, help adolescents apply CT in real, meaningful contexts. The developmental trajectory of younger adolescents underscores the need for educational strategies that align with their unique physical, cognitive, moral, and emotional growth. Teachers should prioritize methods that cultivate CT,

foster moral reasoning, and adapt to the demands of the digital age. Educators can help adolescents navigate the complexities of modern life and emerge as thoughtful, engaged individuals prepared for the challenges of adulthood.

Developing Critical Thinking

Critical thinking (CT) represents the highest level of text comprehension, encompassing a student's ability to analyze a text from both content and linguistic perspectives. This process involves deconstructing the text into several components, analyzing their mutual interrelations, and determining how these components contribute to the overall structure of the text (Szabó, 2024). CT enables students to distinguish essential information from less relevant details, identify the main idea, and synthesize this information into a cohesive whole (Szabó, 2020; Brestenská et al., 2014; Tomčíková, 2013; Vincejová, 2013). According to Gavora (2008), CT involves two interconnected processes: understanding and evaluation. The process of understanding focuses on the content and meaning of the text. At the same time, evaluation consists in comparing the acquired information with prior knowledge and experiences, leading to the creation of new connections and the assessment of the text's quality and the author's communicative intent (Szabó, 2024; Liptáková & Cibáková, 2013; Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020; Gadušová et al., 2020).

CT shares numerous features with reading literacy (Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020). Mental processes essential for comprehensive text understanding, such as inference, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation (Gavora, 1992), are also central to CT. Similarly, reading understood as an interaction between the reader and the text, necessitates thinking and a range of higher cognitive operations that ultimately align with Bloom's taxonomy, including recalling facts, understanding concepts, applying knowledge, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the text (Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020), which underscores the importance of developing critical thinking skills as an integral part of reading instruction, particularly during early adolescence when cognitive capacities are rapidly evolving. Integrating activities that develop CT can enhance students' ability to read with comprehension. These activities encourage engagement with higher mental processes, which are crucial for CT and deeper text processing (ibid.). Larsson (2017) emphasized the importance of developing CT and active learning from an early age. He argued that as cognitive and affective skills evolve, so must CT abilities; otherwise, their development becomes increasingly tricky. This view supports research in education and psychology (Stranovská & Ficzere, 2020; Ennis, 2018).

Advanced reading strategies are essential for fostering deeper comprehension and CT in today's fast-paced, information-driven world. Traditional ways of reading like skimming and scanning, while effective for quick information retrieval, often fail to promote the higher-order cognitive skills required for meaningful engagement with texts. Strategies such as reciprocal teaching and Socratic questioning (Paul & Elder, 2006) address these gaps by encouraging students to actively analyze, evaluate, and interpret information. These methods improve text comprehension and equip learners to critically assess arguments, recognize biases, and articulate their perspectives effectively. Visual and metacognitive strategies provide further support for these objectives. Tools like graphic organizers (Marzano et al., 2001) help students visualize relationships between ideas and synthesize information, while metacognitive strategies encourage self-awareness in the reading process (Szabó, 2024). By planning the use of reading strategies, monitoring, and evaluating their understanding, students can better address comprehension gaps and develop stronger learning habits.

Cooperative learning strategies such as literary circles or book clubs provide additional opportunities for students to engage in discussion and share diverse perspectives on a text. By assigning roles like discussion leader, summarizer, or critic, these activities encourage active participation and the development of CT skills. Structured reading strategies, including SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) and its extension SQ4R (adding Relate), further promote higher-order cognitive processes (Gadušová et al., 2020). These methods guide students through pre-reading activities (surveying headings and predicting content), active reading (identifying key points and summarizing), and post-reading activities (reviewing and connecting new information to prior knowledge). Another strategy, REAP (Read, Encode, Annotate, Ponder), focuses on creating annotations to summarize and critically evaluate the text, fostering more profound understanding and metacognitive reflection. By combining these strategies, educators can create a comprehensive framework for developing students' reading comprehension and CT skills. These approaches enhance text interaction and cultivate essential cognitive abilities for lifelong learning.

Besides reading comprehension instruction, CT in EFL classrooms can be developed through diverse, interactive activities encouraging students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. Engaging students in debates, discussions, and problem-solving tasks develops their ability to explore multiple perspectives and construct logical arguments. Project-based learning, media analysis, and role-playing scenarios help students apply CT to real-world contexts while writing activities, such as essays and reflective journals, promote deeper engagement with ideas. Teachers can use ethical dilemmas to challenge students to think beyond surface-level understanding, and interpreting data or infographics sharpens their analytical skills. Also, peer teaching and literary analysis encourage students to evaluate content and communicate ideas effectively. These methods enhance language skills and prepare students for complex, higher-order thinking in academic and everyday contexts.

Methodology

Research Aim

Critical thinking (CT) is one of the crucial skills in education, essential for students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information meaningfully. Developing tools to assess this skill effectively is vital for understanding and ensuring its growth in educational contexts. This study focuses on the evaluation of the validity and reliability of a questionnaire adapted and designed to measure CT among young adolescents in Slovakia. The research aims to tailor an existing instrument (Honey, 2004) to meet the specific needs and characteristics of the target population, ensuring its relevance and applicability in the Slovak context. By testing the adapted questionnaire during the preliminary research phase, this study seeks to establish its reliability and validity, creating an effective tool for future research focused on CT development. Considering these variables, we define the following sub-aims:

- to explore the concept of CT by reviewing existing research studies and analyzing their focus areas, methodologies, and findings to build a comprehensive understanding of the field.
- to characterize the target group of young adolescents in Slovakia (prospective objects of the research) from the point of view of their socio-emotional, cognitive, and psychological development, providing a detailed profile relevant to the study's aims.

- to evaluate the reliability and validity of the adapted questionnaire in the preliminary research phase, confirming its suitability as a tool for assessing CT in Slovak educational contexts.

Research Questions

The primary objective of this research has been to adapt and evaluate a questionnaire designed to measure CT of young adolescents in Slovakia. To achieve this, it has been essential to address two key aspects: the suitability of the adapted instrument for the target demographic and its reliability and validity as a measurement tool. Considering this aim, we have defined the following research questions:

- Is the adapted questionnaire (developed by Honey, 2004) suitable for young adolescents in Slovakia?
- Are the data collected from the adapted questionnaire reliable and valid to assess the critical thinking of young adolescents in Slovakia?

Research Sample

The research sample was selected from the available cohort of students at Beethovenova lower-secondary school in Nitra, Slovakia. To ensure homogeneity, the study involved two parallel groups, each consisting of 12 students of similar age (13 ± 1 year) and the same A2.1 language proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), resulting in 24 participants. These students completed an adapted questionnaire, which was translated into Slovak and tailored to reflect their age group and cultural, linguistic, and curricular aspects. Out of the 24 respondents, 14 were males and 10 females. All participants, except for one with Hungarian language, had Slovak as their mother tongue. The mental development of the students was approximately the same, which contributed to the homogeneity of the sample. As to their academic performance, all 12 students in each group had identical grades in English and Slovak. Knowledge levels within the groups were comparable: half of the students (50%) had similar grades in Slovak and English, while the other half exhibited a minor discrepancy of one or two grade levels, either slightly lower in Slovak or English. This variance underscores the minimal academic differences among the participants.

Instruments

The primary instrument employed has been an adapted version of the CT questionnaire developed initially by Honey (2004). The purpose of selecting this tool was to assess the CT skills of lower-secondary school students reliably and validly, ensuring its suitability for the age and level of cognitive development of the target group.

Procedures

The adaptation of the instrument involved translating the questionnaire into Slovak and tailoring its language and content to match the developmental and linguistic capabilities of young adolescents (12–13 years) in Slovakia. The original questionnaire consisted of items designed to measure key components of CT, including analysis, evaluation, and inference. To ensure validity and reliability of the instrument, it has undergone a multi-step process, starting with a pilot phase, and followed by a preliminary study. In the pilot phase, a small group of five respondents tested the clarity, comprehensibility, and motivational aspects of the questionnaire, in order to introduce

its further revisions and refinements, if needed. The subsequent preliminary study evaluated the formal and content aspects of the instrument, confirming its alignment with theoretical frameworks and previous research findings on CT. The time required to complete the questionnaire has been calculated to 30 minutes, ensuring it is concise enough to prevent cognitive fatigue while allowing students to engage thoughtfully with all items. The final version of the questionnaire was structured to include a balanced number of 10 items, ensuring a comprehensive assessment without overburdening the participants.

The reliability of the instrument has then been tested through internal consistency estimation**,** which, according to Gavora (2010), refers to the extent to which its items measure the same construct and yield consistent results. It is a crucial aspect of reliability, ensuring the instrument produces stable and cohesive data. In this study, the internal consistency of the adapted Critical Thinking Questionnaire has used Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a widely recognized statistical measure for this purpose.

Furthermore, the validity of the research instrument has been ensured through content validity**,** which examines whether its content accurately reflects the construction it aims to measure (Gavora, 2010). The items of the adapted Critical Thinking Questionnaire have been verified so that they appropriately represent the levels of CT. To establish content validity, the adapted questionnaire has been compared with the original standardized instrument developed by Honey (2004), ensuring alignment with its theoretical foundation and constructs. Content validity has been ensured through expert evaluation involving experienced teachers and methodologists. A two-step process was employed to validate the content of the adapted questionnaire. The experts reviewed each item to evaluate its alignment with the construction of CT, ensuring that it reflects key dimensions such as analysis, evaluation, and inference. Moreover, the adapted questionnaire has been systematically compared to the original standardized tool by Honey (2004). The comparison has guaranteed the adaptation retains the core theoretical dimensions of CT and has addressed the specific needs of young Slovak adolescents, such as language suitability and cultural relevance.

Results

To determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated (Table 1). The overall alpha value was 0.81, indicating a high level of internal consistency, which confirms that the items in the questionnaire are aligned and measure the CT construct reliably across different respondents. The item-total correlation analysis revealed that all items contributed to the overall reliability, with correlations ranging from 0.42 to 0.68.

Table 1. *Calculation of the reliability of the adapted Critical Thinking Questionnaire*

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	TOTAL
4	4	5	3	3	4	3	3	3	5	37
4	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	2	34
4	2	5	5	3	3	4	3	2	2	33
3	2	4	2	4	2	4	5	5	3	34
2	3	4	4	1	2	4	2	5	3	30
3	4	4	4	4	2	3	3	4	3	34
3	3	4	4	5	5	3	4	4	3	38
2	4	3	4	4	2	3	3	4	4	33

1	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	39
2	3	4	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	28
4	3	2	5	3	4	2	3	2	2	30
3	2	1	2	1	2	3	3	2	2	21
3	3	2	4	3	4	4	1	1	1	26
3	3	1	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	30
2	3	2	3	2	4	4	2	3	2	27
2	1	3	2	2	3	3	2	1	1	20
5	4	5	3	3	5	3	4	3	4	39
3	2	3	2	2	3	4	3	2	2	26
5	3	5	4	4	5	4	4	3	4	41
3	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	34
3	4	4	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	28
4	4	5	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	36
2	5	3	2	3	5	3	3	3	5	34
5	3	3	5	3	4	3	2	4	2	34
								Variance		37,477
1,333	1,114	1,697	0,879	0,333	0,879	0,455	0,932	0,811	1,515	9,947
									Alpha	0,816

Note. Q = Question

The expert evaluation demonstrated a high degree of consensus regarding the relevance of the questionnaire items. As Gavora (2010) emphasizes, it is essential for evaluators need to be well-acquainted with the original standardized measurement tool during the adaptation process. Each item in the questionnaire was assessed for its relevance to CT using a scoring scale as follows:

- Essential (4 points)
- Important (3 points)
- Slightly important (1 point)
- Not important at all (0 points)

Only items with the highest scores were included in the final version of the questionnaire. Approximately 85% of the items were rated as essential or important, indicating strong agreement among the experts about their alignment with the CT construct. Items with lower ratings were reviewed and either revised or excluded to enhance the overall coherence of the questionnaire. In addition to expert reviews, feedback from respondents during the pilot and preliminary study phases supported the questionnaire's content validity. Respondents found the items transparent, relatable, and reflective of real-life scenarios requiring CT. The feedback confirmed the instrument's content is consistent with the cognitive and linguistic capabilities of young Slovak adolescents.

Discussion

This study aimed to address two primary research questions: How suitable is the adapted questionnaire (developed by Honey, 2004) for young adolescents in Slovakia? Is the adapted questionnaire reliable and valid for assessing the critical thinking of young adolescents in Slovakia? The findings provide clear and comprehensive answers to these questions.

