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

Dear Language Instructors,

We are delighted to announce that the International Journal of Language Instruction (IJLI) has successfully completed its mission for Volume 4, Number 1, 2025. This latest issue marks another significant milestone in our ongoing commitment to advancing research, scholarship, and practice in the field of language instruction.

In this issue, Madden and Robinson (2024) explored the use of a creative icebreaker in EFL classrooms to enhance students' speaking competence and classroom climate. Their qualitative findings revealed the activity was engaging, enjoyable, and effective in preliminarily assessing speaking skills. While culturally sensitive, the strategy offers practical pedagogical value for fostering communicative competence and learner interaction.

Rai and Pokharel (2025) investigated instruction-giving strategies among EFL teachers in Nepal, revealing that repetition, modeling, and clear time-setting enhance student comprehension. Despite these strengths, overuse of L1 and insufficient comprehension checks hinder effectiveness. The study highlights the need for teacher training focused on motivational techniques and structured, learner-centered instruction to optimize classroom outcomes.

Ho and Ha (2025) examined students' perceptions of learning outcomes in a research writing course within Vietnam's Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework. Using mixed methods, findings show students valued structured writing tasks, peer feedback, and instructor support. While outcomes were generally achieved, students desired more time and practice for advanced writing skills, suggesting curriculum adjustments are needed.

Ngo (2025) explored Vietnamese EFL learners' perceptions of translanguaging at an English center in Ho Chi Minh City. Using a mixed-methods design, the study found that learners generally viewed translanguaging as cognitively and socially beneficial, especially for lower-proficiency students. While it supported comprehension and collaboration, some higher-proficiency learners found it distracting. The study emphasizes context-sensitive, balanced implementation.

The final paper conducted by Nguyen and Bui (2025) who examined Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of challenges in teaching idioms to B1 learners. Findings revealed difficulties with learners' comprehension of figurative meanings, limited contextual resources, and cultural mismatches. Despite these barriers, teachers acknowledged idioms' importance and cultural richness. The study advocates for contextualized, culturally embedded, and learner-centered strategies in idiom instruction.

We extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all authors whose high-quality and insightful contributions have enriched this issue. Your dedication and rigorous research have provided invaluable insights into current trends, challenges, and innovations in language education. We also warmly recognize the institutions and universities with which our contributing authors are affiliated, whose support plays a critical role in fostering scholarly excellence.

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

Our heartfelt thanks also go to the reviewers who generously devoted their time and expertise to ensure the scholarly rigor and high standards of the articles published. Your meticulous reviews and constructive feedback were essential in enhancing the quality and academic integrity of this issue.

Additionally, we deeply appreciate the guidance and unwavering support from the distinguished members of our editorial board, whose collective expertise continues to shape IJLI into a respected and authoritative source in language instruction research.

We invite researchers, educators, and practitioners in language instruction and related fields to submit manuscripts for consideration in our upcoming issue, Volume 4, Number 2, 2025. We welcome original research articles, review articles, and pedagogical studies that contribute to our understanding and advancement of language education worldwide.

Thank you all once again for your continued support and contributions to the International Journal of Language Instruction.

Thanks God for everything!

With warm regards,



Associate Professor Dr. Pham Vu Phi Ho  
Editor-in-chief  
International Journal of Language Instruction

## Using an innovative icebreaker in EFL classes to assess and enhance students' speaking competence

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** Icebreaker, speaking competence, strategic competence, classroom climate, English as a foreign language, Innovative learning

Icebreakers have proved advantageous to the foreign language (L2) classroom. However, there is no known documented research on the 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker activity in L2 classes. This study seeks to conduct initial research on its incorporation. The authors sought to ascertain learners' and instructors' perceptions of this icebreaker in L2 contexts. Eight undergraduate students of Applied Foreign Languages learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and their instructor at Clermont Auvergne University participated in the study. Data were collected via an Instagram poll and the instructor's checklist and observation notes, which were analyzed through the qualitative method. Major findings show that students appreciated the icebreaker and considered it entertaining, memorable, original, and engaging. The instructor found that the icebreaker preliminarily evaluated the learners' linguistic (speaking) skills. However, toilet paper as an apparatus in this icebreaker may raise concerns of potential cultural sensitivity; therefore, the instructor should be mindful of the socio-cultural learning context. In this article, the authors highlighted the benefits and concerns of using this icebreaker and ways to lessen or overcome possible challenges.

### Introduction

Creating a positive, safe, and stimulating classroom climate is of utmost importance to foreign language (L2) teachers. Chiu (2021) agrees that a positive classroom climate can lead to increased student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. A positive classroom environment is essential because many L2 learners come from different backgrounds, and many are taking on a language that is completely new to them, which can cause much anxiety and fear. Tuong (2022) states that "because mastering speaking is the first aim of students when studying a language, it is crucial to discover how to assist students in improving their speaking" (p. 100). In fact, as everything is 'communicative' nowadays, effective language learning



should focus on conversation (Vo, 2022). Dinh (2023) highlights that individual speaking exercises improve students' vocabulary vastly.

The teacher, whether novice or experienced, often contemplates how to stimulate learners' interest in the L2 from the first day of the class, especially if they are meeting a completely new cohort. Teachers play an indispensable role in the course of teaching and learning (Tianjuan, 2019). However, a principle that is sometimes ignored is that interpersonal competence and pedagogical competence are interrelated; that is to say, a teacher who has a good rapport with their student and one who teaches well has a strong possibility of maintaining a positive classroom climate. Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010) posit that a good rapport is built and a positive classroom climate is created when both instructors and students co-construct a learning environment that encourages active student participation. Ellis (2004) notes that the development of a good rapport and a positive classroom climate have been associated with positive student outcomes, such as promoting student motivation and weakening student apprehension. Additionally, engaging in rapport-building behaviors has positively influenced students' opinions of instructor credibility and students' evaluation of instruction (Schrodt et al., 2006).

One way to engage students and stimulate their speaking and general interest in the L2 learning process is by using icebreakers. Yeganehpour (2016) defines an icebreaker as a tool that involves media, physical activity, and brainteaser activities that can be a good way to break the ice in the language classroom. For Dove (2004), icebreakers are "discussion questions" or "interaction activities" that can be used to help students learn to speak easily and enjoyably. He believes the primary goal of icebreakers is to develop an environment that decreases students' anxiety and "breaks the ice" between learners while learning with fun activities. As for Pillai (2007), icebreakers help new and shy students to strike a conversation by developing interpersonal, communication, and team-building skills, breaking cultural barriers among students, promoting a sense of trust and friendship among them, and encouraging and preparing them to learn by stimulating their minds and/or their bodies.

In the L2 context, all language skills are important, including speaking, which helps boost learners' confidence. Knowing grammar and vocabulary is simply not enough; interaction is essential; hence, instructors should create fun activities to promote a positive learning environment in which students can enhance their confidence and speaking skills (Rozali & Amin, 2019). Icebreakers have been used widely in training and professional development contexts to foster a positive work environment and build public speaking and interpersonal skills. However, not much-documented research is available on the potential of using icebreakers in L2 classes. Few studies, such as Astutii et al. (2020) and Yeganehpour and Takkac (2016), provide insights into the positive effects of icebreakers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, primarily concerning pronunciation and fluency. Nevertheless, these studies lack specific details on the types of icebreakers used. Consequently, research is needed on how specific types of innovative icebreakers influence L2 students' language development and classroom climate. In this light, this paper seeks to ascertain the impact of icebreakers on classroom climate and speaking skills in (EFL) classrooms.

## Literature review

Nowadays, there exists a plethora of activities and exercises available to L2 instructors in their quests to make learning more fun and engaging. These include gamified tools, such as Kahoot! (Madden, 2022a) and interactive live worksheets (Madden et al., 2023), quizzes, and Jeopardy, among many others. However, L2 educators are constantly in search of diverse methodologies and strategies that they can employ to have the best learning outcomes possible, especially given targeted objectives. Icebreakers can bridge this gap, especially as it concerns the development of speaking skills. Although icebreakers have been used in L2 classes for many decades, limited documented experiences of their impact on learners in the L2 context remain. The notion of icebreaker derives from 'ice,' which means rigid, cold, and hard nature, and 'breaker,' which means to solve. In a literal sense, an icebreaker is an "ice breaker". Therefore, an icebreaker can be interpreted as any attempt "to break or melt the atmosphere that is rigid as ice to become more comfortable flowing and relaxing" (Astuti et al., 2020, p. 211). Icebreaking is an activity that can be utilized to solve the tension and saturation of students in learning, which will help the class become fun and more conducive to learning before entering into the core activities. Compared to a tense situation, a friendly and conducive classroom situation will be more effective in helping students achieve the desired learning outcomes.

### *Definitions and characteristics of icebreakers*

Forbes-Greene (1982) describes icebreakers as “tools” that can be used in fostering interaction among learners, thereby encouraging “creative thinking”, discussing important assumptions, explaining new topics, and elaborating on specific information. Varvel (2002) highlights that icebreaking activities help learners ease into larger group settings, while Wright (1999) states that icebreakers open communication among students as well as between teachers and students. Crowl (2024) notes that icebreakers help establish the course's tone, signaling to students that they will be expected to participate actively throughout, and initiating the process of building community in the classroom. Therefore, by creating a sense of belonging and mutual support, “icebreakers can contribute to a positive classroom climate and enhance students’ motivation and commitment to learning” (Dansou et al., 2024, p. 977).

Icebreakers, also known as ‘warmers’ in some contexts, can take various formats, such as games, short stories, and guessing. This activity is usually done at the start of a class or a training session and is often completed within five to 15 minutes. However, Sasan et al. (2023) establish that icebreakers should be dynamic and simple to satisfy students' need to develop an appropriate social relationship with peers and teachers and preview the classroom event's style and content. Numerous studies highlight principles common to icebreakers: simple, non-threatening, open-ended, relevant, and energizing (Hoseini Shavoun et al., 2024; Fitria, 2023; Şat et al., 2022). Yeganehpour (2016) provides descriptors of the aforementioned principles:

- Simple: The materials or activities must be simple. In the L2 classroom, the instructor must know the learners' needs and abilities before the instructional process begins. Simple or authentic materials are more understandable than complex ones.
- Non-threatening: No punishment should be associated with the outcome of

students' responses or participation.

- Open-ended: This considers the extent to which the instructor creates a conducive classroom climate, as evidenced by students' participation, reactions, and motivation.
- Relevant: The activity used in the learning process should be related to the specific objectives to be achieved.
- Energizing: The icebreaker should excite and increase students' energy by engaging them in physical, creative, or mental activity.

Mepieza (2023) and Şat et al. (2022) underscore that the instructor should consider the objective, audience, time management, and classroom control when designing an appropriate icebreaker in the classroom. In reality, there is a correlation between students' success and how well the instructor breaks the ice. From this perspective, EFL and L2 teachers, in general, should pay more attention to the methodology they can use in their classes and try to diversify their teaching strategies.

#### *Advantages of icebreakers*

Astuti et al. (2020: 211) cite several benefits of using icebreakers in the classroom, such as eliminating boredom, anxiety, and fatigue because students can get away from the regular routine of the lesson by doing free and cheerful activities. Other advantages include training creative thinking and broadening students' cognitive capacity, developing collaborative and interpersonal skills, promoting problem-solving skills, increasing confidence, practicing concentration, and thinking spontaneously. Patil (2020:3) outlines some advantages of icebreakers in the language-learning process. They are intended to:

1. make learners familiarize themselves with each other in the target learning group.
2. optimize the value that each learner brings to the group.
3. help learners relax and enjoy themselves.
4. help learners get motivation through group assistance and collaboration in learning foreign language.
5. help learners overcome individual fear.
6. enable learners to practice the L2 without being fearful of failure or feeling judged.