Related to the suitability of the questionnaire, has thoroughly been explored through respondent feedback and expert evaluation. The results revealed that the adapted questionnaire suits young Slovak adolescents. Respondents reported that the language and instructions were clear, the questions were engaging, and the items were appropriate for their age and cognitive level. This suitability was further supported by experts who evaluated the content and confirmed its alignment with the developmental and educational needs of the target population. These findings align with our theoretical basis, which emphasizes the development of CT skills and the need for reliable and valid assessment tools. By adapting the questionnaire to the Slovak context, the study ensured its practicality and relevance for meaningful educational use.

The reliability and validity of the instrument has been addressed and answered through statistical and qualitative analyses. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81 demonstrated high internal consistency, indicating that the items cohesively measure the construct of CT. Additionally, content validity has been established through a systematic expert evaluation process, which has ensured that the questionnaire represents theoretical integrity while being adapted to the Slovak context. Experts rated the items based on their relevance to CT, and only the most significant items have been included in the final version. This validation process aligns with the established practices in instrument adaptation and supports the instrument's reliability and validity.

Despite the strengths mentioned above, the study has some limitations. The small sample size of 24 respondents, while sufficient for a preliminary study, limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research involving a larger and more diverse sample would increase the reliability of the conclusions and allow for more general analyses. Another limitation lies in the reliance on evaluations of experienced teachers and methodologists for content validity. Incorporating a broader range of perspectives, such as those from psychologists or curriculum specialists, could enhance the comprehensiveness of the evaluation process. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the understanding of CT assessment by addressing a specific research gap: the lack of validated tools for testing young Slovak adolescents. By adapting and validating the questionnaire tailored to this demographic, the study provides a base for future research and practical applications in Slovak educational contexts.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the importance of adapting and validating assessment tools that reflect the specific cultural, linguistic, and developmental characteristics of young adolescents in a country, in this case, Slovakia. The research addressed a significant lack of such tools in assessing the Slovak educational context, and by focusing on the adaptation of the Critical Thinking Questionnaire, it provided a reliable and valid instrument suitable for the Slovak educational context. The adaptation process was grounded in theoretical considerations and their practical application, which ensured the instrument's relevance to the target group's cognitive profiles.

The findings have confirmed that the validated questionnaire can serve as an effective means for assessing the critical thinking skills of lower-secondary school students. Moreover, the study highlights the value of culturally and contextually sensitive tools in supporting meaningful educational evaluation and research. These insights contribute to a more accurate understanding of critical thinking development and support future efforts to strengthen the teaching practices to develop higher-order thinking skills.

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Appendices
Appendix A: Critical Thinking Questionnaire

Dotazník kritického myslenia Mgr. Ivana Poulíková Úvod Milí siedmaci, v rámci našej štúdie, ktorá sa zaoberá rozvojom čitateľských zručností a kritického myslenia v anglickom jazyku, vás prosíme o vyplnenie tohto dotazníka. Tento dotazník nám pomôže pochopiť, ako rozvíjate svoje kritické myslenie pri čítaní textov a ako reagujete na rôzne informácie. Vaše odpovede sú veľmi dôležité, preto vás prosíme, aby ste odpovedali úprimne a pravdivo. Dotazník je anonymný, a všetky získané údaje budú použité iba na vedecké účely. Ďakujeme vám za váš čas a ochotu zúčastniť sa na tomto výskume. Inštrukcie V dotazníku nájdete rôzne výroky, ktoré sa týkajú vašich zvykov spojených s kritickým myslením. Pre každý výrok sa snažte posúdiť, ako často sa u vás daný spôsob myslenia alebo správania vyskytuje. Použite nasledujúcu škálu: Nikdy – tento spôsob myslenia alebo správania sa u vás vôbec neobjavuje. Zriedkavo – tento spôsob myslenia alebo správania sa u vás objavuje len veľmi zriedkavo. Niekedy – tento spôsob myslenia alebo správania sa u vás objavuje občas. Často – tento spôsob myslenia alebo správania sa u vás objavuje pravidelne. Vždy – tento spôsob myslenia alebo správania sa u vás objavuje stále. Prosím, krížikom označte vždy len jednu možnosť pre každý výrok. Ak máte akékoľvek otázky alebo niečo nie je jasné, neváhajte sa opýtať.
Meno a Priezvisko …… …..…
Trieda ……..…
Vek ……..…
Pohlavie O Žena O Muž
1. Keď čítam, robím si poznámky o dôležitých veciach. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy

2. Opíšem vlastnými slovami, čo som sa naučil, aby som tomu lepšie porozumel. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy
3. Keď's niečím nesúhlasím, vysvetlím prečo. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy
4. Rozlišujem medzi faktami a názormi. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy
4. Rozlišujem medzi faktami a názormi. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy
5. Kontrolujem informácie, aby som si bol istý, že sú pravdivé. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy
6. Pýtam sa otázky, aby som lepšie pochopil, o čom sa hovorí. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy

7. Uvažujem o nových informáciách, aby som zistil, či potrebujem zmeniť svoj názor. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy
8. Premýšľam o tom, čo chýba v informáciách, ktoré dostávam. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy
9. Zaujíma ma o rôzne pohľady na problém, ktorý študujem. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy
10. Rozprávam sa s ostatnými o rôznych názoroch, aby som si rozšíril svoje pochopenie témy. O Nikdy O Zriedkavo O Niekedy O Často O Vždy
Záver Ďakujeme vám za čas, ktorý ste venovali vyplneniu dotazníka, a za vaše úprimné odpovede. Prosíme vás, skontrolujte, či ste odpovedali na všetky otázky. Priestor na váš komentár: …..…

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Exploring English Language Learning Autonomy among Gifted Secondary School Students in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract:
This paper investigated gifted secondary school students' English language learning autonomy, addressing the main research question: "What are the levels of language learning autonomy among gifted secondary school students?" The theoretical significance of the current study is represented in its potential to make significant contributions to the field of language learning and gifted education. It aimed to measure gifted students' English language learning autonomy in terms of technical, psychological, philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions. The findings of this study, practically and theoretically, are expected to make significant contributions to the field of language learning and gifted education. The participants of the study were 64 gifted secondary school female students enrolled in gifted schools in Al-Madinah, Saudi Arabia. To measure the level of learners' autonomy, a scale was used. The scale covers the four dimensions of autonomy with a total of fifty-two items. The findings revealed that, on average, the students demonstrated a high level of autonomy in all four dimensions (Mean = 113.50). The results of the study can be pedagogically contributive to programs similar to the study's context with regard to learner autonomy awareness and learner autonomy development. The study recommended that the study scale should be used in future research to measure the effectiveness of different teaching methods in developing language learner autonomy as a pre- and post-research tool.

Keywords: English language learners, gifted students, learners' autonomy

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Introduction

The prosperity and advancement of nations depend significantly on their human capital, particularly on gifted individuals who contribute substantially to national development. In Saudi Arabia, there is growing recognition of this principle, with increasing emphasis on identifying, nurturing, and developing talented students. The Saudi Ministry of Education (Mawhiba, 2025) defines gifted students as those exhibiting exceptional abilities or outstanding performance compared to their peers in valued domains such as intellectual aptitude, creative thinking, academic achievement, and specialized skills. These exceptional learners require customized educational services that go beyond standard school curricula. This strategic focus aligns with Saudi Vision 2030, as noted by Alammari (2022), supporting both sustainable development and the kingdom's broader economic goals. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education is implementing significant educational reforms (Mawhiba, 2025) that emphasize innovation in advanced technologies and entrepreneurship, aiming to foster an intellectual and creative society that can drive economic growth and diversification in line with the Vision's objectives.

To achieve these goals, the gifted students would require the language and communication skills that enable them to learn and acquire knowledge from various forms of resources available. English language skills would allow them to read and synthesize the materials and later discuss them with their peers and teachers. English language skills should prepare them for their advanced learning, and they should also be developed with the level of content they acquire (Do & Nguyen, 2021). Thus, gifted students must be exposed to language learning skills and activities, which are available in many forms and platforms in the world of academics (Zakaria et al., 2021).

Moreover, today's logic invites us to equip young people, including gifted students, with the skills of learning autonomy, which is the basis for lifelong learning, because they do not need to collect and accumulate knowledge as much as they need to acquire sustainable skills. Aljughaiman et al. (2012) emphasized that currently, the autonomy of learning is one of the basic cognitive goals not only for gifted students but for all students. Wulandari (2017) noted that independent learning skills need training so that students can become individuals who can develop, improve, and regenerate their knowledge throughout their lives.

Consequently, this study is carried out to investigate the level of gifted students' English language learning autonomy based on the four aspects of learner autonomy (technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions). The findings of this study, practically and theoretically, are expected to make significant contributions to the field of language learning and gifted education. Additionally, the results will inform the development of more effective language learning programs for gifted students. The study further provides valuable insights into the English language learning autonomy levels among gifted students, which provides the basis for organizing gifted students' language learning. Moreover, the results of the study provide current evidence of gifted Saudi secondary school students' English learning autonomy levels. In light of these aims, the following questions were formulated: What are the levels of language learning autonomy among gifted secondary school students? What are the levels of language learning technical autonomy among gifted secondary school students? What are the levels of language learning psychological autonomy among gifted secondary school students? What are the levels of language learning political-philosophical autonomy among gifted secondary school students? What are the levels of language learning sociocultural autonomy among gifted secondary school students?

Literature Review

Gifted Students

Gifted students are regarded as valuable assets to the nation and should be allocated appropriate investments. North and Griffiths (2019) asserted that the documented evidence supports the notion that gifted students possess the capacity to make valuable and substantial contributions to our society and economy through their personal growth and development. Siegle (2008) added that the progress of countries relies on the success of their gifted and talented individuals, and the provision of educational opportunities for gifted and creative students is one of the top priorities in advanced nations. In recent years, researchers have shown an increasing interest in describing, identifying, and nurturing talented students.

However, there is no global consensus on the definition of the term 'gifted,' and the concept of talent is a contentious issue. Recently, there has been a proposal by Subotnik et al. (2011) to define giftedness more comprehensively. This definition emphasizes the significance of high performance in specific domains, developmental trajectories, and cognitive and psychosocial variables. Furthermore, Sternberg and Grigorenko (2007) have provided their definition of gifted students as individuals who possess a well-integrated set of abilities that are crucial for achieving success in life. These abilities encompass analytical, creative, and practical skills.

There is no doubt that gifted students have different educational needs than their counterparts, which cannot be met through curricula designed for their non-gifted peers. Davis et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of acknowledging the educational requirements of gifted students and providing them with suitable support, as failing to do so may impede their complete educational growth and advancement. Additionally, gifted education programs should provide a range of educational provisions for gifted students who possess diverse abilities, knowledge, and skills in order to leverage their strengths and address their needs (El-Demerdash, 2010). The approach to working with gifted students in the field of gifted education must be based on several core principles, including valuing individuality, fostering independence and responsibility, promoting holistic development and accelerated progress in the learning process, cultivating creativity, employing advanced forms of learning, utilizing cooperative learning methods, and taking into consideration special abilities and strong interests (David et al., 2023).

Consequently, the current study explores gifted secondary school students' English language learning autonomy levels in order to provide information for designing gifted programs that include and foster the above-mentioned core principles.

Gifted Students and English Language Learning

STEM subjects have been the primary area of emphasis in various gifted programs worldwide (Tan et al., 2020). Correspondingly, Alfaiz et al. (2022) and Al Qarni (2010) contended that despite the advancements in recognizing gifted education in Saudi Arabia and implementing regulations to identify and support gifted students in all disciplines, gifted education has predominantly concentrated on STEM subjects exclusively. Supporting gifted students in the field of STEM holds great importance. However, Zakaria et al. (2021) asserted that it is imperative that gifted students possess language and communication skills that facilitate their ability to assimilate and acquire knowledge from diverse sources readily available to them. It is equally crucial to provide support to gifted students in various areas of learning and subjects, such as the English language, which is the primary focus of this particular study.

It is noteworthy that throughout the current century, the English language has progressively gained dominance in numerous significant domains, including international politics, academia, scientific research, and diplomatic endeavors (Althobaiti, 2020). Learning the English language holds immense importance for gifted students due to its potential to provide them with a distinct advantage in comprehending and mastering STEM subjects, as well as all other academic disciplines. Language proficiency can significantly enhance their ability to effectively read, comprehend, and critically analyze various forms of information. Moreover, the acquisition of language skills enables these exceptional students to engage in meaningful discussions and synthesize complex materials with their peers and educators. It is essential to acknowledge the vital role that language learning plays in supporting gifted students' completion of tasks and assignments that necessitate advanced linguistic abilities. Adequate language skills not only prepare these students for their advanced educational journey but must also progress in tandem with their expanding knowledge base. Hence, it is imperative to expose gifted students to a diverse range of language learning opportunities and resources that are readily available within the academic realm (Zakaria et al., 2021).

The recognition of the importance of acquiring proficiency in the English language is highly acknowledged by the people of Saudi Arabia. This acknowledgment stems from the effects of globalization, the expansion of technological advancements, and the growth of the economy in various sectors, all of which have rendered English a crucial language within the country (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). The acquisition of English is viewed as a prerequisite for pursuing higher education, engaging in international communication, and fostering business development. Furthermore, the attainment of English Language Certificate qualifications has become a mandatory requirement for most professions in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the Saudi government is placing significant emphasis on enhancing the English proficiency of its citizens, investing heavily in scholarships that facilitate education in English-speaking countries. Additionally, numerous Saudi learners have enrolled in various English institutions across the nation, while many Saudi parents are expending substantial financial resources to provide their children with education in English-speaking countries (Rahman, 2011).

Despite the recognized importance of English language proficiency in Saudi Arabia, both regular and gifted learners continue to face significant educational barriers, particularly regarding instructional quality and the failure to address diverse learning needs (Alfares, 2024). The Saudi education system presents several systemic challenges that disproportionately affect gifted English language learners. Al-Tamimi (2019) identifies a critical limitation in teachers' rigid adherence to prescribed curricula, which severely restricts their ability to modify instructional approaches to meet individual student needs. Compounding this issue, Alfaiz et al. (2022) demonstrate that most English teachers lack specialized training to work with gifted learners, as Saudi teacher preparation programs focus exclusively on typical student populations. This combination of inflexible curricula and inadequate teacher training creates an educational environment particularly ill-suited for gifted students, often resulting in negative academic and psychological outcomes. As Winebrenner and Brulles (2012) document, these systemic failures frequently lead to gifted students experiencing underachievement, emotional distress (including anxiety and feelings of isolation), decreased motivation, and overall dissatisfaction with their learning experiences.

Therefore, it is imperative to adequately address students' educational needs, as their engagement will be enhanced when course curricula and English lessons are customized to their individual interests, requirements, and current level of English proficiency (VanTassel-Baska and

Brown 2009). The task of accommodating the needs of English language learners, particularly those with special requirements such as gifted students, poses a significant challenge in numerous countries at present (Do & Nguyen, 2021). As a result, the present study aims to examine the levels of autonomy of gifted students in language learning. Since, in today's language learning landscape, the scope extends beyond conventional textbooks and teaching materials. With the ever-expanding options and advancements in technology, gifted students have the potential to independently explore the vast realm of the internet to find materials that align with their interests. This is particularly relevant as many gifted students possess an inherent drive to seek out learning opportunities that extend beyond the standard curriculum.

Language Learning Autonomy

The advent of the new world has presented novel challenges and distinct demands for individuals within society. Gholami (2016) asserts that these challenges primarily encompass technological advancements, the global expansion following the Second World War, diverse educational requirements, the growing student population in schools and universities, and the evolution of educational systems. Nguyen and Habok (2021) further emphasize that learning is no longer confined to traditional classroom settings but can occur at any time and place as desired by learners. Consequently, the pursuit of autonomy as an educational objective has gained significant attention, as it holds the promise of facilitating lifelong learning. Additionally, Alzubi and Singh (2017) contend that education in the 21st century should prioritize communication, autonomy, and students' control over their learning, as well as foster increased innovation and creativity. Furthermore, studies focusing on the necessary skills for gifted students' education consistently highlight the importance of learning autonomy (Tortop, 2015).

The concept of learning autonomy in foreign language teaching and learning has long been a prominent subject of interest. However, it should be noted that the concept of language learning autonomy does not have a single definitive definition due to its multifaceted and complex nature. The term "learner autonomy" was initially introduced by Holec in 1981, and many researchers in this field refer to Holec's conceptualization of autonomy (Klimas, 2017). According to Holec (1981; 3, as cited in Alzubi and Singh, 2017), learner autonomy is defined as the "ability to take charge of one's learning." Holec further elaborates on this definition by emphasizing the learner's responsibility for all decisions related to their learning, including setting objectives, determining content and progression, selecting methods and techniques, monitoring the learning process (such as pace, timing, and location), and evaluating acquired knowledge.

Benson (1997) also defines autonomy as self-evaluation and the internal capacity of learners to manage their work (as cited in Gholami, 2016). Benson sees autonomous learners as individuals who determine their directions, states, and contexts in the learning process, making them more accountable for their learning (Butt et al., 2020). Benson further provides three definitions of language learning autonomy, including the act of learning on one's own and the technical ability to do so, the internal psychological capacity to self-direct one's learning, and control over the content and processes of one's learning (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2021). Benson's definitions aim to identify three components of learner autonomy, namely technical, psychological, and political dimensions, with Oxford's (2003) extension of the sociocultural dimension. These four dimensions were used as a conceptual framework of language learning autonomy in the present study.

The initial dimension, technical autonomy, is characterized by students learning a language independently, without the assistance of a teacher, and outside of the classroom. It also pertains to the students' ability to manage their learning, as well as the practical skills they acquire through autonomous learning (Gholami, 2016). Technical autonomy is of utmost importance for secondary school students, who are the focus of this study, as they are on the verge of transitioning into autonomous professionals beyond the confines of the educational environment. (Carcamo & Perez, 2022). According to Melvina et al. (2021), technical autonomy comprises two sub-dimensions: behavioral autonomy and situational autonomy. Behavioral autonomy involves the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as goal-setting, planning, and monitoring, to take charge of one's learning. Situational autonomy, on the other hand, refers to the ability to take control of one's learning in situations where independent learning is necessary (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2021).

Psychological autonomy, as a crucial aspect of language learning autonomy, pertains to the individual learner's ability to assume greater responsibility for their learning (Benson, 1997, p. 19, as cited in Gholami, 2016). This dimension can be further categorized into three sub-dimensions: motivational, metacognitive, and affective (Murase, 2015). The motivational sub-dimension encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation towards learning English, the capacity to employ effective strategies for self-motivation, and the acknowledgment of personal accountability for success or failure in language acquisition (Swatevacharkul & Boonma, 2021). It encompasses the learner's desires, sense of responsibility, willingness, and agency (Oxford, 2003). On the other hand, the metacognitive sub-dimension refers to the metacognitive knowledge that enables students to effectively utilize metacognitive strategies. It involves understanding one's own learning needs, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses, thereby enabling learners to take control of their learning process (Melvina et al., 2021). Lastly, the affective sub-dimension involves the capacity to regulate one's learning by recognizing and managing affective states such as anxiety, self-esteem, and other emotions that may impact language learning (Melvina et al., 2021).

The concept of **political** autonomy, as the third dimension, encompasses both group and individual autonomy, as stated by Murase (2015). Group autonomy pertains to the teacher's authority and the role of parents or government policies as other forms of authority. On the other hand, individual autonomy refers to the learners' ability to make decisions regarding certain aspects of their learning, such as content, goals, and objectives in learning English. Furthermore, the political dimension is closely linked to the notion of freedom in learning. Negative freedom denotes a situation where students have the liberty to study based on their preferences without any restrictions, while positive freedom implies that students can control their learning freely with the support and cooperation of teachers or other authorities, as explained by Melvina et al. (2021).

Sociocultural autonomy, the fourth dimension, pertains to the contextual environment in which individuals engage in educational experiences. While autonomy is a universally recognized concept, its value varies across different regions, resulting in diverse interpretations depending on the specific context (Carcamo & Perez, 2022). The perception of autonomy is influenced by the cultural perspectives on learning, which can differ between Eastern and Western cultures due to factors such as national identity or expected roles within the classroom (Chirkov, 2007).

Consequently, students' inclination towards autonomy is affected, making it crucial to consider these cultural influences when assessing student autonomy levels. This dimension encompasses two primary sub-dimensions: social-interactive and cultural. The social-interactive sub-dimension draws from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Murase, 2015), emphasizing the significance of social interaction in fostering learner autonomy. Through interactions with teachers and peers, students develop their autonomy in language learning. On the other hand, the cultural sub-dimension focuses on the social aspects of learner autonomy, encompassing national or ethnic cultural influences (Melvina et al., 2021).

Method

This study aimed to explore the English language learning autonomy of gifted secondary school students in Saudi Arabia. The study adopts a quantitative method to measure the levels of English language learning autonomy of gifted secondary school students. Accordingly, this study was designed as a survey research with data collected through a questionnaire. Students' perceptions regarding their levels of English language learning autonomy were collected using a questionnaire, and the study's data were analyzed using SPSS.

Participants

The study population is composed of all gifted students at the secondary level in Medina, Saudi Arabia. According to the Department of Capacity Development in the General Directorate of Education in the Medina region, it consists of a total of 383 students in the academic year 2024-2025. The study followed a non-probability sampling design named voluntary response sampling technique, in which participants volunteer to be part of the research. The study sample consisted of 64 talented female students in the 24th Secondary School in Medina (n = 64), with members ranging in age from 14 to 16 years. This constitutes 8.35% of the study population and is an acceptable percentage in educational research and studies.

Instrument

The study utilized a scale to measure the levels of English language learners' autonomy among gifted secondary school students. The scale is adopted and adapted from the Measuring Instrument for Language Learner Autonomy (MILLA), originally developed by Murase (2015). Murase (2015) reconceptualized Benson’s (1997) and Oxford’s (2003) learner autonomy and developed a questionnaire to assess learner autonomy consisting of four interrelated dimensions. MILLA comprises four dimensions of learner autonomy: technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions.

The researcher has made some adjustments and deleted some items to adapt the tool to the study's objectives, namely, to measure the levels of language learning autonomy among gifted students at the secondary level. She also made sure to select items that fit the nature of the study sample and the context of its application in Saudi Arabia. The researcher also applied the 4-point Likert scale instead of the 5-point one adopted by Murase (2015). Students choose their degree of agreement with the phrases to indicate that they possess the skills mentioned for the autonomy of learning English (4 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Disagree, 2 = Agree, 1 = Strongly Agree). The researcher deliberately selected the 4-point rather than the 5-point Likert scale to avoid the possibility that members of the sample might not understand the midpoint of neutrality. In addition, the researcher's concern is about the need for the student to make the decision and not to remain

impartial with regard to the extent to which she possesses autonomy skills. Based on this, the researcher worked on a number of procedures to ascertain the instrument's reliability once again after the amendment.

After arriving at the initial version of the scale (69 items), the instrument was subjected to evaluation by a group of arbitrators. According to their comments, some items of the scale had been deleted, similar items had been merged, and several items had been paraphrased. Next, the scale was piloted with a group of students (N=12) with the aim of calculating the internal consistency of the scale items using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to calculate the degree of each item in the dimension and the overall degree of the dimension. The results have shown that the correlation factor values between the grades of each item and the overall degree of dimension to which it belongs range from 0.59 to 0.94, which is statistically significant at a level of 0.05. That is, the items are considered to be valid and internally consistent to measure what they are designed to measure.

The pilot study further aimed to measure the construct validity of the scale dimensions to show the extent to which each of the dimensions is related to the overall degree of the scale using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The results revealed that the correlation values between the grades of each dimension and the overall score of the scale range from 0.74 to 0.89, which are statistically significant at 0.05. Therefore, the dimensions are valid and consistent to measure what they are designed to measure.

In addition, the pilot study aimed to calculate the reliability of the scale using Cronbach's alpha. The results showed that the Alpha Cronbach coefficient for all dimensions of the scale is between 0.92 and 0.75, which are high, and the Alpha Cronbach coefficient for the scale as a whole is 0.91. This revealed that the study tool is highly reliable. Consequently, the researcher is confident in the scale's validity and reliability to test the study hypotheses and answer its questions. Thus, the study tool is ready to be applied to the original study sample.