To this list, Johnson (2012) adds that an appropriately planned academic icebreaker can enhance critical-thinking skills, establish a cooperative classroom and promote cooperative behavior, develop positive teacher-student rapport, engage economic, social, and cultural boundaries, and create positive attitudes toward school and learning. Additionally, a well-designed icebreaker helps to quickly assess students, their current skill or knowledge levels, and their attitudes toward the teacher and the learning environment (Dhuhria, 2020). Kavanagh et al. (2011) suggest that icebreakers can also contribute to the development of cultural awareness and tolerance, breaking down barriers, and overcoming separation and loneliness. These benefits indicate that icebreaking activities can be effectively used in the L2 classroom to stimulate

learning as they provide a medium through which instructors can transmit knowledge in unorthodox ways to give variety to the classroom experience.

#### *Findings from recent studies conducted on icebreakers*

Dansou et al. (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study involving eight English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and 54 EFL learners in a Beninese context, which focused on the effectiveness of icebreakers in managing foreign language anxiety (FLA) in the L2 classroom. Findings indicate that icebreakers are a valuable and effective strategy to achieve this objective, and well-designed icebreaker activities create a positive and inclusive learning environment, fostering a sense of community among learners. Additionally, icebreakers help to boost learners' confidence in the target language, which leads to reduced anxiety and an increased willingness to speak, thus leading to a supportive classroom atmosphere. This corresponds with Eragamreddy's (2024) study, conducted at a Libyan university, which found that icebreakers significantly increased students' desire and readiness to communicate orally in English.

A 2023 study conducted by Sasan et al., which examined the impact of icebreaker activities on student engagement and participation in a senior high school in the Philippines, revealed that icebreaker activities can positively impact student engagement and participation. Qualitative analysis suggests that students felt a greater sense of community and connectedness with their peers, an increased atmosphere and mood, and an increased willingness to participate and engage in class discussions. Furthermore, icebreakers provide opportunities for learners to develop important social, communication, and team-building skills. This aligns with findings from Abbas et al. (2022), who found that icebreakers significantly influenced student engagement, primarily among initially disengaged learners. Kristin et al. (2022) equally found that icebreakers increased student participation in the classroom, highlighting that those who participated in icebreaker activities at the beginning of a course were more likely to be consistent in class discussions throughout the semester.

Findings from an experiment conducted by Astuti et al. (2021) at an Indonesian high school in which 32 grade seven female students participated, revealed that icebreakers helped to increase students' motivation and interest in English and boost their academic performance. In another study conducted by Dhuhria (2020) at an Indonesian high school in which English language teachers participated, findings suggest that icebreaker activities are important to attract students' attention, establish good interaction between students and teachers, increase academic performance and language skills, especially speaking, pronunciation, and vocabulary, as well as motivation.

Specifically concerning speaking competence, Sari et al. (2023) reported on a study on the implementation of an icebreaker technique toward students' speaking skills in English language teaching at an Indonesian junior high school. Teachers reported that they used icebreakers such as brainstorming, burning questions, guessing words, sharing experiences, and quizzes to motivate and train learners to participate orally in class and motivate them to stay engaged. Findings also showed that students' speaking skills improved in components such as comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Hariati (2018) contributed to the list of icebreakers in L2 contexts, adding that the use of 'Two Truths and A Lie' helped

to improve students' speaking competence in EFL after their pre-and post-test results were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. Similarly, Saha and Singh (2021) shared findings from their study on the development of speaking skills through language games, including icebreakers, in technologically deprived EFL classrooms in an Indian context. The results showed a positive change in the classroom climate as opportunities were provided for grade seven learners to practice and improve their English-speaking skills. Likewise, Alamsyah (2017) documented results from a junior high school context in Indonesia, involving pre-test and post-test. Results showed that icebreakers were effective in enhancing students' speaking skills in areas of accuracy and fluency in L2 English when a comparison was made between their pre- and post-test grades.

As seen in the literature, the data related to using icebreakers in L2 classes is limited in terms of content, methodology, and geographical diversity. Very few studies provide examples of the types of icebreakers used in L2 classrooms, and only one study spoke to the impact of a specific type of icebreaker – 'Two Truths and A Lie'. This shows a gap in specificity, which calls for studies to deliberately focus on the interplay between particular icebreakers and the development of learners' L2 speaking skills. Additionally, most of the studies adopted a quantitative approach, examining pre-and post-test scores, which invites research to be done using the mixed-method or qualitative approach. Furthermore, most studies are situated in a certain geographical location with learners of similar cultural backgrounds; therefore, research is limited to using icebreakers in L2 contexts with students operating in a multicultural setting. This study is positioned to explore an innovative and specific icebreaker in a multiracial context, which will provide insights to serve the L2 community.

### *Theoretical frameworks for icebreakers*

Numerous theories were researched and found to support icebreakers' use in L2 classes; these include behaviorism, cognitivism, social constructivism, self-determination theory (SDT), and theory of motivation, as summarized in Table 1. Behaviorism invites the instructor to encourage the learners to participate in the icebreaker and offer positive reinforcement where applicable. Positive reinforcement is the offering of the desired rewards or sought-after stimuli to elicit expected behavior (Ghafar, 2023). Cognitivism promotes students' metacognition and problem-solving skills (Muhajirah, 2020). Therefore, icebreakers can allow students to think about their thinking (Flavell, 1979) and work collaboratively to solve problems, which supports the theory of social constructivism; this theory supports that students develop knowledge and learn through social interactions (Kent & Rechavi, 2020). Icebreakers are designed to facilitate social interactions among students, which may lead to increased engagement and participation. Lev Vygotsky posited that learners experience development on two levels – first on a social level (interpsychological), followed by the individual level (intrapyschological) (Kukla, 2013). Vygotsky also spoke of the Zone of Proximal Development [ZPD], which describes a learner achieving the next (higher) level of development through collaborative learning facilitated by either peers who are more competent or with a more knowledgeable other such as an adult (Shabani et al., 2010). The goal of ZPD is to allow students to collaborate to complete a task that is slightly above what they can currently complete independently. After this collaborative learning experience, they should be able to complete the task independently. Icebreakers allow

students of diverse backgrounds to work together and learn from each other. Albert Bandura's theory of social learning supports Vygotsky's social constructivism theory. According to Bandura (1978), people learn and develop through observing the behaviors and attitudes of others, along with the results or consequences of the observed behaviors. Through icebreaking activities, students can learn from each other. Concerning SDT, it claims that learners have three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are satisfied, learners experience enhanced motivation, well-being, and growth. Otherwise, it can lead to diminished motivation and psychological distress (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Icebreakers may promote these feelings by giving students a sense of control over their learning and creating a sense of belonging in the classroom. Ryan & Deci (2017) further highlighted in their book that SDT distinguishes between different types of motivation: intrinsic motivation (engaging or participating in activities because they are enjoyable and without reward or external consequence) and extrinsic motivation (engaging or participating in activities for the reward or consequence that are associated). This is in harmony with Gardner's theory of motivation, which states that motivation is the eagerness when one individual learns a new language and the satisfaction experienced in that activity (Gardner et al., 1979). Apsari (2014) states that motivation plays a vital role in reading an L2. Thus, motivation determines the success of learning. Icebreakers are pedagogical tools that can influence students' motivation to learn and improve their language skills. However, there are noticeable gaps in the literature concerning the use of specific and innovative icebreakers in L2 pedagogy that could improve students' speaking competence and overall classroom climate. Although icebreakers contribute to collaboration and communication through social constructivism, insufficient data speaks to their usage in multilingual and multicultural contexts and their potential to impact intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

### *Research Questions*

To achieve the purpose of the study, the following research questions serve as a guide:

1. What are students' perceptions of the 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker in the EFL classroom?
2. What lessons can teachers take away from the 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker in the EFL classroom?

**Table 1.**

Theoretical contributions of Icebreakers to L2 classes

<b>Contribution of Icebreakers</b>	<b>Primary Features</b>	<b>Underpinning Theories</b>
Collaboration	-foster a sense of community and trust -create an avenue for effective community -build a supportive learning atmosphere where learners feel more connected and willing to work together	-Social constructivism -Social learning theory -Self-determination theory
Communication	-foster an environment where learners can practice their language skills in a low-pressure and non-judgmental setting -improve learners' communicative abilities -promote speaking and listening in a non-threatening environment -offer opportunities to communicate and interact with peers, improving their fluency and confidence in using the target language	-Behaviorism -Social constructivism
Critical thinking	-offer opportunities to solve the problem -promote metacognition	-Cognitivism
Participation	-create a comfortable, engaging, and safe classroom climate -encourage learners to participate actively	-Motivation theory -Behaviorism

## Methods

This study employed the exploratory qualitative content analysis approach to ascertain students' perceptions of the 'How much do you use?' icebreaker in EFL classes and the teachers' takeaways from the pedagogical tool. An Instagram survey and observation notes were used as data collection instruments.

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The study comprised eight undergraduate students (7 females and 1 male) from Applied Foreign Languages and English specializations from Clermont Auvergne University (UCA), who took a 10-week spoken English course, which explored everyday topics and current affairs issues with the aim of building oral competence and confidence in English. Their ages ranged between 18 and 23 years, and they were between B1 and B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The participants were chosen via convenience sampling due to the time frame in which the data was collected. Rahi (2017) states that convenience sampling describes the data collection process from a research population that is effortlessly reachable to the researcher. The 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker was used in the semester's first class as a Getting To Know You activity and for the instructor to obtain an initial perception of students' speaking competence and interests.

Below are the steps used to conduct the icebreaker. These steps are modifiable based on different contexts.

### How Much Do You Use?



1. Take sufficient rolls of toilet paper to class.
2. Have students sit in a circle or semi-circle based on the configuration of the classroom.
3. Remove the toilet paper from its hidden container and ask students to identify it. (In principle, everybody knows what toilet paper is.)
4. Ask students a few questions to build suspense but ease any tension: Do you use it? What brand/color do you use? How much does it cost?
5. Pass the roll of toilet paper around and tell the students to take how much they use. (Many may take only one or two squares; however, inform them of the impracticality of taking very few plies. Some will even say the amount is dependent on the context in which the toilet paper is being used. Tell them to think about a worst-case scenario.)
6. After everyone has taken their portion, ask them to hold up the quantity. If the instructor believes a student has too few plies, they can encourage the student to take more.
7. The instructor may choose to participate to help ease the anxiety that may arise.
8. Once everyone has taken it, the instructor reveals the objective of the game: Based on the number of plies taken, each student is to introduce him or herself by presenting some basic details.
9. The instructor may ask the student seated beside the interlocutor to ask follow-up questions to practice question formation and to gather further details.

#### *Design of the Study*

This study used qualitative research design. This design was chosen because qualitative research takes into account participants' attitudes, behaviors, experiences, and perceptions. At its core, qualitative research asks open-ended questions whose answers are not easily translated into numbers, compared to quantitative research (Cleland, 2017). Given the open-ended nature of the research questions at hand, qualitative research design is often not linear in the same way quantitative design is (Cleland, 2017).

#### *Data collection & analysis*

An Instagram poll asking students to give their perceptions of the icebreaker was conducted over a one-month period between March and April of 2024. The participants were invited to



react positively or negatively to the icebreaker. The following message was posted in French (see Figure 1) on the instructor's Instagram: "Attention to all my former French students/students I taught in France. Do you remember the toilet paper game 'How much do you use?' in English class? I am writing an article on this activity in language class and therefore am seeking your feedback on both its positive and negative aspects. Overall, what do you think about this activity? Thanks in advance for responding, whether in French or in English."