Procedures

A number of ethical considerations were ensured in the current study. The method and the tools of the study were approved to ensure their compliance with the standards for conducting human studies. The researchers sent a consent letter to the participants and their guardians. This letter included the purpose and methodology of the study, as well as assurances to the participants regarding respect for their privacy, the confidentiality of their information, and the restriction of its use solely for scientific research purposes. The researchers further ensured that the participants' personal information, such as their names, remained confidential and provided them with the option to omit such details if they chose. The scale of the study was distributed during the first term of the academic year 2024-2025 to gifted secondary school students online using Google Forms. Students were instructed to answer and submit their responses within two days. Responses were then collected and analyzed using the SPSS program. The means for each dimension and the standard deviation were calculated in the analysis process.

Results

The results are organized into five sections: (a) the levels of language learning autonomy among gifted secondary school students, (b) the levels of language learning technical autonomy among gifted secondary school students, (c) the levels of language learning psychological autonomy among gifted secondary school students, (d) the levels of language learning political-

philosophical autonomy among gifted secondary school students, and (e) the levels of language learning sociocultural autonomy among gifted secondary school students.

Language Learning Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table One shows the participants' responses to the first question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning autonomy is 113.5. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. The standard deviation of 41.654 indicates a moderate degree of variability among respondents.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the autonomy of English language learning*

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
41.654	113.50	52	32

Language Learning Technical Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table Two shows the participants' responses to the second question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning technical autonomy is 41.63. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. A value of 16.133 for the standard deviation means that individual scores typically vary by about 16.13 points from the mean.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the technical autonomy of English language learning*

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
16.133	41.63	20	32

Language Learning Psychological Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table Three shows the participants' responses to the third question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning psychological autonomy is 23.47. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. A value of 7.750 for the standard deviation means that while there is some diversity in responses, the scores are relatively clustered around the mean.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the psychological autonomy of English language learning*

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
7.750	23.47	10	32

Language Learning and Political-Philosophical Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table Four shows the participants' responses to the fourth question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning political-philosophical autonomy is 28.38. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. A value of 13.569 for the standard deviation means that while there is some diversity in responses, the scores are relatively clustered around the mean.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the political-philosophical autonomy of English language learning*

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
13.569	28.38	14	32

Language Learning and Sociocultural Autonomy Among Gifted Secondary School Students

Table Five shows the participants' responses to the fifth question. The total mean score for the total scale regarding gifted students' language learning sociocultural autonomy is 18.06. In terms of the original coding of responses (where lower numbers indicate agreement and higher numbers indicate disagreement), a low mean suggests that many responses tend toward "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." In other words, most respondents are leaning toward agreement with the presented statements. A value of 6.584 for the standard deviation means that while there is some diversity in responses, the scores are relatively clustered around the mean.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for the responses of gifted secondary school students regarding the sociocultural autonomy of English language learning

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number of Items	N
6.584	18.06	8	32

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Discussion

The questions of the study aimed to identify the levels of English language learners' autonomy among gifted secondary school students. The questions investigated language learners' autonomy as a whole, and in addition, they focused on measuring the levels of the four dimensions of autonomy (technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural). The findings have revealed that the levels of English language learners' autonomy among gifted secondary school students are significantly high. Furthermore, the results showed that the levels of gifted secondary school students' language learning autonomy in all four dimensions are significantly high as well.

Despite the well-documented constraints in Saudi Arabia's English education system - including rigid curricula, insufficient teacher training for gifted learners, and limited differentiation (Al-Tamimi, 2019; Alfaiz et al., 2022) – the research results indicated that gifted Saudi students demonstrate surprisingly high levels of autonomy in language learning, which may be attributed to several understudied compensatory factors. These students likely develop self-regulated learning strategies as an adaptive response to unchallenging classroom environments (Zimmerman, 2002), while also leveraging digital resources like language apps and online courses to circumvent traditional instructional limitations. Furthermore, cultural and familial support for academic achievement may foster independent learning habits, as families often encourage extracurricular English study through private tutors or international programs. Peer collaboration through study groups and online communities, combined with gifted students' intrinsic motivation for mastery (North & Griffiths, 2019), creates alternative pathways for autonomous learning despite systemic barriers. This emergent autonomy suggests that while the education system may not actively promote autonomous learning, gifted students develop these competencies through necessity and opportunity outside formal classroom structures.

The findings are supported by previous research projects and studies that have already investigated the English language learners' autonomy among gifted secondary school students. For instance, Reis (2011) investigated self-regulated learning in gifted students. This study explores self-regulated learning (SRL) among gifted students, which aligns with the technical dimension (learning strategies) and the psychological dimension (motivation and self-regulation). The study reveals that gifted students exhibit higher levels of SRL, which contributes to their high levels of autonomy in learning. However, the political-philosophical and sociocultural dimensions were not explicitly addressed in this study. Similarly, Benson (2008) studied autonomy among students transitioning from school to university, including gifted students. It addresses the technical dimension (learning strategies), the psychological dimension (self-regulation), the political-philosophical dimension (learner control), and the sociocultural dimension (adaptation to new environments). The study reveals that autonomy levels vary based on individual and contextual factors. The study further revealed that gifted students exhibit higher levels of autonomy, particularly in self-regulation and adaptability. In a similar vein, Smith (2008) explored learner autonomy in gifted language, focusing on the technical dimension (advanced language learning strategies), the psychological dimension (motivation and self-efficacy), the political-philosophical dimension (learner agency), and the sociocultural dimension (cultural influences). The study reveals that gifted language learners exhibit high levels of autonomy and that gifted language learners demonstrate advanced autonomy, particularly in self-directed learning and cultural adaptability.

Conclusion

This paper presented a valuable investigation into the English language learning autonomy of gifted secondary school students in Saudi Arabia, with a focus on the technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions of autonomy. The study is theoretically significant as it contributes to both the fields of language learning and gifted education, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia, where research on gifted students' language learning autonomy may be limited. A scale consisting of 52 items was used to assess the four dimensions of autonomy. This tool allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the students' autonomy levels. The results indicated that the students exhibited a high level of autonomy across all four dimensions. This suggests that gifted students in this context are capable of self-directed learning and possess the skills and motivation necessary for autonomous language learning. The study was limited to female gifted students at the secondary school in Al-Madinah, Saudi Arabia. The study's findings can inform the design of educational programs aimed at fostering learner autonomy, particularly in similar contexts. It emphasizes the importance of raising awareness about learner autonomy and developing strategies to enhance it. The study recommends using the developed scale in future research to evaluate the effectiveness of various teaching methods in promoting language learner autonomy. It suggests employing the scale as both a pre- and post-research tool to measure changes in autonomy levels over time. The study adds to the understanding of how gifted students approach language learning autonomously, bridging the gap between gifted education and language learning research. The scale developed in this study can serve as a valuable tool for educators and researchers to assess and promote learner autonomy in diverse educational settings. Future research could expand to include non-gifted students or other regions to provide a broader perspective. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to observe how autonomy develops over time and how it is influenced by different teaching methods or interventions.

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What Are the Washback Effects of Online Students' English Competence Assessment?

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Abstract
The purpose of this study is to explain how students' online English competence tests were implemented and to analyze the washback effects of this assessment. The study used a qualitative methodology and a descriptive research design. The study included 20 English teachers and seventh-grade students from 14 Islamic secondary schools in Semarang city, Indonesia, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Observation and documentation were conducted to collect the data. The data were analyzed through selection, reduction, and verification. The findings indicate that students' online assessments of their English ability were done appropriately for their teachers. They made use of numerous platforms and testing tools. Notwithstanding certain obstacles, the students looked for multiple ways to overcome them. It is possible to argue that online student assessments have positive and negative effects. English teachers should employ appropriate and doable strategies to minimize the detrimental washback effects of online English assessments on students while maximizing the favorable washback effects. They can combine student-centered and teacher-centered strategies in a harmonious way by delivering positive reinforcement to students, emphasizing the advantages of full English competence, and including pair and group work in lesson preparation.
Keywords: assessment, effect, English competence, Indonesian context, online, secondary students, washback
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Introduction

Teachers require well-prepared online test instruments when conducting teaching, learning, and assessment procedures. They can be written or spoken, and assignments are now a worry. Proper online tests influence students' degree of proficiency. This is not only to address the harsh criticism of prejudice in the field of education but also to improve educational quality. The *Merdeka* curriculum's requirement for a holistic evaluation proved challenging for teachers to execute. Students take part as though they have a duty to develop into the idealized people found only in fairy tales. Apart from the necessity of continuous socialization and evaluation of the scheduled comprehensive assessment, additional difficulties arise due to the history of student involvement.

For instance, based on family considerations, education is not seen as a major investment in the child's future. Attending school wastes time and money, and the students end up working as manual laborers. However, there are some circumstances that force them to work to support their parents and go to school as well. Because of this, students see school as a place to unwind and study without excitement. By using electronics late at night, students even try to find signs of inadequate parental supervision. in particular, the educational setting throughout the pandemic. At the level of traditional learning, the virtual world, where this instruction does not take place, is an effective area that may evaluate true abilities. The facilities and infrastructure needed for online learning activities still present a number of challenges in the areas of cognition and psychomotor skills. It is difficult for students to keep up with the learning that happens constantly throughout a semester. Teachers struggle to evaluate their students' affective dimensions.

In truth, some attitude evaluation can be done via video conference utilizing solutions, but not every meeting can be held. It can be done with Zoom Meeting, Google Meet, Cisco Webex, Teams, or other apps. Consequently, chat programs have become more popular than other software that needs to be entered letter by letter. It is challenging to communicate modern students' viewpoints. Actually, the issue first surfaced during the preceding semester. This problem is still present in many areas, even if it integrates online and offline learning. Those who struggle with online learning make up for it offline. Drop off a job that was approved online at the school. Collecting and dropping off a large number of assignments that other students who are adept at online learning have finished.

Of course, if done correctly, this problem will not arise. Nevertheless, teachers are gravely misguiding students who, for a number of reasons, don't care about online and offline learning and who think the assessment will be the same as it was last semester. Students are confused about where the regulations are, even after going through the procedures. Yet, based on discussions in several of the same WhatsApp groups, the researchers discovered that most teachers administer assessments appropriately and correctly. In the case of an emergency or other unusual circumstance, instructors are asked to continue providing student evaluations. The researchers found that in some of the same WhatsApp groups, the majority of teachers carry out assessments in a proper and appropriate manner. Teachers are requested to carry on administering student evaluations in the event of an emergency or other extraordinary situation. Self-assessment was also used by teachers as research conducted by (Albakri, 2024).

> In English language sessions, using appropriate self-assessment tools in writing tasks is essential because writing is considered one of the complex skills that learners struggle with, especially when learning English as a second language. Creating an e-portfolio in which each student accumulates the

> evidence of the self-assessment rubric will help students and instructors (Albakri, 2024 p.48).

All lessons are evaluated regularly to identify cognitive and non-cognitive issues that arise as a result of distance learning for students. Non-cognitive assessments are used to assess students' psychological and emotional traits, such as their enjoyment of learning at home, the state of their families, and their psychological and social-emotional well-being. Cognitive evaluation is to test students' cognitive abilities and learning results. The evaluation results are used to guide the selection of instructional strategies as well as remedial or supplemental education for students who are most likely to fall behind. In its broadest meaning, washback refers to how testing affects education (Damankesh, M., & Babaii, 2015; Kirkpatrick, R., & Gyem, 2012 & Rahman, A.Kh et al., 2021). Additionally, Apichatrojanakul, (2011); Furaidah, F et al (2015) & Zhan, Y., & Andrews (2013).

> In a washback study, the products commonly refer to what is learned. In this case, the focus is supposed to be the development of communicative competence. However, the answer to what is learned can be derived from the activities done by students and how they are assessed in the classroom (Rahman, A Kh et al, 2021, p.17).

According to Zhan, Y., & Andrews (2013), the washback concept encompasses test effects on instruction, especially in the classroom. Positive and negative factors can be roughly classified into two categories based on their impact on educational practices. Studies on the washback effects of online student assessments are scarce. As a result, this research intends to look into the types of washback experienced by online students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study focuses on teachers' needs for requiring well-prepared online test instruments, such as different types of written and spoken online exams or projects. Appropriate and high-quality online exams influence students' degree of competency. The primary goal of this study is to explain the adoption of online assessments for students. Second, examine washback effects on students' online assessments of English competence.

Literature Review

Washback Effect

Evaluation should connect the goals of the scholars' studies to the training of the academics. Regular evaluation provides insight into the success and advancement of students. Instead, their growth and performance on tests showed how much they had learned and how supportive their teacher had been. The statements are supported by (Li, 2018; Ali, & Hamid, 2020).The exams are designed to help students achieve the standards of tutorial performance (Hamann, K et al., 2016). The use of assessment and testing ultimately seems to be driving the college system and its curriculum (Hill, B et al., 2018).

This is due to the idea that the term "backwash" or "washback" describes how assessments affect coaching. When the evaluation had the ability to impact what emerged and manifested in the classroom, it was acknowledged as an integral aspect of study room practice. It protected the components of coaching, including the methods of instruction, coaching materials, coaching techniques, coaching approaches, leisure time or schedule, and evaluation protocols (Cheng, L., & Curtis, 2012; Fulmer, G.W et al., 2017; Pizarro, 2010).

Because of this, washback studies are classified as empirical investigations. It relates to actual instructor reports, sports, and test takers in the classroom. Pizarro (2010) describes washback

research as bringing teachers' and students' responses closer to the high-stakes test. These phenomena are leveraged to improve teaching strategies and mastery activities. The specific environment of lecture room exercises fosters and exposes various sorts of movement as a result of EFL classroom assessments. Because of these facts, washback studies are considered empirical research. They are connected to real teacher reports, athletics, and students taking exams in the classroom. Pizarro (2010) claims that the goal of washback research is to simulate a high-stakes exam for lecturers and students.

This phenomenon helps to improve instructional tactics and activity mastery. As a result of EFL classroom evaluation, the distinctive atmosphere of lecture room exercises promotes and exposes various types of motions. Mu Noz (2017) and Pan,Y & Newfields (2011) present four major definitions of washback. Initially, washback concerns the impact of the test on instruction and learning. The second strategy, known as measurement-driven education, is predicated on the idea that assessments ought to encourage and facilitate learning. The relationship between learning and assessment is the third component of curricular alignment. Lastly, systemic validity highlights the significance of integrating assessments into the educational system and proving how testing can improve learning. As previously stated, washback can take two forms: positive or negative results.

If we return to learning concepts and objectives that appear to be linked, the test's washback effect will result in a negative outcome. If everyone gains from the outcome and all intended improvements are encouraged, then it will be positive. This supports the claim put forth by (Cheng, L., & Curtis, 2012). As a result, it will be presumed that the test might be regarded as a failure or a poor one if the subject given and studied differs from the exam questions.

Method

Research Design

A descriptive research design and a qualitative approach were used in this study. In the academic year 2022-2023, twenty English teachers and the seventh graders of fourteen Islamic secondary schools in Semarang city, Indonesia, participated in the research.

Instruments

Data were gathered through observation and documentation. Observation was employed to investigate data on students' performance in doing online English topic assessments. Documentation was used to find out students' achievements in their online assessments. The washback conceptual framework (Ali, M.M & Hamid, 2020; Cheng, L., & Curtis, 2012; Rahman, A.Kh et al., 2021) was studied to help in creating the observation guide, which was then altered from (Fulmer, G.W et al., 2017; Mu noz, 2017; Rahman, A.Kh et al., 2021). This study operationalized three components of how students learn: attitudes, learning content, and test-taking strategies.

Procedures

The influence of online examinations was thoroughly investigated using an observation guideline. Information on the effects of the online exam in the English program on student learning, opinions about online assessment, and recommendations for optimizing the advantages of the online test in the teaching and learning process were gathered. These are supported by (Creswell, J.W. & Timothy, 2019; Creswell, 2014; Tracy, 2013). The interview section also gathered data on

how the effect affects teachers' and students' readiness for online teaching and learning. The interview guideline for students includes their thoughts on the online test in the English program and how it affects their language development. Similarly, the instructor's interview guide covered three important points: the outcomes of the online test taken by the student. The way the online tests were created, administered, and scored, as well as any effects they might have had on the way English was taught.

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed utilizing an interactive model with four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion writing (Miles, M.B., Huberman,A.M &Saldana, 2014). The interview results were assessed in two stages. First, the interview data were analyzed using topological analysis based on the feedback from the students regarding online evaluation, interpretation, and washback. To assess the extent to which students provided comments and viewpoints on the results of the English online exam, the frequency of data relevant to the interview criteria was also determined. To aid with the researchers' data transcription, a WhatsApp discussion was used to digitally record each stage of the interview. It was employed to ascertain whether the data obtained from the interview aligns with the study participants' expectations. This process, also called member checking, had the objective of ascertaining the level of reliability.

There were four procedures: data selection, data reduction, data display, and data conclusion drawing. The primary goal of the interview was to learn about the shared experiences of teachers and students who took an online knowledge test. Throughout the data reduction process, each piece of information was meticulously categorized. Themes that had been coded to incorporate any required information pertaining to the main topic of the study served as the basis for the categorization. The specifics of the interview transcripts were hotly debated. The goal of the study's findings on the effects of online assessment was to offer fresh perspectives on how to evaluate EFL students in an efficient manner. Even though the test was given online, the results can still be utilized to enhance the process of teaching and learning. The term "online learning outcomes" is often used, which could support the notion that the best kind of evaluation is one that evaluates learning as opposed to the learning process itself.

Results

The implementation of students' online assessment of English competence

At the madrasah, twenty teachers can effectively implement the online assessment of students. Four formative assessments or daily online tests, were given by the teachers on average. The percentage acquired using G-form was 74%. Additional tools utilized by educators included Google Classroom (11%), The Take and Drop model (15%), e-learning, Google Drive, and practicum.

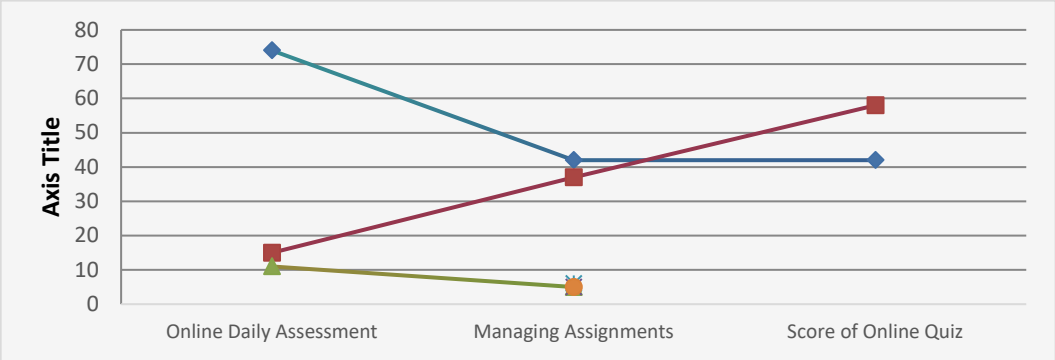


Figure 1. Quiz Platform

Four was the average number of quizzes given. Google Classroom, Google Forms, Quizziz, Schoology, Worksheet, e-learning, Wordwall, Moodle, and WhatsApp Video were the platforms

that teachers utilized to administer quizzes. When teachers gave their students a midterm exam, they used Google Drive, Google Forms, worksheets, paper tests, and students come to school. Teachers used Google Drive, Google Forms, students come to school, and paper tests as their platforms for the final exam. Nineteen teachers or ninety-five percent reported assigning homework. Nine assignments were often given by teachers in a semester.

The following platforms were utilized by teachers to handle assignments: Google Drive (5%), WhatsApp (42%), Google Forms (37%), Google Classroom (5%), MSword worksheets (5%), e-Learning (5%), YouTube videos (5%), and Google Drive (5%). Students used Google Drive, Google Forms, books, Google Classroom, paper (F4), and WhatsApp to turn in their assignments. The results of the Formative Test, an online daily assessment, range from 32% (very good) to 68% (good enough). The online quiz yielded a 42% (good enough) score, with 58% scoring well. When asked, "How is the students' score on the online mid-test?" Teachers respond that 95% of them give online tests with a "good" test score, and 5% use offline tests for midterm assessments.

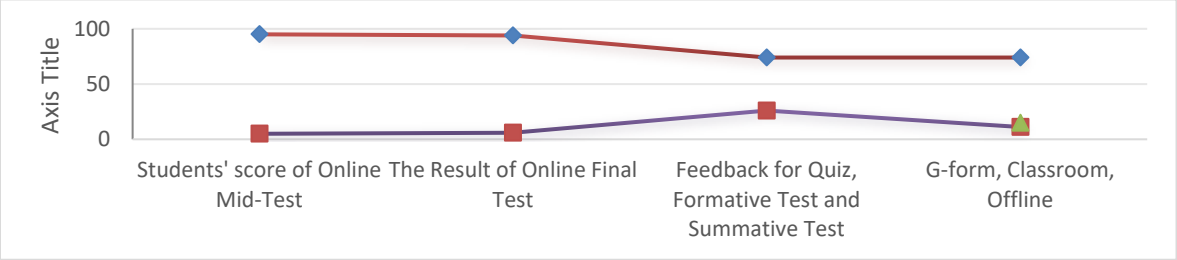


Figure 2. Students' Score

The teachers' response for the final test was 6% (poor), and 94% was good. When giving students their final test, the teachers used Google Drive, Google Forms, WhatsApp, e-learning, Google Classroom, and email. It provided a solution to the query, "What platforms do teachers use to administer final exams?" Students use Google Drive, email, Google Forms, E-learning, WhatsApp, and offline when they attend school to turn in their assignments for assessment.

Teachers and students must overcome the following challenges: networking signals; students taking out devices from parents, brothers, or sisters; absence of supervision; subjective tests; students' motivation, condition, and readiness for learning; students' middle-class and lower-class backgrounds; some students come from broken homes; and students' laziness. Teachers and students deal with the following issues: signal; students taking out devices from parents, brothers, or sisters; inadequate supervision; a subjective exam; students' motivation, condition, and readiness for learning; students from middle-class and lower-class families; some students from broken homes; and laziness on the part of the students.

For quiz, formative, and summative assessments, teachers provide feedback to students in as many as 74% of cases, while 26% of cases receive no response at all. The teachers felt that formative assessments were both sufficient 32% and insufficient 68%. Just 5% of teachers did not assign homework to their students, whereas the majority, 95% of them, did. In a single semester, they assigned homework to students nine times. They offered quizzes, Google Form, Google Drive, Schoology, e-learning, Wordwall, Moodle, and a mix of Google Form and WhatsApp for the midterm exam. Using Google Classroom (10%), Wordwall (5%), Quizzes (11%), Schoology (5%),

Google Form (42%), WhatsApp (16%), and e-learning (11%), they administered the final exam. Students' performance on the quiz was between (63%) good enough and (37%) less. Teachers reported that 32% of students performed well enough and 68% less on daily examinations. Just 5% of teachers did not offer an online midterm test, while 95% of teachers offered one. On the final exam, 42% of students performed well enough, and 58% performed worse. utilizing Google Form (58%) as the platform for administering online tests; e-learning (5%); WhatsApp (26%); email (5%); Instagram (3%); and paper tests (3%).

Submitting the online test via Google Form (53%), Google Classroom (11%), Google Drive (5%), and emails directly to the institution (16%). Just 26 percent of educators said they never gave their students comments on their evaluations, compared to 74 percent of teachers who did. They used Google Drive (5%), Google Form (5%), WhatsApp (58%), and Instagram (5%), to provide the feedback to the students. Additionally, there were certain barriers to teaching, learning, and assessment, including networking (53%), students' use of cell phones (5%), lack of internet access (16%), insufficient supervision (12%), and a lower percentage of students who were prepared and interested in learning (14%).

The researchers saw firsthand that English teachers had gathered on several occasions to discuss how to prepare for the online test, and the review confirms this. The major goal of preparing is to increase one's English language ability. Six teachers found it challenging to create assessments that were suitable because the administration is very different from the seventh class that was taught previously. On the other hand, students also knew how to get ready for exams that would be taken online. The student thinks that adding the assessment results to the teaching and learning process could be advantageous.

Conversely, students also understood how to prepare tests for online assessment. They think that adding the assessment results to the teaching and learning process could be advantageous. The result is in line with (Li, 2018) investigation. They emphasized how evaluation comments, when utilized as a teaching tool, had a good impact on students' writing. Learner autonomy is intended to assist students in maximizing their learning outcomes by fostering their capacity for self-directed learning and providing them with a better awareness of their unique learning paths.