**Figure 1.**

Screenshot of Instagram poll question



Convenience sampling was used to gather the participants. Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad (2012) note that convenience or opportunity sampling is the most common type of sampling in L2 studies, Dörnyei (2007) points out that this form of the non-probable and non-random sample includes members of the target population that meet certain specific criteria, including accessibility, availability, and proximity, and their willingness to participate in the study. All the participants consented to participate in the study.

The instructor's observation notes and checklist (See Table 2) were also used to collect data. The checklist covered aspects such as students' perceived reaction to and appreciation of the icebreaker on a scale representing none, mild, moderate, and severe.

The data in this study was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Wong (2008) states that qualitative data is usually subjective and rich and consists of comprehensive information normally presented in the form of words. The data was analyzed by reading and examining the transcripts to ascertain similarities or differences and create themes where applicable.

The research aims to document valid experiences regarding students' and instructors' perceptions of the icebreaker in L2 classes.

**Table 2.**

Instructor's observation checklist for toilet paper icebreaker

Description	None	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Comment
Student hesitated to participate in the game					
Student displayed annoyance, discomfort, shyness, and resistance.					
Student demonstrated confidence when speaking.					
Student appreciated the game after discovering its objective.					

## Results/Findings

*Research question 1: What are students' perceptions of the 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker in the EFL classroom?*

As seen in Table 3 below, all the respondents (N=8) positively perceived the icebreaker used in class. The icebreaker was described as (1) Fun and memorable – Many students found it enjoyable and memorable, and it helped to break the ice and build confidence among participants. (2) Humorous and educational – The icebreaker provided a humorous way to get to know each other and de-stress. The shared anecdotes helped students to feel more at ease. (3) Original and engaging – The icebreaker activity was unique and made students smile, which lightened the atmosphere and made it easier to interact. (4) Confidence building – The icebreaker activity positively impacted building learners' confidence and easing into the group dynamic. (5) Teaching style appreciation – Several learners expressed appreciation for the modern and enriching teaching style that made learning enjoyable.

On the negative side – though not many responses – there was (1) Initial hesitation – Some participants felt unsure or reluctant to fully engage at first, worried about being judged or mocked, and (2) Language barriers – There were concerns about differences in language proficiency, which made it challenging for some to express themselves fully. These findings support the instructor's observations noted in his checklist that students displayed a range of emotions and reactions from the start to the end of the game. During the process, some students in the class expressed surprise, indecision, and even excitement to explore the game.

**Table 3.**

Students' perceptions of the 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker

Student	Excerpt
Léna	I remember this activity; it was a nice way to break the ice between us. It was fun! I enjoyed doing it; it made me feel good 👍👍👍
Sara	I personally found this activity fun and an excellent way to break the ice and build students' confidence in a humorous and educational way 😊
Julie	I admit I don't remember it very well ... But I remember it being a clever way of forcing people to give information about themselves 😊 I thought it was original!
Terry	Personally, I found this approach very interesting and fun, and it helps you de-stress because, firstly, everyone poops, and secondly, it puts everyone on an equal footing. It also makes it easier to find out what other people like.
Margaux	I still remember it! It was a great idea 💡 no one was expecting it and in the end, it forced us to be sincere and rack our brains. A good way to break the ice and get to know each other at the start of the semester. Negatives: None, it was fun, and I think a lot of people remembered it 😊
Dalya	I found this game very fun, entertaining, and interesting. Perhaps the negative point was that people didn't really dare tell the truth for fear of being mocked or judged - at least that's how I felt at first, but then I thought, no, there's nothing to be ashamed of, the game isn't designed for that. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ultra-enriching and modern teaching style, which made us love our English lessons.
Cécile	So on the plus side, it's an original activity because I still remember it years later! 😊 The idea made everyone smile, so when you get to know each other, it helps to lighten the atmosphere.  On the negative side, I remember that the class didn't dare use it naturally because we wondered what it was going to be used for. We thought about it too much and didn't really dare take much.
Susan	On the positive side, I'd say that it clearly gave us confidence both with you (the teacher) and with our classmates, and above all it was fun to share anecdotes 😊 Negative points: I can't really think of any since I had the impression that it was really more like team building 😊 The only concern I can see is the difference in language level between everyone. Some of them, I had the impression, didn't have the words to express what they wanted to say, but well, in the end, we tried to understand otherwise, but putting myself in their shoes, it must have been very frustrating 😊

*Research question 2: What lessons can teachers take away from the 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker in the EFL classroom?*

Based on the instructor's (primary author) observation notes, there are a few takeaways to note.

1. **Classroom climate:** The 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker has the potential to contribute to a positive classroom climate at the start of an academic semester. It allows students and teachers to learn about and warm up to each other, which helps create comfort, which is important for the flow throughout the system. As the icebreaker can be sensitive – since it involves toilet paper – it may be useful for the instructor to get involved in the game in a practical way. The instructor observed during class (20 students) that most students felt relieved when they decided to participate in the game. This helped to ease the tension, given that there was a lot of suspense leading up to the actual objective of the game.
2. **Cultural sensitivity:** Although toilet paper is universally used, the instructor needs to gauge cultural sensitivity. If the instrument used (toilet paper) might be offensive to the majority of learners, it might be useful to use another item, such as marbles, squares of scrap paper, or sticky notes.
3. **Language proficiency:** The icebreaker helped the instructor understand the learners' background and interests and conduct an instant preliminary assessment of their language proficiency. Therefore, the instructor could evaluate learners based on language register, syntax, intonation, fluency, and accent. This assessment helped the instructor with the pedagogical activities and grouping arrangements done throughout the semester. For instance, for certain activities, he could pair a weaker student with a more competent one.
4. **Strategic competence:** The icebreaker helped some students develop confidence in speaking in public and use strategic competence to overcome communication barriers. As established earlier, students were situated at different levels on the CEFR. The icebreaker required them to think spontaneously, and strategic competence allowed the weaker ones to express themselves with their limited language knowledge. Scaffolding from the instructor helped them to navigate foreign language anxiety.

## Discussion

The findings show that all students have a positive perception of the 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker in EFL classes. Students appreciate the icebreaker because it is humorous, memorable, educational, original, and engaging. In addition, they highlighted its potential to improve self-confidence, which is a creative and innovative pedagogical tool. These findings support a number of studies previously conducted, such as Dansou et al. (2024) who highlighted the role of icebreakers in helping learners gain self-confidence, reduce anxiety, and increase their willingness to speak, Sasan et al. (2023), Abbas et al. (2022) and Astuti et al. (2021) who spoke about the role of icebreakers in impacting student engagement, participation and motivation, and Duhria (2020) who noted the potential of icebreakers in establishing a

positive rapport between students and teachers and increasing speaking skills in areas such as pronunciation and vocabulary. Students' appreciation for the originality of the pedagogical tool highlights the need for instructors to move away from a stoic and inflexible classroom to one where the students get an opportunity to engage in free and cheerful activities, as a friendly and conducive learning environment will be more effective in helping learners achieve the learning objectives (Astuti et al., 2020). Icebreaking activities can thus be utilized in the L2 classroom to stimulate learning through unorthodox ways to give variety to the classroom experience.

In addition, the findings support Patil's (2020) position that icebreakers in the language learning process help to make learners familiarize themselves with each other in the target language, optimize the value that each person brings to the group, help learners relax and enjoy themselves, help learners overcome individual fear, and empower learners to practice the L2 without being fearful of failure or feeling judged. As pointed out under the possible drawbacks of the 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker, some learners might have hesitated to participate fully because of fear of being judged or mocked due to their language level or inability to speak fluently like others. In such cases, the onus is on the instructor to help relax the atmosphere and scaffold learners to engage in strategic competence. Importantly, instructors are to be mindful of the learners' level of comfort and the cultural contexts in which they operate. Consequently, instructors must be flexible and culturally aware so as to propose adaptable icebreaker solutions for diverse classroom settings. If the learner is shy, the instructor could ask him or her to say very little, but gradually throughout the semester, the instructor can demand more as the learner gets more comfortable. Importantly, the instructor should not employ punitive measures. As Yeganehpour (2016) established, icebreakers should be non-threatening, meaning there should be no punishment associated with the outcome of students' responses or participation.

Furthermore, icebreakers help the instructor quickly assess learners' proficiency in the language (Dhuhria, 2020). As the instructor indicated, he was able to assess students preliminarily based on language register, use of grammar, intonation, and fluency. Consequently, icebreakers can influence the didactic approach and depth of content to be covered.

Moreover, as students get an opportunity to learn about each other at the start of the semester, it helps them to cultivate and develop cultural awareness, tolerance for diversity (Kavanagh et al., 2011), and intercultural communicative competence (Madden, 2022b; Madden et al., 2024). Language classes, especially at the university level, can be very diverse with students from different languages and cultural backgrounds. Icebreakers can, therefore, help them to develop their intercultural communicative competence and collaborative skills.

## Conclusion

The study has revealed that the 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker is a welcome activity in the EFL classroom. It is considered entertaining, memorable, original, and engaging. Additionally, learners consider this icebreaker innovative and note its potential to aid in developing self-confidence in L2 oral communication. The icebreaker sets the tone for the overall semester, as it helps both students and teachers to familiarize themselves with each

other, which helps to build trust, foster an appreciation for cultural diversity, and improve intercultural communicative competence. For the teacher, the icebreaker can serve as a preliminary form of assessment to evaluate learners' linguistic skills, such as vocabulary level, use of language (syntax), intonation, and fluency. This assessment can serve to guide future pedagogical interventions and the type and depth of content covered.

Although there are notable advantages to using the icebreaker in EFL classes, some learners may feel apprehensive about participating because they do not want to feel ridiculed or judged. In such a case, the instructor should be understanding and not employ any punitive measures. In the same vein, instructors should assess whether the icebreaker is appropriate within the students' cultural environment. Otherwise, the instructor could adopt other more receivable and socio-culturally and socio-institutionally acceptable alternatives.

The 'How much do you use?' toilet paper icebreaker presents an additional didactic option for L2 instructors and could be considered a useful alternative in spaces limited by technology integration. However, teachers could replace the toilet paper apparatus with sticky notes or marbles, for example, to ensure inclusivity and avoid potential discomfort.

The sample size for this study (N=8) is very small; therefore, the results do not allow for generalizations to be made. Additionally, only one form of data collection tool was used to gather data from the participants, and the number of questions asked was also limited. Future studies could consider other data collection tools such as questionnaires, reflective entries, and interviews. The observation notes from the instructor are also subjective, as they are from one person's perspective and interpretation.

Going forward, it would be interesting for L2 instructors to replicate this study with a larger number of learners across different languages and levels of the education system. In addition, L2 instructors could consider using this icebreaker as a revision activity or as a course evaluation.

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## The Dynamics of Teachers' Instruction in Nepali Classrooms

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

Instruction-giving,  
ESL or EFL,  
language, strategies

Regardless of the significant role of instruction-giving in EFL classrooms in achieving lesson goals, some research in Nepal explores its impact on classroom efficiency and student participation. This paper intends to bridge this research gap by assessing the instructional strategies of English teachers. Conducted in Nepal, the research observed 15 English teachers during their lessons to assess their instruction-giving techniques. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected through classroom observations and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Findings reveal that repetition, board writing of key points, and demonstrations effectively reinforce instructions and aid comprehension. However, challenges remain in optimizing instruction delivery. The paper highlights the need for professional development programs that emphasize repetition, language simplification, visual aids, and demonstrations. These findings can inform teacher training modules, ultimately enhancing classroom management and student learning outcomes. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on instructional strategies in Nepal's EFL/ESL classrooms.

### Introduction

Nepal, known for its rich cultural heritage, is one of the most sought-after countries. It is renowned for its diverse and vibrant population that embraces a wide range of religions and traditions (The Fascination Cultural Diversity of Nepal, 2019). Nepal is often categorized within the Expanding Circle, as English has traditionally held no official status in the country. However, the language has played significant economic, educational, and social roles in society, much like it does in Outer Circle English-speaking countries (Pandey, 2020).