While some students do not disclose their learning style, three of the participants said that language assessment and online learning are two things that significantly improve their self-directed learning. The propensity of pupils to take charge of their education is referred to as "learner autonomy". It is thought that taking this approach will enable language learners to acquire languages more successfully and actively. When students are aware of their flaws and inadequacies, they learn how to become better learners. According to (Rahman, A.Kh et al., 2021), giving learners specific goals and assisting them in evaluating those goals will help them develop autonomy. This is consistent with that claim. Furthermore, it is evident from (Apichatrojanakul, 2011; Zhan, & Andrews, 2013; Damankesh, M., & Babaii, 2015b) that the influence of an exam is felt more on an individual basis than on the level of the group. Furthermore, the information obtained from the interview revealed that one teacher asserted that the online test did not cause all of her students to lose motivation. High learning motivation can lead to autonomous learning.

Nonetheless, motivation decreased as a result of outside technology forces: This finding is in line with research by (Mu noz, 2017). The workload, the assessment's equality and fairness for all students, and the assignments' capacity to accommodate a variety of learning styles and skill levels were all factors that the teachers had to consider while developing language exams (Fulmer, G.W et al., 2017; Furaidah, F et al., 2015). The current study's findings indicate that teachers

thought online testing improved their comprehension of language assessment. Pan,Y & Newfields (2011) state that assessment illiteracy has negative effects for educators and students. It raised instructors' awareness of creative approaches to language assessment while maintaining equity for students' use of technology and the internet.

Teachers discovered that it was easier to arrange the evaluation due to the intricate characteristics of the online platforms. Contextualizing and contrasting evaluation methodologies is made possible by the internet (Hamann, K et al., 2016; Hill, B et al., 2018). I had a greater chance of getting an unbiased assessment as a result. Genuine, real-world examples of the kinds of activities that students will be required to do in the future can make an exam more effective (Hamann, K et al., 2016; Hill, B et al., 2018). It provided me with a greater chance to get an unbiased assessment. According to (Hamann, K et al., 2016; Hill, B et al., 2018), tests that include authentic, real-world examples of the kinds of tasks that students will have to do in the future will be more effective. Given that the evaluator may examine both the process and the result, and the environment provides real resources and tools for completing tasks, it is especially pertinent to online assessments (Hamann, K et al., 2016; Hill, B et al., 2018).

There are drawbacks to online testing for the English program in addition to its benefits. According to (Ali, M.M & Hamid, 2020; Cheng, L., & Curtis, 2012). It is defined as having unintentional impacts on learning and education, like the application of evaluation techniques instead of instructional strategies, excessive exam anxiety, and a failure to advance general knowledge. The negative results of the online English program examinations are listed below. The findings show that students' and teachers' confidence in technical topics is equal. They all agree that their biggest concern is maintaining an internet connection during the test. Teachers worry that students' abilities and test scores will be misunderstood because of a lack of rich information, which would negatively affect them.

Based on the information from the interviews, they faced a number of difficulties when completing the online assessment. Its drawbacks include the requirement that both teachers and students have a dependable internet connection in order to use technology. Furthermore, there can be misunderstandings among students because they are unable to clarify anything that is not clear. Students had trouble managing their time, which caused them to lose attention during the online exam. Because of the COVID-19 epidemic, every teacher was still getting used to the entire online assessment. To make teaching and testing more interesting and varied, teachers have devoted a great deal of effort to learning how to use a range of online testing technologies in addition to the school's primary and official e-learning platform. Students in the English program actually agree with the teachers. When taking online tests, individuals are concerned about the instructions they don't understand.

To sum up, precision and accuracy are important when taking an online assessment, especially if it's a short answer question where the answer must match the current answer key. When asking questions, teachers find it difficult to answer them, and students need to understand this. In their comments, almost all participants—teachers and students alike—bring up this topic. As previously mentioned, the effectiveness of an online exam is greatly influenced by connections (Hamann, K et al., 2016; Hill, B et al., 2018).

Selecting the appropriate program to use also became essential. Teachers become frustrated when they are unable to master instructional technology. Before they can utilize the technology to create an online evaluation, teachers must become proficient with it. Teachers' and students' participation in online assessments declined. It might happen because there was no quick

interaction. Instructors who exhibit supportive behaviors themselves will inspire the highest levels of engagement from their students. In contrast, in classes with the lowest levels of students' engagement, teachers demonstrated greater degrees of chaotic teaching techniques. During classroom interactions, one of the teachers made it apparent that she could see her students and give them direct instructions. Avoiding misunderstandings may also be aided by direct communication. A teacher encouraged the students to take part in the online assessment by giving them a quick rundown of the evaluation criteria for the material: For most students, taking tests online is a unique experience.

Therefore, it makes sense that its operation has not been successful. Online learning minimizes the purportedly intense engagement between teachers and students. Seeing teachers in action promotes a sense of learning and community, as demonstrated by (Ali, M.M & Hamid, 2020; Hamann, K et al., 2016).The next difficulty for language learners and teachers is being able to participate in the teaching-learning process while online. Anxiety related to tests might be caused by various circumstances. Students are forced to take the test whenever and whenever they choose due to the flexibility of online assessments. Students feel less nervous during tests because there isn't any direct supervision. In theory, it is best to provide an exam to a patient when they are not very nervous (Furaidah, F et al., 2015; Mu noz, 2017). However, pressure over their work could be felt by teachers. The information gleaned from the interview indicates that they were worried about their students' exams, especially given the possibility of cheating associated with online learning and assessment.

Discussion

All agree, however, that rather than having a negative effect on student learning, the internet connection component, helping devices, and laptops have a positive one. The teachers see good results because they and the students reviewed the entire test subject one week beforehand. Although (Ali, M.M & Hamid, 2020) address some aspects of the negative effects of assessment, this study showed that language exams aren't always more difficult when given online. The preparedness of educators and learners for the virtual examination, instruction, and acquisition of knowledge. Assessment for Learning (AfL) fosters motivation while placing a strong emphasis on achievement and progress. Students learn that making errors is normal in an AfL classroom because of the positive learning atmosphere. This is particularly important in EFL classrooms. Since EFL students are eager to receive feedback on their faults, teachers can foster a classroom setting where mistakes are not a big problem by stressing mistakes and offering comments on specific errors.

Rather, teachers should develop tactics and materials based on examination data to help students acquire the foundations of grammar. For example, if assessments indicate that students struggle with a certain grammatical item, teachers may modify their instruction by developing courses or learning activities on that particular object. The areas of the skill that needed improvement might be discussed by teachers and students. Due to time limits in offline exams, teachers may choose to provide feedback on each student's assignment. An online assessment would ultimately be used to build the interaction between teachers and students. This outcome is in line with studies that recommend teachers focus more on the areas that students find difficult (Das, S et al., 2014). Furthermore, feedback is given to students in order to help them move forward on their current trajectory. This study closes a gap in the literature by delving into the effects of an online exam. The current study discovered that online evaluation in EFL Indonesian classes,

particularly in the English program, had both positive and negative effects during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings described above make it rather evident that students' judgments of their English proficiency are linked to both positive and negative washback effects. One crucial factor that significantly affects teaching and learning is the washback effect. Although it can occur in the wider community or within the educational system, it usually does so in the setting of a classroom. The role of classroom teachers in generating positive washback and reducing negative impacts is also emphasized. To do this, test developers, teachers, and legislators must undoubtedly collaborate.

But educators also help put into practice strategies for teaching that look at what lawmakers, developers, and students expect (Das, S et al., 2014; Hamann, K et al., 2016; Hill, B et al., 2018). For this reason, educators should try their hardest to innovate their teaching strategies while focusing on raising student achievement. Teachers need to have a thorough understanding of both the areas that washback affects and the educational theories that support it. Notably, a classroom teacher must have a strong understanding of the test goals as well as a range of test-related factors, such as the test's context, uses, characteristics, and test-takers' expectations, in order to select an effective strategy to promote positive washback and reduce negative washback.

Several washback methods demonstrate how important testing is. Tests can have either a positive or negative impact on instruction and learning. Furthermore, it appears that educators have a big influence on how certain washback develops. It can raise or lower the standard of instruction and learning. (Das,S et al., 2014). How teachers use the curriculum and instructional materials, how they are evaluated, and how social and political pressure affects them are all impacted by the washback effect. Positive sentiments regarding the use of online tests are often expressed by students. Thus, it was seen that there was an increase in assessment flexibility, a rise in student awareness of the creation of online language exams, a rise in student autonomy in their learning, a drop in teacher and student engagement, and test anxiety. EFL teachers and students have certain special challenges when it comes to online language testing. Despite the online test's difficulty in developing, EFL teachers continue to take it. Additionally, since everything is documented, students can learn from their errors.

Because comprehensive online evaluation is still relatively new in this country, more studies with a larger sample size and more supporting data are recommended in order to draw reliable conclusions about its impacts. Furthermore, this study proposes punishments for educators who fail to prepare the assignment in a more organized manner. Teachers could also go over a number of new language evaluation forms during the online assessment. It makes sense to attempt to include advantageous effects in the design of tests. Test designers should consider both the advantages and disadvantages of their tests for teaching and learning. They can implement dynamic assessment. It is supported by (Alshaye, 2024).

> Dynamic assessment provides real-time feedback and promotes metacognition, enabling teachers to understand the specific needs and strategies of the learners. When applied in the English language learning experience. By using dynamic assessment, teachers can receive individualized support from peers, monitor their progress, and adjust their learning strategies accordingly (Alshaye, 2024. p 51).

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Conclusion

English teachers give their students a lot of exercises before online exams. They provide their students with a lot of homework and tasks to help them study for online tests. They also give their students a lot of homework and chores. Meanwhile, an overview of the content that would be evaluated online was given by the teachers. They describe the online evaluation process, and also give feedback online and offline instruction and assessment. Peer mentoring consists of groups of students who perform well and others who don't. The manner in which teachers provide encouragement of underachievers and instruction is crucial. Verify that test takers have a firm grasp of the subject matter prior to online exams, and boost test takers' comfort and confidence levels prior to online exams.

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The Role of Authentic Texts in the Development of Critical Thinking in English Teaching

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of authentic texts in fostering critical thinking skills among English language learners, addressing the need for structured pedagogical approaches. The research evaluates how adapted authentic materials enhance language learning through lexical, communicative, and audio-linguistic methodologies, emphasizing their cultural, and cognitive significance. The study employed the approach combining content analysis with statistical comparisons using Sherman's test and Phillips' test to assess perceptions and critical thinking development. The study involved 120 Ukrainian university students. The results demonstrated strong agreement among both teachers (97%) and learners (93%) regarding the benefits of authentic texts. Participants showed high proficiency in completing tasks of varying complexity, achieving success rates of 98% for simple tasks, 95% for creative tasks, and 89% for complex tasks. These outcomes highlight significant improvements in objective text analysis, logical reasoning, self-organization, and problem-solving abilities. The findings suggest that integrating authentic texts into EFL curricula effectively cultivates critical thinking while promoting cultural and linguistic competence. Recommendations include adopting the tripartite lexical-communicative-audio-linguistic framework across language programs, selecting culturally diverse materials, and expanding research to include students at different proficiency levels for broader validation.

Keywords: Authentic materials, critical thinking, English as a foreign language, language teaching, lexical approach, Ukrainian learners

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Introduction

Learning a foreign language should be based on accuracy and consistency, which ensures the relationship between linguistic and cultural features. To understand a foreign language, students need to focus on its features, which will allow them to use individual words correctly (Nguyen, 2023). Authentic texts gives them an understanding of the cultural aspects of the language, which is associated with the rendering of its emotional colouring. Therefore, choosing authentic texts for learning English is a relevant research issue.

An authentic text can be interpreted as reproducing reliable, original information that reflects the cultural, traditional, and social features of the language development (Rakhmonova, 2024). The variety of authentic materials enables their adaptation to the level of students' language abilities. This contributes to broader cognitive activity, understanding of the values of the language, and its originality. Such approaches to learning affect a more meaningful perception of information by students, which ensures a high-quality learning process (Sasabone et al., 2023). Authentic texts can enhance students' interest in acquiring knowledge of a foreign language. So, students immerse themselves in understanding national linguistic features (Kozlova et al., 2022). This enables them to perceive English more accurately, developing their thinking and creativity. Authentic texts help students to perceive new information and words, allowing them to perceive another language more qualitatively (Nematova, 2023). The analysis of authentic texts should be based on selecting the most important information and understanding new vocabulary.