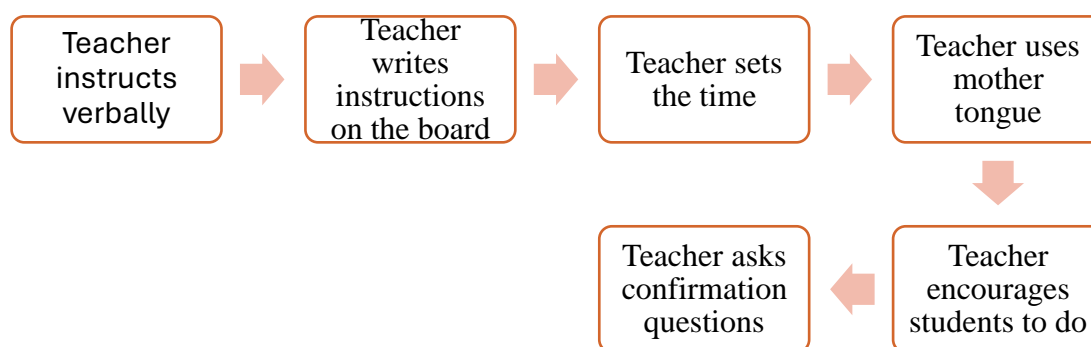
The global expansion and increasing use of English have led to a significant shift from teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to teaching it as an international language (EIL) (Rose & Montakantiwong, 2018). Effective instruction-giving is essential in EFL/ESL classrooms, significantly influencing students' language acquisition and overall academic success (Angulo, 2023). In Nepal, where English proficiency is increasingly important, mastering instruction-giving nuances has become more critical than ever. Previous studies have highlighted the

pivotal role of clear instructions in driving positive learning outcomes in EFL environments. For instance, El Kemma (2019) emphasized how well-crafted instructions can boost student engagement and language development, while Sowell (2017) pointed out that unclear instructions can lead to the failure of classroom activities. Supporting this view, Riwayatiningsih (2024) stated “Teachers who use clear, concise, and accessible language can significantly enhance understanding and engagement, making learning more effective” (p. 138). In EFL settings, teachers are required to give detailed and intended instruction to avoid ambiguity and fear in students.

Instruction involves planning and organizing teaching and learning activities, integrating elements such as teachers, students, materials, and the learning environment (El Kemma, 2019). However, this study shifts the focus to how teachers deliver instructions for classroom activities. By examining these practices within a Nepali school, this research aims to analyze the challenges EFL teachers face and the effective methods they use to guide students. By exploring instruction-giving dynamics, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on best practices in EFL teaching, offering practical recommendations for improving instructional strategies in any EFL or ESL settings.

### Flow Chart 1:

A general instruction-giving process



Students in EFL classrooms often encounter significant difficulties when instructions are poorly delivered. A systematic instruction-giving process (Flow Chart 1) can be more effective than just giving verbal or written instruction because our class consists of all types of learners. Miscommunication or unclear guidance can lead to confusion, resulting in students misunderstanding tasks or objectives. This confusion hampers their ability to engage effectively in learning activities, which can diminish their confidence and motivation. Additionally, when instructions are vague or overly complex, students may struggle to follow along, leading to wasted class time and a lack of focus. These challenges not only impede language acquisition but also contribute to a sense of frustration and disengagement, ultimately affecting their overall academic success and progress in mastering English.

Despite the fact that there are a lot of studies on effective classroom teaching and improving classroom teaching with technological aids, research on the quality of instruction-giving still remains very limited. While most studies have concentrated on the integration of L1, technology, projects, drills, plays, and other hands-on activities in EFL classes, little attention has been paid to how Nepal's English teachers are improving their instruction-giving in English. This gap has left a significant part of English language teaching unexplored because the value

of English Medium Instruction (EMI) and English language proficiency is increasing in Nepal. This study can offer practical suggestions for enhancing teachers' instruction-giving and maximizing students' learning outcomes by filling such a gap in Nepal's context.

## Literature Review

EFL teachers must grapple with a lot of challenges in their classrooms. All age group learners may have some sources of fear. Phuong and Bau (2024) emphasize that anxiety among adult learners comes from the idea of being backward in class, hesitation to converse in English, and a fear of making grammatical errors. New EFL teachers have more challenges to deal with than experienced ones. Amin and Rahimi (2018) clarify that managing classes, executing a curriculum that aligns with the class levels and duration, adopting contextual teaching approaches, and familiarizing themselves with teacher rights and regulations are major challenges. Heng et al. (2023) argue that teachers designing a wide range of levels that achieve the goals using the same materials and inflexible lesson plans disallow them from customizing them for students' needs.

EFL teachers should adopt different strategies based on class needs and students' abilities. Malik et al. (2020) found that EFL teachers use teaching techniques such as learning, flash card exchange, drawing games, guessing games, miming games, and topical discussion in Indonesia. There are also other classroom strategies that EFL teachers can apply. Direct instruction, small groups, role-play, etc., are helpful in teaching-learning (Hayat et al., 2021). Oktavia et al. (2021) suggest games, songs, practice, and memorizing as fun teaching strategies for young students. Every classroom has a different context. So, different EFL teachers are expected to adopt different techniques to cater to their needs. A one-size-fits-all idea is detrimental to teaching. EFL teachers' challenges are varied, and different approaches are necessary to achieve classroom goals.

In educational settings, the concept of instruction is multifaceted, encompassing the strategies teachers use to guide students effectively. Research has highlighted the important impact of direct instruction on students' self-regulated learning (Asaro-Saddler & Saddler, 2010; Graham et al., 2005; Lam, 2014; Teng & Zhang, 2019). Magno and Lizada (2015) state that instructions are verbal or written orders integral to teaching strategies. Spratt et al. (2005) emphasize that instruction involves guiding learners through various stages of a lesson, while Margaretha and Wacana (2015) stress that clear instructions are crucial for student success, as misunderstandings can lead to students falling behind. The process of instruction-giving typically involves three stages: preparation, delivery, and post-delivery. During the preparation stage, teachers meticulously plan how to communicate instructions, considering the appropriate language and examples to ensure clarity (El, 2019; Woodberry & Aldrich, 2000). Scrivener (2005) advises simplifying language to enhance student comprehension, emphasizing that concise instructions are more effective.

In the delivery stage, capturing students' attention is critical. Strategies such as ringing a bell, clapping hands, or using cue phrases like "Time to start" or "Listen up" can be effective (Wulandari, 2017; Sowell, 2017). Holmes (2014) identifies three types of directives for delivering instructions: imperatives, interrogatives, and declaratives, with imperatives being the most efficient due to their brevity. Additionally, techniques such as repetition, demonstration, time limits, and using the student's native language are essential for effective instruction (Sowell, 2017). Moreover, "Modeling is a teaching strategy where the learners are shown by their teachers in a clear and detailed manner on how they will complete their tasks" (Esparrago-

Kalidas et al., 2023). Dang and Nguyen (2024) claim that language proficiency improves based on teachers' teaching methods applied in class in the EMI context.

Post-delivery, it's crucial to ensure that all students understand the instructions. Harmer (2007) highlights the importance of checking comprehension through methods beyond simply asking, "Do you understand?" Effective strategies include inviting a student to explain the task or having someone demonstrate it (Harmer, 2007; El, 2019). Missteps in the order or clarity of instructions can lead to confusion and hinder learning (Loaiza & Zean, 2023). This revision condenses the key points about instructional strategies, focusing on clarity, planning, and ensuring student comprehension for successful educational outcomes.

Previous scholarship has explored instructional strategies; however, some research gaps and contradictions exist. Scholars such as (Sowell (2017) and Holmes (2014) are inclined to directive-based instructions such as imperatives, repetition, and modeling. On the other hand, scholars such as Oktavia et al. (2021) recommend interactive and learner-centered approaches including games and songs. Moreover, Harmer (2007) and El (2019) stress the importance of post-delivery comprehension tests. However, there is very limited study on how EFL teachers customize such strategies for multicultural classrooms in Nepal. Heng et al. (2023) present that rigid lesson plans impede the process of instruction-giving in class. A clear classification of instruction-giving techniques, such as repetition for reinforcement, modeling for demonstration, and imperative instruction for clarity, tends to offer a more insightful understanding of effective teaching strategies, addressing inconsistencies in existing scholarship on instruction-giving in EFL contexts.

### *Factors Influencing Instruction-Giving in EFL Classrooms*

Şen (2021) suggests that teachers' approach when giving instructions in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms varies widely. Sherma (2024) claims that professional teachers are always on the lookout for substituting their old-fashioned method of teaching. The factors influencing these variations can be grouped into five categories: activity-based, instruction-based, student-based, syllabus timing, and teacher-based factors. The complexity and importance of a given activity directly influence how instructions are delivered. When students encounter new or unfamiliar activities, teachers often slow down and use modeling techniques to ensure that instructions are clear and understood before the activity begins. Instructions that are lengthy, complicated, or involve unfamiliar topics or formats pose significant challenges. Such instructions often require teachers to spend additional time clarifying, paraphrasing, simplifying, and monitoring to ensure that students understand. This is especially true when instructions involve unfamiliar vocabulary or are presented in an unclear manner.

Student motivation and proficiency levels also play a critical role in instruction-giving. Understanding the specific motivational factors identified by students can inform instructional strategies aimed at enhancing engagement and enthusiasm in writing classes (Sherma, 2023). Similarly, Weinstein and Andrew (2007) note that inattentive or easily distracted students can complicate the process. Conversely, teachers may assume that more advanced students will easily understand instructions, often leading to less emphasis on checking for comprehension. The pace of the syllabus can impact how thoroughly instructions are checked. Due to time constraints, teachers may sometimes skip verifying that students fully understand the instructions, depending on how quickly they need to progress through the syllabus.

The language used for instruction is a significant factor. While it can be seen as an effective strategy to use the target language, especially for advanced students, this approach can be challenging for beginners (Liruso & de Debat, 2003). The choice between using the mother

tongue or the target language for instructions is a common dilemma among EFL teachers. Another critical factor is teacher fatigue. The heavy workload often leaves teachers with limited time to thoroughly prepare or assess their instructional methods. Fatigue can also lead to neglecting to review instructions, which can result in students not fully understanding what they are expected to do. By recognizing and addressing these activity-based, instruction-based, student-based, syllabus timing, and teacher-based factors, teachers can improve their ability to give clear and effective instructions, thereby creating a more conducive learning environment.

### *Research Questions*

To analyze the challenges EFL teachers face and the effective methods they use to guide students, the research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What specific strategies are EFL teachers at a Nepali school currently using to give instructions in the classroom?
2. How effectively are these instructional strategies being implemented in EFL classrooms at the school?

### **Research Methodology**

This study was conducted at a Nepali school, where the focus is on teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to students who are non-English majors. The school aims to equip students with the English communication skills necessary for their careers. The study specifically examines instruction-giving, a critical aspect of classroom management. To support this, the school has organized several workshops to discuss and share strategies and techniques related to instruction-giving.

### *Data collection*

The participants in this study were a diverse group of EFL teachers, ranging from newcomers to those with extensive experience. The researcher knew the school principal but not the teachers. The participants were teaching at different grades ranging from grade 5 to 10. With the school principal's written consent for the observations, ensuring ethical compliance, a total of 15 lessons of 15 teachers were observed at their convenient dates, each during a single 45-minute lesson, to explore how they deliver instructions. The observation process was carried out with the informed consent of the school's Principal, who approved the study beforehand. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to address the research question. The observed lessons ranged from grades 5 to 10 with varying degrees of structure and difficulty based on students' ages rather than their proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds. However, all the lessons followed a general structure of instruction-giving orally and in written format, followed by explanation and clarification. In earlier grades, instructors used simple words, wrote detailed questions, and made gestures. However, in higher grades, teachers wrote instructions concisely and asked them verbally for clarification.

### *Data analysis*

The study employed thematic analysis, a method involving coding and categorization to analyze the qualitative data collected (Creswell, 2011). The instruction's effectiveness in these EFL classrooms was evaluated using an observation checklist adapted from Sowell (Sowell, 2017) and narrative notes. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is a robust qualitative descriptive method that is well-suited for describing the instructional practices of a group of teachers. This

approach aligns with the study's goal of detailing the techniques teachers use to give instructions. Additionally, field notes from the observations were supplemented by recordings, which were transcribed and analyzed to deepen the understanding of instruction-giving practices in this educational context.

For the quantitative analysis, the researcher used frequency counts to assess the existence of specific instructional techniques observed across the 15 lessons. The observation checklist adapted from Sowell (2017) gave an opportunity to collect data, allowing the researcher to compare the data across different teachers and grade levels. Finally, coding schemes were applied to categorize instruction-giving approaches such as repetition, modeling, and imperative instructions.

## Results/Findings

**Research question 1:** *What specific strategies are EFL teachers at a Nepali school currently using to give instructions in the classroom?*

This section presents key findings on the current practices of instruction-giving in EFL classrooms at the Nepali school under study. Teachers at the school employ several effective strategies for delivering instructions. Four notable techniques are the use of time constraints and repetition.

### *Setting time limits*

Setting clear time limits for activities helps students focus and work efficiently. For instance, in a task where students were asked to list materials, Teacher A instructed, "Take three minutes to gather your thoughts." This prompt immediately engaged students, who understood that their progress would be checked after the allotted time.

### *Repetition*

Given that not all students may be fully attentive when instructions are first given, repetition ensures that everyone understands the task. For example, Teacher B reinforced the instruction by saying, "Be silent. You are running out of time. Any answer is acceptable." This repetition clarified the task, whereas in contrast, Teacher C, who did not repeat instructions effectively, saw fewer students respond confidently when asked if they understood.

### *Affirmative instructions*

Teachers who use short, inspiring sentences tend to encourage students effectively. Instructions such as "You can do. Any answer is acceptable." In contrast, overly formal or complex instructions, like those given by Teacher D—"I would like you to pull the words from the essay you read, which are synonymous with them" can confuse students and waste time as they struggle to identify the key points.

### *Coherent instructions*

When an activity requires multiple steps, it is more effective for teachers to break down the instructions rather than delivering them all at once. Using sequential words like "first," "then," "next," and simple connectors like "and," "so," helps students visualize and follow the necessary steps.



**Research question 2:** *How effectively are these instructional strategies being implemented in EFL classrooms at the school?*

*Use of Mother Tongue*

To implement class instruction effectively, some teachers at the school resort to using the student's native language to support instruction. Teacher E, for example, used the mother tongue to check for understanding, which was deemed appropriate in that context. However, others, such as Teachers F and G, regularly translated instructions into the native language immediately after giving them in English. This practice stems from concerns that students may not fully grasp English instructions. However, this reliance on translation overlooks the potential for students to understand with the help of visual aids and body language. Additionally, teachers who speak quickly often switch to the mother tongue if their initial instructions in English are unclear, which may undermine students' language learning. Teachers can discuss the meanings of difficult vocabulary in advance.

*Checking for Understanding*

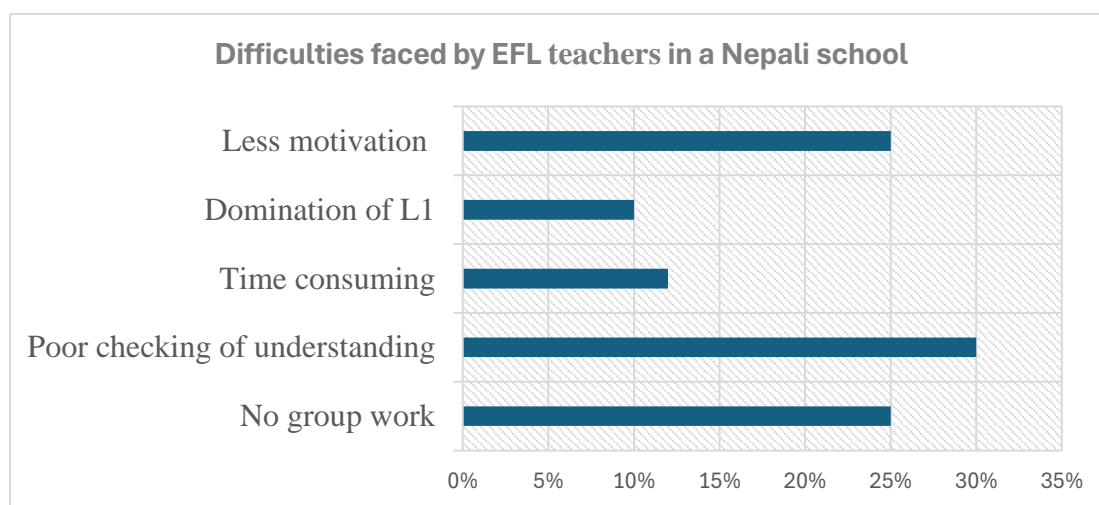
Post-instruction, teachers employed various methods to check student comprehension, including asking checking questions, requesting students to summarize or repeat instructions, asking for demonstrations, or, in some cases, not checking at all.

Many teachers used simple questions like "Did I make myself clear?" or "Did you all get it?" to gauge comprehension. However, these questions often went unanswered because students were unclear on the instructions or were too shy or unmotivated to respond. This silence can lead teachers to mistakenly assume that students understand, which may result in confusion and hinder the success of the activity. For example, even when Teacher H used the first language to support the instructions and followed up with "You got it?" students remained unclear about what they needed to do, with some working individually instead of in pairs as required.

On the other hand, teachers who used concise, imperative instructions observed better student comprehension and time efficiency. In contrast, those who used long, academic sentences often faced difficulties as students struggled to understand and follow the instructions, leading to delays and potential confusion. During class observations, some difficulties faced by the teachers were noted.

**Bar Chart 1:**

Difficulties faced by EFL teachers in a Nepali school



The data (Bar Chart 1) presents challenges encountered by teachers during the instruction-giving process and reveals several critical areas for improvement. Notably, the figures indicate a significant prevalence of issues such as the absence of student grouping before instruction delivery (25%), insufficient checking of students' understanding of concepts (30%), and an alarming neglect of motivation in instruction-giving (25%). Moreover, the misuse of the student's native language (L1) during instruction (10%) suggests potential communication barriers that may hinder effective knowledge transmission. Additionally, the relatively lower percentages of teachers struggling with attention acquisition (8.6%) and time-consuming instruction delivery (12%) underscore the importance of addressing these concerns to optimize the overall teaching and learning experience.

Instructional strategies differed from one teacher to another owing to grade levels among 15 teachers. Even if some teachers used repetition, modeling, and imperative instructions, 30% (5 teachers) did not check student understanding, and 25% (4 teachers) neglected motivation. The percentages in Bar Chart 1 highlight key instructional challenges. For instance, 25% (4 teachers) did not group students, affecting collaboration, while 30% (5 teachers) failed to check comprehension. Additionally, 10% (2 teachers) overused L1, potentially limiting English exposure. Lower percentages, such as attention acquisition (8.6%) and time-consuming instruction (12%), indicate these issues were less prevalent.

## Discussion

According to the findings, the teachers used some techniques to make their instructions clear to students. Among the techniques, setting time limits, repetition, affirmative instructions, and coherent instructions were the most common ones. According to Sowell (2017), to instruct students effectively, EFL teachers must adopt strategies such as repetition, demonstration, time limits, and students' native language. The teachers used mother tongue and yes/no questions to gauge the effectiveness of instructional strategies. However, instructors should also think about those students who are reluctant to ask questions or respond to confirmation questions even if they may not have understood the teacher's instructions. In our observation, three problems were very serious: students were less motivated to engage in assignments, poor checking of understanding, and group work. Even if some students miss out on some instructions, group members can tell each other what to do. Even though students clearly understand their teachers' instructions, they may be unwilling to engage in individual or group work. This exactly matches Sherma's (2023) claim that teachers must consider certain motivational factors to engage students in writing activities.

In Nepal, EFL teachers struggle with instruction-giving because some teachers themselves are not good at English. Timsina (2021) stresses that no subject experts or school administrators supervise and guide teachers' delivery if needed. Bhandari and Bhandari (2024) believe that Nepal's classrooms are socially and culturally diverse. Students have different proficiency levels in English. Due to large classroom sizes, teachers are not able to give individual attention to them. Moreover, low-resourced classrooms are a big hindrance to effective instruction-giving. More importantly, most teachers are not well-trained to adopt and adapt their approaches to improving their instruction-giving in EFL contexts.

Some teachers were found using their mother tongue to ensure that their students understood the given instructions. Even if teachers are often discouraged from using their native language in ESL and EFL settings in most places, Sowell (2017) has stressed the need to use a native language, and Scrivener (2005) has emphasized simple and concise language. Simple and

concise language can be a precursor to the use of students' mother tongue when giving instructions in class. Overall, my research findings match Sowell's (2017) emphasis on strategies such as repetition, time check, and positive statements. Nonetheless, Nepali teachers' overuse of L1 in EFL classes supports the traditional EFL agendas. Similarly, my findings resonate with Sherma's (2023) assertion that a lack of motivation threatens teachers' clear classroom commands. Even if previous scholarship has adequately covered class instructional strategies, my studies highlight classroom challenges faced by Nepali teachers, indicating a strong need for more structured comprehension tests and motivational formulas.

## Conclusion

### *Summary*

The findings of this study highlight several key aspects of instruction-giving practices in EFL classrooms at a Nepali school. Teachers demonstrate an awareness of the significance of delivering clear instructions and effectively employ strategies such as gaining students' attention, using demonstrations, checking comprehension, and incorporating visual aids. Many teachers strive to deliver concise, straightforward instructions and often use imperative sentences to enhance clarity. However, some challenges persist, particularly regarding the inappropriate use of the mother tongue.

### *Implications*

As Ly (2024) emphasizes English teachers' roles within the classroom to accelerate learning growth, teachers must devise a wide range of tactics, including giving clear and focused instruction. In ESL/EFL contexts, teachers should use both the target language (English) and the native language (Nepali) appropriately for clear instruction. Just asking confirmation questions may not apply to introverted students, so teachers should walk around to ensure students are on track. Moreover, teachers should write instructions in detail with examples aided by visual and audio materials. Teachers should integrate reward-based motivation strategies to enhance student engagement. Teachers should encourage students to put one of their hands up if they have some confusion. Similarly, teachers should ask students to repeat key instructions or vocabulary words to confirm their comprehension. Also, teachers should encourage students to work in pairs and explain concepts to each other, allowing them to check each other's understanding.

### *Limitations of the study*

This study has limitations that may impact the broader applicability of its findings. The data were collected within a specific educational context, making the results primarily relevant to that setting and not necessarily reflective of Nepal's wider EFL teaching community. Additionally, the research relied solely on observation, incorporating interviews could have provided deeper insights into teachers' perspectives on instruction-giving. Future research on this topic could explore the impact of using the mother tongue in instruction delivery or examine methods for capturing students' attention more effectively. Comparative studies could also be conducted to analyze the effectiveness of oral versus written instructions or the role of body language and visual aids in enhancing classroom management.

## Abbreviations

EFL = English as a Foreign Language

ESL = English as a Second Language

L1 = First language / mother tongue

EMI = English Medium Instruction

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## Conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest.