Authentic texts provide an understanding of the features of emotional lexical turns, which provides the opportunity for students' independent development based on the analysis of the obtained information (Ivashchuk et al., 2023). The development of students' thinking is associated with conducting a comparative analysis of grammatical constructions, as well as understanding the methods of rendering the meaning of individual words. The critical thinking develops through the analysis of such texts, focusing on a clear sequence of presenting information (Bidenko et al., 2024). An effective approach to developing thinking is finding additional information to reveal the content of this text and discussing information. The importance of authentic materials for learning is their belonging to original sources, which reflects the culture of the people, focusing on their lexical content (Hwang et al., 2023). The importance of using authentic texts is associated with adaptation to the natural language environment, which motivates students to use the most unique language means. Authentic texts are a tool for communication between individual features of the English language and their application in modern speech. This process expands students' professional interest (Kazhan & Karpiuk, 2024).

The studied theoretical materials give grounds to make a conclusion about the advantages of authentic texts. However, there are no separate programmes for their adaptation in the educational process. The aim of the research is to determine the role of authentic texts in the development of students' critical thinking in teaching English. The aim involves the fulfillment of the following research objectives:

- Develop approaches to the adaptation of authentic texts when learning English;
- Determine the importance of authentic approaches for the possibility of students' learning a foreign language based on the teachers' and students' opinions;
- Measure the level of development of students' critical thinking based on solving language tasks of varying complexity;
- Identify the skills developed by students during their study of English.

Literature Review

The use of various colloquial expressions fosters a more nuanced understanding of informal equivalents in foreign language acquisition. The process of learning often involves finding appropriate translation counterparts, which can be effectively facilitated through authentic materials. Zasina (2024) confirms that authentic texts foster learners' exposure to informal lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances. This kind of input enhances both vocabulary development and cultural awareness.

Recent advancements in AI technologies, such as ChatGPT, offer novel pathways to interact with authentic texts. According to Çelik et al. (2024), ChatGPT enables learners to simplify complex authentic materials and engage in contextualized language learning. Generative AI assists learners in comprehending original content by paraphrasing, rephrasing, and facilitating metalinguistic reflection. Moreover, ChatGPT can produce texts in different styles and levels of complexity, making it a flexible tool for autonomous learning.

Interactive technologies further support language learning by exposing students to natural discourse. Hussein (2025) emphasizes that AI-supported interaction can create a socio-cultural context conducive to optimal language assimilation. Nonetheless, the automation of content processing with ChatGPT might reduce the human dimension of teaching, potentially affecting emotional engagement and nuanced interpretation of texts. Culturally embedded materials, as argued by Xavier (2024), help integrate grammar instruction with the broader socio-cultural functions of language. Such materials engage learners on multiple levels – linguistic, cognitive, and affective – thus fostering holistic development. Liu et al. (2024) show that immersive technologies, such as virtual reality, can scaffold step-by-step reading comprehension and ensure accurate information retention. However, further research is needed to explore how such tools align with curriculum goals and language proficiency frameworks.

Audiovisual resources also contribute significantly to the acquisition of colloquial and authentic speech. Okumuş and Gürbüz (2023) note that on-screen texts and subtitles enhance incidental learning of vocabulary and grammar. However, they also caution that language in films is often modified for entertainment purposes and may not always reflect authentic use. This partial authenticity limits their pedagogical potential unless accompanied by critical discussion or guided instruction.

The virtual exchange model offers a collaborative approach to learning. According to Aranha et al. (2023), it promotes student agency and authentic language use through peer-to-peer interaction. By engaging in culturally responsive group activities, students enhance their socio-pragmatic awareness and develop greater control over their language output. Michelson et al. (2023) further assert that collaborative textual engagement expands learners' social and analytical competencies. However, the authors also recognize the need for more systematic implementation protocols to ensure equitable participation.

A recurring theme in the reviewed literature is the influence of learners' first language (L1) in shaping their approach to acquiring L2 structures. Wang et al. (2023) demonstrate how interlingual comparisons can facilitate the internalization of lexical units, especially with the introduction of authentic examples. This highlights the role of contrastive analysis and story writing as tools for integrating L1 and L2 knowledge. Recent research from peer-reviewed international journals further highlights the pedagogical potential of ChatGPT. For instance, Lee and Kim (2024) found that ChatGPT enables real-time feedback and enhances learner agency in L2 writing tasks involving authentic prompts. Similarly, in a study by Doležal and Martinek

(2024), students used AI-generated questions to interact critically with original texts improving comprehension and lexical flexibility.

Despite these positive developments, there is a notable gap in research regarding the full integration of authentic texts into structured pedagogical models, particularly for developmenting critical thinking and analytical reading skills. While many studies endorse the use of authentic materials, they are often presented as supplementary rather than core components of language instruction. Moreover, only a limited number of works address how AI tools like ChatGPT can be leveraged to scaffold learners' engagement with these materials in cognitively demanding tasks.

Finally, Kersten (2023) emphasizes that the accumulation of meaningful language experiences prepares learners for critical engagement and authentic communication. However, her study lacks specific mechanisms for integrating authentic texts into curriculum design. Further research should explore how AI-driven customization of materials could support differentiated instruction, while preserving the cultural and contextual richness of authentic input.

Methods

Research Design

The first stage of the study provided for the development of approaches to learning English using authentic texts. The approaches to learning involved working with texts and developing conversational and audio-linguistic skills. The second stage was an assessment of the impact of authentic texts on foreign language learning. The results were compared between students and teachers to obtain accurate information. The third level of the study included determining the students' critical thinking capabilities, which was associated with assessing student performance. The impact of students' critical thinking on the development of various skills for learning English was also determined.

Sampling

The sample of students was made among the educational institutions Ivan Kozhedub Kharkiv National Air Force University (KNAFU), Sumy National Agrarian University (SNAU). The research involved second-year students who could translate and speak English. The students lacked an expanded vocabulary, which affected the achievement of purposefulness in learning. The sample consisted of 120 students for whom English was a foreign language. The students studied to be English translators at the Department of Aviation English, the Foreign Languages Department. An input exam based on a written test was conducted to ensure that the students met the specified criteria. The evaluation of the test results allowed us to select a sample of students to participate in the research. It was planned to involve 150 students in the research, but 30 of them did not achieve the required results on the exam, which lasted 1.5 hours. The exam was conducted by 10 teachers teaching English for more than seven years. The students were involved in the study upon their voluntary consent to participate in it. The number of students was sufficient to implement the research objectives.

Methods

The general theoretical method of analysis was used to develop approaches to learning English. The process involved combining the features of authentic texts with the existing curriculum. For this purpose, existing teaching approaches were analysed (Alharbi, 2023; Bidenko

et al., 2024; Chaikovska et al., 2024; Rakhmonova, 2024). Training based on these approaches lasted for 4 months.

The approaches used to consider the authentic texts were assessed by determining the positive and negative impact of their adaptation in the educational process. The teachers' and students' opinions were taken into account based on their experience gained during training. The criteria for evaluation were the level of perception of the educational material, the possibility of expanding vocabulary, the adequacy of the selected authentic texts, and the possibility of using authentic words in different contexts. Obtaining input from teachers and students was made possible via Skype, which allowed for responses to be provided in a convenient format within the allotted time (three hours). The input data became the basis for calculating the Sherman criterion (Hwang et al., 2023).

The criteria for evaluation were the level of perception of educational material, the possibility of expanding vocabulary, the adequacy of selected authentic texts, and the possibility of using authentic words in different contexts. The initial data from teachers and students were obtained via Skype, which enabled providing answers in a convenient format within the allotted time (three hours). The initial data became the basis for calculating the Sherman test (Hwang et al., 2023).

$$w_n = \frac{1}{2n}\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}|x_i - \bar{x}|}{\bar{x}}, \quad (1)$$

n – the total number of criteria for calculation;

x_i – the value of the studied factor;

$\bar{x}$ – arithmetic mean.

The teachers assessed the level of critical thinking by taking into account the students' ability to perform complex, simple, and creative tasks. Simple tasks involved the study and analysis of authentic texts, and understanding them in accordance with the content. Complex tasks aimed at the ability to use authentic words in different contexts, as well as developing critical thinking approaches. Creative tasks are associated with free variation of the acquired knowledge to enable communication and solving non-standard tasks. The level of the development of students' critical thinking was assessed by determining the general level of students' knowledge. Obtaining the results did not involve focusing on one exam. The results were obtained by observing students throughout the entire period of study. The level of critical thinking was assessed by calculating the J. Phillips test (Kazhan & Karpiuk, 2024):

$$p = 1 - \frac{6\sum d^2}{n^3 - n} \quad (2)$$

d – the difference of rank values that reflect the average deviation;

n – the specified number of criteria for calculation

The skills related to the development of critical thinking were identified through basic principles of critical thinking. Their consideration implied a conscious perception of information and the ability to independently improve a foreign language. It was determined which aspect of students' critical thinking was developed first. The results were combined to obtain final data.

Instruments

Skype was used as a tool during the research. It provided the possibility of receiving feedback from students. Microsoft Excel was also a research tool, which allowed for the calculations presented in the research results.

Results

The first objective was fulfilled through the approaches to the possibility of using authentic texts for learning English. The focus was on the possibility of developing students' critical thinking. Figure 1 presents the approaches to learning .

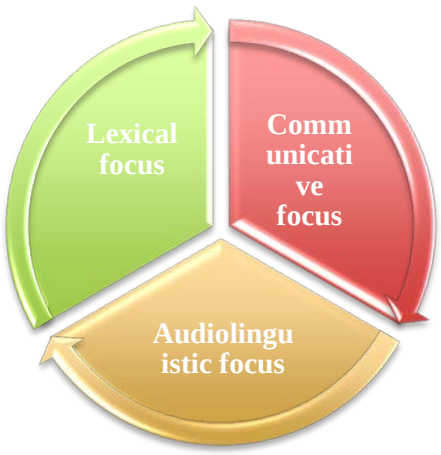


Figure 1. Approaches to adapting authentic texts when learning English
Source: developed by the authors

The lexical focus in the educational process involves reading and studying authentic texts. The educational process aimed at the integrated perception of information from authentic texts, contributing to their better understanding. In this way, students fully perceive language tools, verbs, and lexical idioms. The learning process aimed at studying new vocabulary and understanding through the performance of various tasks. This provides an understanding of the spiritual values of language and their use to ensure intercultural dialogue. The process provides an understanding of the connections between different words, which ensures rendering relevant content. The study of such words provides an understanding of the meaning of new lexical units and their independent use. Game-based methods for learning new words from authentic texts enhance students' motivation.

The communicative focus of educational approaches is associated with applying learned words in practice. This is ensured by an active form of speech interaction between students. The approach aimed at developing the skills of generating one's own thoughts based on learned words. They ensure the memorization of a large amount of information. Based on the communicative focus, students orient themselves to memorizing a separate topic. This ensures the development of conversational practices, better understanding of the native speaker, and the absence of a language barrier. The process affects the possibility of using speech structures without prior preparation, which minimizes the fear of communication.

The audio-linguistic focus involves the auditory perception of authentic texts. The process affects the perception of speech imitation, which improves the understanding of the heard text and the formation of correct pronunciation. The auditory perception of texts was associated with the information repetition at least 3 times. Understanding the meaning of words ensures the perception of their individual use. In this way, students focused on generalizing and systematizing the perceived educational materials.

The study assessed the impact of learning English using authentic texts. The assessment was related to determining the positive or negative impact of the developed learning approaches. The results included the assessment of teachers and students (Figure 2).