## Data availability statement

The data supporting the outcome of this research work has been reported in this manuscript.

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## Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Learning Outcomes from Students' Perspectives towards Research Writing Course: A Case Study

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** Outcome-based education, outcome-based learning activities, English Language, Vietnam

For the past twenty years, higher education in Vietnam has moved from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach, using Outcome-Based Education (OBE). Whereas OBE has been implemented for a long time, the amount of research investigating students' perceptions of its effectiveness is limited. This study aims to solve this gap by examining English Language graduate students' perceptions of outcome-based learning activities and the expected learning outcomes of the course Research Writing course at Van Lang University. A mixed-methods approach was used, including questionnaires and interviews, to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The findings point out that students hold a positive attitude towards the expected learning outcomes and learning activities organized by their lecturer, highlighting the benefits of an OBE course. Results from the study would be beneficial to the development of course outlines, training programs, and the implementation of OBE at Van Lang University.

### Introduction

#### *Background of the Study*

In response to international integration, over the last twenty years, Vietnam has ventured into comprehensive educational reforms to transform the nature of education from all levels and develop higher education of excellent quality that can promote the development of a country in terms of economy and society (Harman et al., 2010). In this reform, focusing on learning outcomes is the pervasive feature (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2019). For most parts, education is always about outcomes; in other words, it seems that there are several significant elements in the current educational reconstruction basically summarized as Outcomes Based Education (OBE) (Andrich, 2002). Laws, decisions, and circulars enacted by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET), such as “Law on Higher Education” (MOET, 2012),



"Circular 07" (MOET, 2015), and "Circular 17" (MOET, 2021) have heightened the expectations towards about OBE for higher education institutions.

The central principle of OBE is "Success for all learners and teachers" (Spady, 1995, p.9). Firstly, education should guarantee each learner obtains the necessary knowledge and abilities to fulfill the expected learning outcomes when completing the course. Secondly, learning outcomes should be clearly identified and maximize the potential of every learner (Thuy, 2022). In the sense of ensuring that every student can achieve the expected learning outcomes, this learner-centered approach centers around the success of every student (Thuy, 2022). The implementation of OBE has shifted the conventional teaching method of Vietnamese teachers from a teacher-centered to a student-centered one (Hang & Van, 2020).

### *Statement of the Problems*

According to Nusche (2008), present quality assessments of educational programs tend to ignore information about learning outcomes. Alternatively, they only consider factors such as activities, inputs, and research outputs, namely materials used, classes taught, and research papers published. These kinds of performance indicators may fail to provide accurate measurements of the extent to which universities or colleges really improve the knowledge and skills of their learners.

In the context of comprehensive reform in education, with a concentration on the effectiveness of student learning, it is critical to understand students' standpoint on each course they have taken at a certain Vietnamese university (Yao & Collins, 2019). Aziz et al. (2012) stated that the most realistic way in today's education evaluation is to focalize students' viewpoints on their experience with academic programs. This could be attributed to student feedback being indispensable for designing and developing any learning program. By collecting and analyzing their feedback, educators can know how the expected learning outcomes have translated into reality. Notwithstanding the importance of feedback from students, relatively few research papers from the perspective of students have examined whether the expected learning outcomes have been achieved or where students stand on the expected learning outcomes of a specific course (Thuy, 2022).

### *The Purpose of the Study*

It is nearly impossible to assess the effectiveness of expected learning outcomes without knowing what students think about the learning outcomes set by their lectures and the extent to which they have achieved. In the absence of this information, this paper aims to evaluate the effectiveness of learning outcomes by exploring English Language graduate students' perspectives towards the learning activities and the expected learning outcomes of the course Research Writing at Van Lang University (Ho Chi Minh City).

## Literature review

### *Learning Outcomes*

Adam (2006, p.2) stated that “learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate at the end of a period of learning”. It means learning outcomes are concise descriptions of the knowledge and skills that the learner will learn, possess, and demonstrate by the end of a learning period. Learning outcomes illustrate the learning results pertaining to a combination of knowledge, abilities, capacities, and responsibilities that a learner will acquire from engaging in various learning activities at an educational institution (Coates et al., 2018).

Learning outcomes are typical examples of showing, expressing, and reflecting on the curriculum in terms of modules, lessons, and qualifications (Keengwe, 2022). The use of learning outcomes is closely related to the shift from teaching to learning, which is known as the learner-centered paradigm of education.

There is a wide range of definitions for the term ‘learning outcomes,’ but they all have four features in common (Adam, 2004). First, learning outcomes represent a universal attempt to be more precise by intensifying achievements. Second, Bloom's action verbs are employed to write learning outcomes. Third, learning outcomes emphasize the relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment. Finally, several learning outcomes may express a specific competence.

### *Outcome-based Education*

Spady (1995) intensively studied the OBE approach. In her book, she states that OBE centers around the education system, ensuring that learners achieve substantial success in their later careers and future lives. OBE is a part of education transformation, changing from a teacher-centered approach to a learner-centered one. With the nature of OBE, what students have learned and whether they are successful is of great importance. In the same vein, Donnelly (2007) defines OBE as an educational process in which students’ specific learning outcome is recognized. One of the distinguishing characteristics of OBE is that learning outcomes deeply influence the entire teaching activities and the assessment of students’ learning (Tucker, 2004).

Despite different definitions of OBE, all of them bear some resemblance (Harden, 1999). First, teachers are required to form a clear expectation of the knowledge and capacities that students should achieve when they complete a course, and then make an attempt to plan the proper content and learning activities to guarantee that expected goals can be achieved (Driscoll, 2007). Second, coursebooks or teacher experiences are no longer motivators in the teaching and learning process. The student's outcome is the driving force, opposite to conventional input-oriented education (Kaliannan & Chandran, 2012). To sum up, OBE is viewed as an innovative education model for education transformation.

### *Previous Research*

The research was done by Aziz et al. (2012a) on the topic of the effectiveness of learning outcomes from undergraduates’ standpoints. Questionnaires were distributed to 185 college students to collect data. All of the participants majored in engineering at the Universiti

Teknologi Malaysia. The percentage of students who acknowledged the importance and benefits of learning outcomes was more than 60%. The rest were on the opposite side of the fence; they neither got the meaning of learning outcomes nor thought that learning outcomes were crucial.

Lixun (2013) evaluated the effectiveness of outcome-based learning from the viewpoints of college students and lectures. Sixteen lecturers and about six hundred students from the English Department at the Hong Kong Institute of Education participated in the study. Questionnaire surveys and interviews were used to collect data. The findings revealed that both students and educators had a positive attitude toward this student-centered strategy. Students agreed that this instructional approach allowed them to have clearer purposes for studying, doing exercises, and revising. Moreover, they had a deeper understanding of what the lectures expected them to achieve and what they were required to do to fulfill these expectations.

In his research, Gong Jianmin (2016) examined the competence of university graduates. He concluded that introducing a new instructional approach, OBE, is an unavoidable alternative to enhancing the quality of students who will take part in the labor market. However, when applying this new educational model, there were some difficulties related to teachers' ability, curriculum design, quality assessment, etc.

Tan et al. (2018) systematically reviewed numerous studies published from 2006 to 2016 on eight online sources to determine OBE's effectiveness in nursing classes. Researchers found that the OBE strategies enhanced competency in the process of acquiring knowledge, which meant that students got higher final scores and cognitive skills. While demonstrating clinical skills, nursing students had a higher level of clinical skills, clinical nursing competencies, and behavioral skills. Besides, most students were satisfied with outcome-based learning activities.

Pirzada and Gull (2019) examined the perceptions of one hundred lectures of various universities in Pakistan towards outcome-based education and its effect on teaching performance. A questionnaire was used as the major instrument for collecting and analyzing data. Outcome-based education enhances lectures' teaching quality and benefits students in some aspects. It also supports college students in building and improving their portfolios. These are concrete proof of learning gained to develop academic performance and a professional career in the future.

The article written by Li and Jiang (2020) illustrated the benefits of OBE to high school students. They used three research instruments for this research: questionnaires, interviews, pre-tests, and post-tests. The findings show that OBE helped students boost their writing skills. To be more specific, students could expand their lexical resources and structures, improve their word choice, and apply newly learned language knowledge to their essays. Moreover, this new learning paradigm encouraged students' learning motivation and minimized their bad feelings, such as uselessness, nervousness, and passiveness.

In the same vein, Zhao (2020) studies the advantages of the new English teaching model based on OBE at Bohai University, China. The researcher found that this modern educational model allows students to develop multiple skills, which are one of the most crucial features of an employee in a very competitive working environment. Additionally, OBE can meet the

requirements of the new English curriculum, developing the ability to create and apply among students.

One year later, Yasmin and Yasmeeen (2021) examined OBE's effectiveness in learning English for non-English major college students. A group of 29 second-year students specializing in Chemical Engineering participated in the experiment. Pre- and post-tests on two productive skills (writing and speaking) and the results of the midterm and final exams were used to collect data. The findings showed that after applying the OBE method, the scores and performance of students significantly increased. OBE did promote the process of obtaining learning objectives. However, there were some concerns. Some students did not have a strong learning motivation and failed to adapt to this new instructional method. They remained passive because the traditional teaching methods had forced them to do so for a long time.

Thuy (2022) conducted a study on four hundred students to examine their perspectives on outcome-based learning activities. All of them came from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City. A questionnaire with nineteen items was employed to gather information. In general, students were positive about outcome-oriented teaching activities. They enjoyed activities that allowed them to improve their communication abilities and critical thinking. They also highly evaluated the expected learning outcomes as sufficiently informed, making them more independent in their learning process.

In the same year, Cruz (2022) wrote an article on students' attitudes toward OBE in a state university. The total participants were 100, including 45 college students, 55 graduate students, and 20 postgraduate students. They were asked to rank 31 statements on a four-point Likert scale. Results demonstrate that most respondents held a positive attitude toward OBE. Specifically, students felt ready to shift to a new education approach. They firmly believed that OBE would develop the quality of students' performance and enable them to equip the necessary skills for their future careers.

Whereas previous research has examined the importance and methods of evaluating learning outcomes in universities, it is equally essential to explore the particular difficulties students face in achieving these outcomes, especially in research writing. For example, a study carried out on postgraduate students in the University of Mekong Delta revealed that paraphrasing, plagiarism, referencing, citation, coherence, and cohesion are the most common writing problems (Ho, 2024).

However, these challenges are part of a larger obstacle that Vietnamese EFL learners face in learning English. Time constraints, financial burden, and limited English proficiency in four skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - prevent them from being the learning outcomes effectively (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024).

### *Research Gaps*

Myriad research papers are conducted to investigate students' perceptions of OBE or outcome-based learning activities. However, most articles are put in the context of European countries, China, Japan, and the Philippines. Although some articles were written to propose a theoretical framework for assessing and evaluating learning outcomes at national and institutional levels, little has been known about how Vietnamese students, especially college students, think about

OBE in general and outcome-based learning activities conducted in classrooms.

### *Research Questions*

To address the above problems, this paper has two research questions:

Research question 1: Which course learning outcomes have been achieved by students?

Research question 2: Which outcome-based learning activities have helped them achieve these course learning outcomes?

## **Methods**

### *Research Context and Sample*

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Van Lang University, Ho Chi Minh City. In 1995, VLU, one of the first private universities in Vietnam, was founded. The university has 66 college majors and 14 graduate majors. Concerning master's programs, the English language is a new one. VLU has just recruited for English Language graduate students since 2021.

The researchers invited 10 participants to take part in the online survey. All of them are students in the second master's program in English Language at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU in the academic year 2022–2024. To be more specific, there were 8 female and 2 male participants. They completed the course 'Research Writing'. This course lasted six weeks. Students were required to attend the class every Saturday and Sunday from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. During the lessons, students participated in different outcome-based learning activities, namely discussion, presentation, collaborative writing, etc. 10 participants were asked to complete the online surveys and join in the online interviews.

### *Design of the Study*

This is a mixed methods study. Online surveys and semi-structured studies were utilized to find out which course learning outcomes have been achieved by students and which outcome-based learning activities have helped them to do so.

### *Quantitative Research*

When it comes to the quantitative method, the researchers made use of Google Forms to create 5-point Likert scale online questionnaires, containing 5 response options: Strongly Disagree (SD); Disagree (D); Neutral (N); Agree (A); Strongly Agree (SA). The study aimed to conduct surveys with 10 graduate students majoring in English Language at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU. It took about three minutes for the students to complete the survey.

### *Qualitative Research*

After filling out the survey, each student was invited to an online interview via Zalo to discuss their perceptions of the course learning outcomes. The researchers chose online interviews instead of face-to-face interviews due to their convenience and flexibility.

## *Data collection & analysis*

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire is based on the learning outcomes of the Research Writing course. It has two separate parts. The initial part deals with basic information that is directly connected to the issue being researched, consisting of 22 structured questions. This part was divided into three sub-items revolving around students' evaluation of three aspects of the expected learning outcomes: Knowledge (questions 1-5), Abilities (questions 6-14), and Capabilities and Responsibilities (questions 15-21). These twenty-one questions were developed using the five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Regarding question 22, students were asked to tick which outcome-based learning activities helped them achieve the course learning outcomes. The second part emphasized classification and identification information. Such information as majors, current jobs, the amount of time they have spent learning English, ages, and names were collected in this part. The students were asked to complete it in three or up to five minutes. Microsoft Excel was used to analyze the data collected.

Patten and Group (2020) stated that questionnaire surveys as a quantitative method have the advantage of saving effort and time due to their ability to automatically collect data. With technological advancements, surveys can now be conducted online, allowing researchers to gather data simultaneously.

### *Interview*

10 students were interviewed via Zalo, a common app for sending messages and making video calls in Vietnam. The interview was recorded and lasted about twenty minutes. During the interviews, the researchers carefully noted down what the participants said. Then, their answers were shown with detailed explanations. These are the interview questions:

- 1) Do you think that these expected learning outcomes are reasonable for the length of the course? Why?
- 2) Do you think that these expected learning outcomes are reasonable to your level? Why?
- 3) Which outcome-based learning activities that you find most helpful and meaningful? Why?

## **Results**

*Research question 1: Which course learning outcomes have been achieved by students?*

### *Quantitative Analysis (Research Question 1)*

Table 1

Knowledge gained from the course

Items	Questionnaire	1	2	3	4	5
		SD	D	N	A	SA
	<b>I. KNOWLEDGE</b> After taking this course, you gain a broad knowledge of...					
1	Writing argumentative essays, opinion essays, discussion essays, etc.			3	5	2
2	Advanced academic writing styles		1	2	6	1
3	Writing in-text citations and references			3	5	2
4	Avoiding plagiarism		1	2	3	4
5	Writing a research paper		2	2	4	2

It is apparent from this table that students gained a decent amount of knowledge. 10 students in items 1 and 3 agreed that they had a general knowledge of types of essays and citing and referencing. This could be attributed to the fact that they had learned this knowledge during college time, and the lecturer of this course reinforced the knowledge in the first and second sessions of the subject. Item 2-4-5 shows that most students acquired a common knowledge about styles in advanced academic writing, preventing plagiarism, and writing a research paper. However, a few students did not think so.

Table 2

Abilities gained from the course

Items	Questionnaire	1	2	3	4	5
		SD	D	N	A	SA
	<b>II. ABILITIES</b> After learning this course, you are able to...					
6	Write a logical and coherent argumentative paper or a research paper in academic writing styles		2	2	5	1
7	Write in-text citations and references			5	2	3
8	Write a summary		2	3	3	2
9	Write an analysis		2	1	5	2
10	Avoid plagiarism		1	2	4	3
11	Analyze a research paper		2	2	3	3
12	Evaluate a research paper	1	1	2	4	2
13	Write a research critique	1	1	6	1	1
14	Evaluate peer essays		1	1	5	3

What is interesting in this data is that, as can be seen in items 9-10-14, students' top three strongest abilities are evaluating peer essays, writing an analysis, and writing a summary. Next came item 6-11-12. Six students agreed that they had the ability to write logical and coherent essays in an academic way and analyze and evaluate a research paper. The rest remained neutral or did not agree. Items 7 and 8 divided opinions. Half of the students agreed that they could write in-text citations and references and write a summary, while others did not regard themselves as having these abilities. Last but not least, six students chose the 'neutral' option for item 13. Only 2 students thought that they could criticize a research paper.

Table 3

Capacities and responsibilities gained from the course

Items	Questionnaire	1	2	3	4	5
		SD	D	N	A	SA
	<b>III. CAPACITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES</b> <b>After learning this course, you are capable of...</b>					
15	Working individually to conduct your writing projects/research papers	1	2	1	3	3
16	Working in groups		1	2	2	5
17	Creating new research ideas	1	1	4	2	2
18	Speaking up for your own perspective after comprehending the knowledge related to a particular research topic	1	1	3	3	2
19	Reading academic papers at a fairly fast speed and a decent quantity to ensure sufficient knowledge	2		5	1	2
20	Developing a sense of responsibility to improve your writing quality by yourself	2	1	1	5	1
21	Collaborating with your peers to help each other improve writing quality.	2		1	5	2

The table shows that students' highest capacity was group work (item 16), which might directly result from collaborative writing (item 21). Item 15-20 demonstrated that six students could work individually to carry out their own research papers and thought they were responsible for enhancing their writing quality by themselves. In item 18, 5 participants believed that they were capable of speaking up for their own viewpoints after acquiring the knowledge of a certain research topic. Item 17 revealed that four students were confident in their capacity to generate new research ideas. In item 19, only three students confirmed that they were capable of reading academic papers at a fairly fast speech and a reasonable quantity to gain enough knowledge.



### *Qualitative Analysis (Research Question 1)*

#### **Interview question 1: Do you think that these expected learning outcomes are reasonable for the length of the course? Why?**

When asked about this question, most students answered that it would be better to extend the course length to make the expected learning outcomes more reasonable. The following excerpts from their responses showed their opinions.

The expected learning outcomes related to knowledge can be achieved in six weeks. However, the ability to write logical and coherent essays needs more time to develop. Of all the 4 skills, writing is the most difficult one. I think I do not have enough vocabulary and structure to convey my ideas in an academic way. I just write what I think in an informal style. (Student 7-2-5-6)

The lecturer taught me all of the knowledge I need to write a research paper. However, knowledge is just what lies in my mind. When it comes to abilities and capacities, I do not think I can apply this knowledge successfully. I am not sure how to make my essay logical and coherent. Although I can follow the steps to criticize a research paper, I am always being subjective. It is not easy to find research gaps and then suggest solutions. (Student 3-4-10)

Six weeks is enough for me to remember and understand the knowledge that I have been taught. I also have the ability to work in a group and correct my friends' essays. However, I cannot say that I can write a summary or an analysis. Because the course duration is quite short, I do not have enough time and chances to practice summarizing and analyzing. (Student 1-8-9)

#### **Interview question 2: Do you think these expected learning outcomes are reasonable for your English level? Why?**

On one hand, some students said that their English level is adequate for the expected learning outcomes.

I got an IELTS 7.5 overall. My reading and writing skills are at the C2 level, and my writing skill is at the B2 levels. So, I do not find it difficult to achieve these learning outcomes. (Student 4)

Although I have not taken any English proficiency test, my English level is estimated at the B2 level. As long as I try my best and follow my lecturer's instructions, I think I can complete 80% of the expected learning outcomes. (Student 2-5)

I have to read materials written in English eight hours a day. In other words, I live with English. So, I think these learning outcomes are attainable with my English competency. (Student 6)

Conversely, some students confessed that they do not have the English level required for the learning outcomes.

My English level is at B1 level. It is just enough for me to write a simple essay. I do not have a wide range of academic vocabulary and grammatical structures to write. (Student

7).

My English proficiency is equal to that of IELTS 5.0 overall. I do not have any obstacles to gaining knowledge from this course because the lecturer uses simple words. But I struggle to write even a short paragraph. How can I write a critique or an analysis when my vocabulary is not enough? (Student 1-8)

My reading speed is extremely low. When I read academic papers, even though I can find the meaning of any new words and try to understand every single word, I cannot understand the whole sentence because it is written in a complex way. This is the reason why I cannot read research papers to get information or write a summary. (Student 9)

I can't understand everything written in the coursebook and slides. This is because my English is not good enough. I find it hard for me even to read the coursebook. (Student 3-10)

*Research question 2: Which outcome-based learning activities have helped them achieve these course learning outcomes?*

*Quantitative Analysis (Research Question 2)*

**Table 4.**

Outcome-based learning activities help students achieve course-learning outcomes

Items	Questionnaire	Number of students
22	<b>Which outcome-based learning activities help you achieve these expected learning outcomes?</b>	
	Discussion	6
	Interview your friends to get more ideas for your writing	4
	Do weekly assignments via Google Docs: group writing	10
	Give feedback for your friends' writing	8
	Ask your lecturer any questions related to the lesson	8
	Group presentation	4
	Search for and read other research papers by yourself	6
	Listen to lectures	6
	Others	0

According to Table 4, doing weekly assignments, giving feedback, and asking the lecturer are the top three activities that helped students achieve the above-expected learning outcomes. What lies at the root of this result is the rating rubrics for the course. Assignment and

participation account for 20% and 10%, respectively. In terms of assignments, students were required to write an essay related to the content of the lesson on a weekly basis. After receiving their peer feedback, they had a chance to better their essay and then submit the revised essay. Moreover, group assignments reduce the homework burden. Students may feel more confident and relaxed to complete weekly assignments. These are the reasons why writing weekly assignments is ranked first among learning activities. With reference to participation, students were encouraged to give feedback and ask any questions related to the course. The lecturer then gave his students bonuses based on the number of comments and questions at the end of each learning period. This could motivate students to participate in the lesson. The figure for discussion. Listening to lectures and searching for and reading other research papers by yourself was equal, which was six. Four students chose group presentations and interviewed friends.

### *Qualitative Analysis (Research Question 2)*

#### **Interview question 3: Which outcome-based learning activities that you find most helpful and meaningful? Why?**

*I think doing weekly assignments is the most helpful outcome-based learning activity. As this course is 'Research Writing,' writing activity must be the top helpful activity. Only by writing more and more can you improve your writing quality. (Student 1-5)*

*I think peer feedback is the most meaningful outcome-based learning activity. When you can correct your friends' errors in word choice or grammatical structures, you can improve these two language areas a lot. To put it another way, you learn from your friends' mistakes. Besides, I also learned many good ideas and phrases from my friends' essays. (Student 2-10)*

*In my opinion, asking questions is the activity that I enjoyed most. There is so much information on the Internet. I cannot find the precise answer to my questions by myself. Even some information that Google does not have. The best solution for this problem is to ask your lecturer - who is an expert in research writing. (Student 3)*

*From my perspective, finding and reading more research papers is the most meaningful outcome-based learning activity. I do not like working in groups. I learn best when I do everything by myself. By reading alone, I can organize ideas clearly and deeply understand the problems. (Student 4-9)*

*I think listening to lectures is the most helpful outcome-based learning activity. How can you acquire new knowledge without listening to your lecturer? This is the best, safest, easiest, and quickest way to learn new things. (Student 8)*

*It is definitely a discussion. I learn best when I actively find the information and exchange this information with others. I think I can learn something new from my classmates' viewpoints. (Student 7)*

## Discussion

### *Research question 1: Which course learning outcomes have been achieved by students?*

The results from our research show that students can achieve many expected learning outcomes of the Research Writing course. All of the outcome-based learning activities organized by the lecturer assisted students in achieving these outcomes. According to the data, it is suggested that students need more time to boost their writing skills in general. In terms of writing a research critique, creating new research ideas, and reading speed, students need more instructions and time to develop. The findings from the survey were supported by the conclusion of the research by Lixun (2013), Pirzada and Gull (2019), and Li and Jiang (2020) which suggested that when students know exactly what they need to learn and improve, they can acquire knowledge and practice skills that are necessary for the course they are learning. These findings confirmed the findings of the research paper carried out by Tan et al. (2018), who affirmed that OBE approaches did improve proficiency in learning, resulting in higher overall grades and better cognitive abilities for students. In terms of professional skills, their skills increased significantly. All of the students enjoyed every learning activity extremely much.