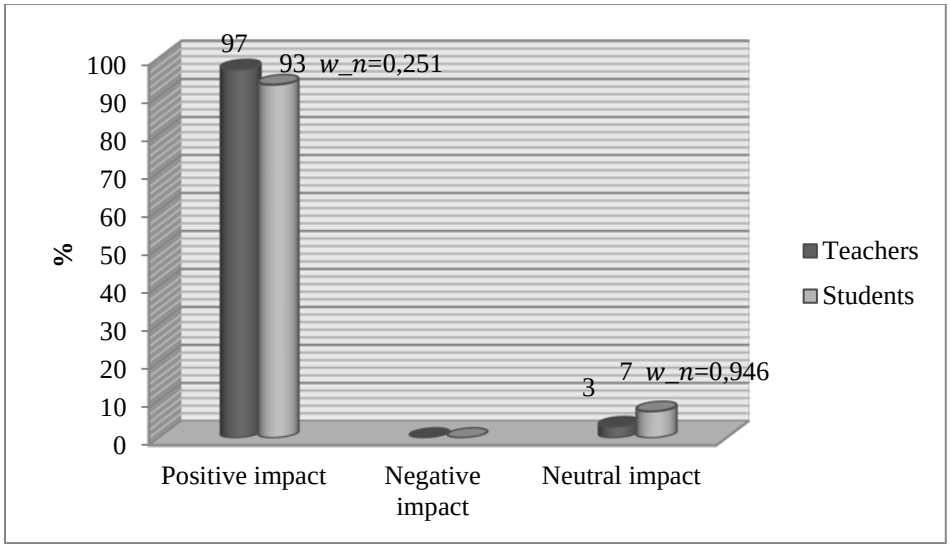


Figure 2. Assessing the impact of the approach to learning English using authentic texts (if w_n calculations exceed the tabulated value (0.537), the values are not equivalent)
Source: developed by the authors

Comparing the teachers' and students' results showed the positive impact of using authentic texts for learning a foreign language. This is determined by the use of texts that correspond to a certain level of students' knowledge and ensure a deeper learning of materials. Using authentic texts expands students' cognitive activity, focusing on the reliability of educational materials. Authentic texts provide an orientation to thematic diversity, which contributes to achieving of linguistic goals. Authentic materials offer a connection between different stages of classes for structuring of knowledge. The positive value of using authentic texts is associated with the fulfillment of a developmental function, which affects students' observation and the development of thinking. At the same time, linguistic memory develops, which ensures linguistic and creative activity. Authentic texts contribute to considering various linguistic examples, which affects the transfer of linguistic content. Authentic materials improve linguistic knowledge, focusing on the sound series. This ensures the perception of a foreign language, thereby eliminating language barriers. Based on authentic materials, it is possible to ensure effective learning based on students' immersion in a foreign language environment to conduct more effective discussions. So, the students developed English language skills during their studies based on the culture and mentality of another country. The students were more focused on engaging in professional activities.

The level of critical thinking was assessed among students. The analysis determined students' ability to perform complex, simple, and creative tasks. The development of critical thinking was assessed through calculations of the J. Phillips test (Table 1, Figure 3)

Table 1. *The impact of critical thinking on students' ability to perform language tasks of varying levels of complexity*

Level of capabilities	Complex tasks			Simple tasks			Creative tasks			*p*
	%	M	SD	%	M	SD	%	M	SD	
Full performance	89	39.5	7.1	98	44.7	5.3	95	41.2	6.9	0.739
Partial performance	11	9.3	12.1	2	5.4	18.9	5	7.2	15.3	0.718
No performance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: developed by the authors

Comparison of the features of performing language tasks of different levels of complexity found that students developed critical thinking. The students did not spend enough time performing simple tasks, and they could freely use them based on the obtained knowledge. Developed critical thinking enabled a qualitative analysis of the source information for the possibility of achieving the set goal. When performing simple tasks, the students trained socio-cultural orientation, the use of natural techniques for translation, which ensured the reflection of the flavour of the English language.

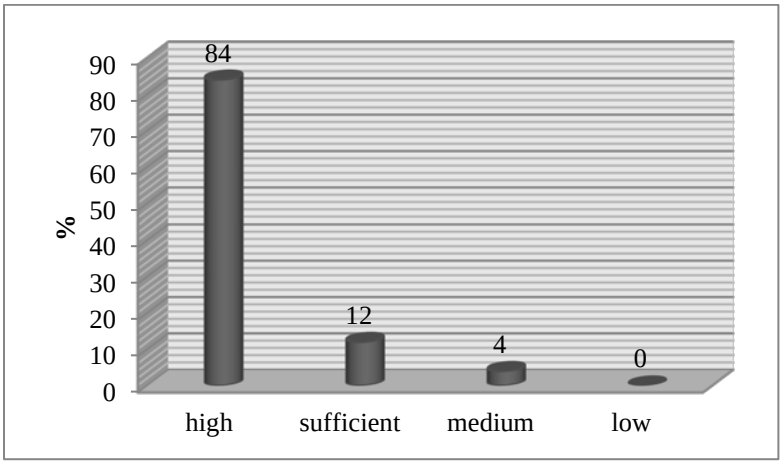


Figure 3. Percentage distribution of student performance depending on the level of obtained knowledge

Source: developed by the author

Developed critical thinking enabled students to achieve the ability to perform creative tasks. This provides the possibility of using interdisciplinary information, influencing the ability to express their own thoughts in a foreign language. Performing creative tasks involved a greater focus on the development of communicative competence. During an oral discussion of a separate topic, students focused on using various methods and techniques in communication. The expression of thoughts was competent, associated with culture, sociology, and individual traditions. The conscious use of foreign language vocabulary increased students' level of communication. Students perceived authentic words by ear, thereby improving the understanding of the obtained information. Performing creative tasks was associated with preserving the communication culture, adhering to value orientations. This allowed students to use authentic words as a means of communication, not elements taken out of context. Students also used complex tasks based on speaking skills and developed critical thinking. Based on these indicators, students provided a logical presentation of their own thoughts, which was associated with cognitive and intellectual skills.

The language skills acquired by the students gave grounds to assess which critical thinking skills had developed. The focus was on the aspects of thinking that were necessary for learning a foreign language. Figure 4 presents the results.

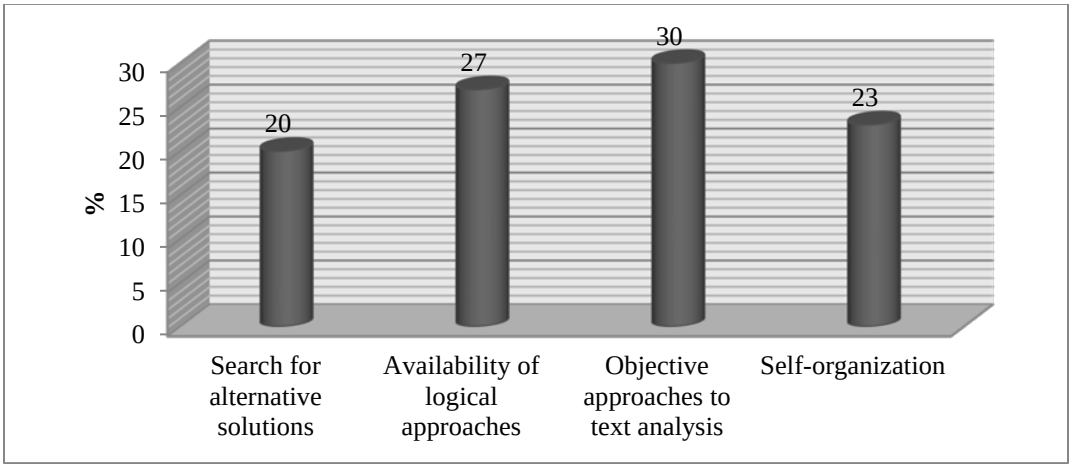


Figure 4. Critical thinking skills developed by students during their studies
Source: developed by the authors

The development of students' critical thinking showed the possibility of objective perception of authentic texts and their evaluation for using alternative language solutions. This contributed to the achievement of high results by students. Objective approaches to text analysis contributed to the development of students' awareness, which extended their ways of presenting their own thoughts based on perceived authentic texts. Students actively used logical approaches during communication, which influenced the use of different approaches to communication. Such analysis ensured the sound reasoning of their own actions, which contributed to the qualitative learning of the English language. The development of self-organization skills provided the possibility of more detailed use of authentic texts. The search for alternative solutions enabled students to use the knowledge gained to think through their own actions, which influenced the expansion of language interests.

Discussion

The corpus approach to learning English should be based on the selection of authentic language contexts. The training should focus on classifying grammatical and terminological units, as the most effective way to translate information is to enrich the terminological vocabulary. Therefore, working with authentic text ensures using terminological units in a natural context (Chen, 2023). Learning a language through situational learning enables perceiving different educational concepts, which creates an authentic environment for learning English. The mobile Collaborative Contextual Drama system provides learning English in an authentic context based on short annotations to the text and creating images. Using such an approach improved students' English (Manabe et al., 2023). Authentic texts contribute to a deeper acquaintance with the language and the students' ability to perform various tasks that can be useful in professional life. The primary importance of such texts is associated with rendering communicative purpose, which is important for the academic and professional context. This can be manifested in reading professional articles and writing texts (Drašler & Podgoršek, 2022). Learning a foreign language

should include the preservation of its basic stylistics. The use of poems was proposed for students' interaction with authentic texts. The study of poetic language enables the discovery of linguistic patterns, which develops students' independence (Jaafar & Ganapathy, 2022). The analyzed studies paid attention to one of the aspects of language learning (communicative / writing texts / text analysis based on annotations). Using one of the aspects does not ensure achieving high results by students, as they lack comprehensive approaches to the perception of information. Our article proposed to use a comprehensive approach to including authentic texts in the educational process (lexical, communicative, audio-linguistic approaches).

Artificial intelligence (AI) enhances rethinking a foreign language, contributing to the students' overall success. ChatGPT facilitates this process , as it takes into account alternative language approaches. The process aimes at understanding the text, focusing on the actual translation, rather than a superficial approach (Albeihi & Rice, 2025). AI contributes to creating algorithms for learning a foreign language, which provides personalized learning. Other texts enable developing an understanding of another culture, as well as focus on human interaction (De la Vall &Araya, 2023). The AI-based tools expand writing skills based on the generation of authentic texts. AI aims at correcting the potential and limitations for information perception. The process is implemented on the basis of creating automated tools for evaluating written text, correcting spelling (Alharbi, 2023). ChatGPT opens up many opportunities for the development of language education, enabling the creation of various forms of texts. Students' task performance entails the development of critical judgments, forming a personalized learning experience (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). The selection of texts for learning a foreign language should be related to the reflection of the specifics of a particular country. Computational linguistics technologies extract text that are associated with temporal and operational data (Zare et al., 2021). Published works provided for the use of authentic texts using computer technologies. Computer technologies were not sufficiently covered in the works, which requires searching for more effective mechanisms for their adaptation. Our article studied more traditional methods, but aimed at the comprehensive implementation of the educational process.

Learning a second foreign language should immerse students in the cultural and linguistic environment for a comprehensive understanding of the language and the dynamism of learning. Using original texts provides a better understanding of the features of the language (Abbasova, 2023). An analysis of academic articles established that attention should be paid to original (authentic) texts when learning a foreign language. Their adaptation to the educational process is considered from the perspective of using interactive technologies, which excludes other approaches to educational implementation. In our work, authentic texts became the main tool for learning English, which involved lexical, communicative, and audio-linguistic approaches. The effectiveness of the authentic texts for learning a foreign language was also assessed based on the opinions of teachers and students. The level of development of students' critical thinking was assessed by determining the students' capabilities and was related to the features of performing tasks of different levels of complexity. The skills developed by students related to critical thinking were also identified. The practical impact of the article is associated with the creation of approaches that ensure the possibility of using authentic texts in the educational process.

Limitations

The research limitations are related to the failure to involve students of different years of study. This would allow for a more qualitative assessment of the importance of authentic texts in

learning English. Further research will focus on such an approach for a comparative analysis of first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year students.

Recommendations

Using authentic texts in the educational process will provide a better understanding of a foreign language, focusing on its cultural and social features. Authentic texts expand students' language knowledge anf the ability to understand additional context. The process provides students with a broader awareness, focusing on original materials.

Conclusions

During the study, the authors maintained the sequence of stages that reflected the research objectives. The approaches to adapting authentic texts for learning English were developed. The lexical approach was associated with reading and studying authentic texts. The communicative focus provided for studying new words in practice, the ability to generate one's thoughts. The audio-linguistic focus provided for the perception of speech imitation and correct pronunciation of authentic texts. Such an educational process positively influenced the possibility of learning English. The positive influence on the teachers' opinion (97%) is associated with expanded students' cognitive activity based on studying authentic texts and achieving new goals. The students believed that the positive value of such an approach is associated with the possibility of immersion in a foreign language environment (93%).

The results of the study showed that students achieved a high level of critical thinking, which was associated with the performance of linguistic tasks of varying levels of complexity. The students were able to achieve full completion of simple (98%), creative (95%), and complex (89%) tasks, which improved the students' overall performance (84%). The students better performed creative tasks than complex ones that did not require a non-standard approach, as they could express their own opinion and independently develop foreign language skills.

The study also found that creative thinking promoted the development of other skills. These include objective approaches to text analysis, the logical approaches, self-organization, and searching for alternative solutions. Further research may focus at comparing the effectiveness of students' learning of the English language when using authentic texts and ordinary academic texts.

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