### *Research question 2: Which outcome-based learning activities have helped them achieve these course learning outcomes?*

Findings from item 22 and the interviews showed that each outcome-based learning activity helped students obtain these course learning outcomes. These activities involved them working in groups effectively to find the answer to a certain problem or write an essay. This result was consistent with those of the study conducted by Thuy (2022). In her research, students were in favor of all outcome-based learning activities that their lecturers set. The difference between the two research is that in Thuy's one, most students highly recommend activities that could boost their critical thinking and communication skills.

## Conclusion

A study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of learning outcomes from students' perspectives towards the research writing course. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were applied, with data collected through an online survey and a semi-structured interview. The study results demonstrated that students achieved the most expected learning outcomes. Specifically, students all agreed that they could absorb the required knowledge of this course. Their strongest abilities are evaluating peer essays, writing an analysis, and avoiding plagiarism. Students favored outcome-based learning activities designed by the lecturer. However, more support and time are needed for students to create new research ideas and improve writing quality.

### *Limitation*

This study has a number of limitations. Firstly, the sample size is limited to only ten graduate students from the Faculty of Foreign Language at VLU, which may not be enough for broader representation. Increasing the number of samples could provide more generalizable results.

Secondly, the research methods are not utterly objective, as the results depend heavily on the viewpoints of the students. There might be a potential for information bias, where students may express their own feelings rather than genuine opinions. Thirdly, prior exposure to English and this subject and personal experiences may have an impact on their responses, which influences the consistency of the study. Future research could solve these limitations by collecting larger samples and extending the time of the study to get more thorough results.

#### *Implication for Instruction*

This study suggests courses of action for EFL lecturers at VLU. The first suggestion is that lecturers should design more learning activities for students to develop the skill of reading a vast array of research papers effectively and quickly so that learners will have sufficient knowledge to write commentaries and critiques for a research paper. The second piece of advice is that lecturers should give detailed feedback for each student's work in terms of vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and coherence so that every student knows exactly what their problem is and finds a proper way to solve it. The other suggestion is that lecturers should provide long-term support to help students find new ideas for a certain research topic.

#### *Recommendation for Further Research*

It is recommended that future research should have a larger number of participants. Researchers could investigate students' learning motivation to discover their learning needs because some articles show that why a student pursues a master's degree can affect their achievement of expected learning outcomes. Questions related to their difficulties in learning this subject and English should be included, as this information plays an important role in building effective learning outcomes for the next course.

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## EFL Learners' Perceptions of Translanguaging in English classes at an HCM English Centre

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

translanguaging, English as a Foreign language (EFL), translanguaging practices

This study examines 28 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' perception of the use of translanguaging in English classes at a language center in Ho Chi Minh City (HCM). The study aims to explore how EFL learners perceive its impacts on their language learning and classroom experiences. The data were collected through surveys and interviews regarding the participants' attitudes toward using their mother tongue in English classes. The results indicate that participants consider translanguaging a useful medium, which increases comprehension, promotes communication opportunities, and creates a supportive learning atmosphere, but could also lead to confusion or dependence on the L1. The findings also suggest that translanguaging may be more appropriate for lower-proficiency classes. This study contributes to the expanding body of literature about translanguaging and offers useful information for teachers interested in successfully applying multilingual strategies in Vietnamese EFL classrooms.

### Introduction

#### *Background to the study*

With the prevalence of multicultural societies, the need to acquire a second or third language is becoming more pronounced. Following that movement, translanguaging and bilingual methods have seen increasing interest due to their potential to solve some of these issues (Prilutskaya, 2021). Cook (2022) asserts that translanguaging constitutes multi-competence. It offers a complete integrated linguistic repertoire of many languages within a student's cognition, offering further benefits in learning contexts.

Translanguaging in education promotes inclusivity and equitable communication by recognizing and valuing students' whole linguistic repertoire (Garcia & Wei, 2014). This first enables learners to make sense of and relate to complex content and texts Bensalem & Thompson, 2021. A different linguistic repertoire helps students find the meaning in real content

instead of just the superficial meaning. For example, students' language backgrounds are productive tools for first-year English major students while developing speaking skills through digital storytelling (Du et al., 2024). Phan et al. (2024) added that such activity also fosters the creativity of Vietnamese EFL students and makes them exploit linguistic resources constructively, which is on track with translanguaging practices. These studies demonstrate the benefits of translanguaging in digital storytelling, allowing students to use their entire linguistic repertoire for effective communication and creativity. This mixed use of the mother tongue and English among Vietnamese EFL learners leads to culturally relevant stories in English, fostering the requisite confidence in one's ability to acquire a foreign language. Second, a language and culture exchange enhances learners' cognitive development and problem-solving abilities since it requires them to actively switch between different languages and cultures in order to overcome language barriers (Purkarthofer & Mossakowski, 2011). For instance, bilinguals' use of translanguaging presents two grammatical structures at once which promotes cognitive flexibility and linguistic creativity among learners (MacSwan, 2022). Third, this strategy also encourages students' motivation and active participation in the tasks given inside the classroom. Unlike the English-only approach, translanguaging strategies in SLA offer advantages that cause English learners in bilingual contexts to experience greater satisfaction with their teaching method (Slavin & Cheung, 2005). This technique enables students to be creative as they can use and enjoy their mother tongue at school while still getting into the target language (Menken & Sanchez, 2019). It creates conditions under which students can become bilingual or multilingual by allowing much more contact with other languages and cultures than ordinary classrooms permit. Moreover, translanguaging is compatible with bilingual grammar frameworks because it allows for simultaneous access to two grammatical systems while upholding cognitive flexibility along with linguistic creativity among learners (MacSwan, 2022).

However, there has been some controversy on this topic. While many suggest that translanguaging should be used strategically in foreign language classrooms (Canagarajah, 2013), (Garcia, 2009), (Creese & Blackledge, 2010), others claim that this system is still in its early phases of development and overlooks other elements, such as reading, writing, and grammar. Despite its potential benefits, translanguaging or multilingual education has been controversial. It can create confusion when the boundaries of languages become porous and students cannot understand each other's structures and lexicon (Schulze et al., 2024). Language policies are institutional constraints that also limit the application of the system (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). Teachers who lack proficiency in their students' native languages may fail to use those languages (Prilutskaya, 2021) effectively. In addition to these factors, participatory conditions may be unequal among students due to less exposure to the target language; all these factors add complications to its use (Turnbull, 2019; García & Wei, 2014).

Vietnamese foreign language classrooms have initially followed the monolingual teaching method. Nevertheless, as instructors have become aware of the advantages of translanguaging, they have begun using it in classrooms (Pham & Vu, 2023). The shift from monolingual classroom to multilingual classroom environments provides an interesting context for examining translanguaging practices. One of the critical purposes of applying translanguaging in Vietnamese EFL classrooms is that most Vietnamese students, especially university students,

come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Their distinct dialects and linguistic diversity aren't always appreciated in EFL classrooms as they could be a problem for them (Nguyen, 2018). However, these students may draw from their various linguistic resources to create meaningful utterances through translanguaging.

### *Purpose of the study*

In today's education system, many teachers have been experimenting with different approaches to find the most suitable method for their unique student population. This exploratory research aims to examine EFL learners' perceptions of the impacts of using translanguaging as a teaching method at an English language center. This study aims to understand university students' attitudes about translanguaging practices, recognize the effectiveness or demerits of translanguaging practices while teaching, and identify the difficulties that hinder the use of translanguaging practices.

## **Literature review**

### *Definition of translanguaging*

The origin of translanguaging dates back to Welsh bilingual education in the 1980s (Conteh, 2018). It was first recognized using its Welsh term '*Trawsieithu*,' which was later intentionally translated into English by Colin Baker for further research. Translanguaging is a language practice that emphasizes using more than one language in discourse by communicating with all your language resources. Multilingual speakers engage in this dynamic process, strategically utilizing many languages to navigate complex social and cognitive challenges. Factors to consider while translanguaging are language production, efficient communication, and the thought processes that underlie language use (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011).

### *Translanguaging versus code-switching*

The rationale for mentioning these two terms is that their differences are ambiguous for some, potentially causing confusion (Pham & Nguyen, 2024). There is a great deal of difference between the two notions regarding their theoretical and analytical foundations.

Code-switching involves changing two languages, whereas translanguaging focuses on creating a complete language repertoire. In other words, the term "code-switching" describes the process of moving from one language to another during a single communication event, and "translanguaging" centralizes the process of meaning and sense-making (Wei, 2017). Code-switching occurs in most cases to make communication spontaneous and smooth, which is why interlocutors sometimes do not recognize this phenomenon (Le, 2022). Unlike code-switching, translanguaging is much more an intentional practice of bilinguals to use units of multiple languages as parts of an integrated whole language system to communicate (Lewis et al., 2012). On the other hand, code-switching involves alternating between two languages for certain functions, such as addressing gaps in vocabulary, signaling cultural identity, or adapting to what a listener can understand. For example, a speaker that uses English for technical terminology but uses their native language for social phrases in a conversation. Unlike code-switching which treats two or more languages as separate entities, translanguaging proposes a fluid and purpose-

driven use of language, seeing the mix of all linguistic resources as integral for effective communication and learning (García & Leiva, 2014). Though code-switching was perceived as a lack of mastery, research acknowledges its pragmatic functions in real communication (Cahyani et al., 2018). Code-switching limits cognitive engagement to the switching point, preserves the value of all languages, and fosters creativity by encouraging the "ease" of expression through the capability of all language resources a speaker has.

### *Translanguaging strategies*

Both the learners and instructors can demonstrate translanguaging strategies. It helps students achieve a higher proficiency level in both languages and for teachers to facilitate student learning. For teachers, it is feasible to design a lesson plan that incorporates English as the medium of instruction and another language as the medium for discussion. Each language may be used in diverse contexts in the classroom, making it easier for students to learn them. There are 3 main purposes for translanguaging, namely cognitive (to explain complicated concepts), pedagogical (work as a teaching strategy, like to support students' learning and engagement), and affective (for emotional and social aspects use) (Forman, 2010). According to Rosemary Cromarty (2019), two types of translanguaging may emerge in the classroom. The first type appears only when learners don't understand. Then, they are permitted and encouraged to utilize their native language (Hornberger & Link, 2012). Unlike the first type, which might occur at any time, the second type is more planned. In this approach, translanguaging is considered an extension language, which has been incorporated into the curriculum to help with language development. Instructors will have to determine when native language interference is beneficial while planning their lessons, and that is probably decided by addressing the question, 'Will this content be inaccessible or misleading to any of my students due to their language proficiency?'

### *Previous research studies*

Translanguaging may significantly impact the future of education, so many studies aim to clarify the influence of this approach on academics. Research has shown that instructors' attitudes regarding translanguaging seem to be rather contradictory. According to Zein's (2018) research, many teachers preferred the monolingual approach and hesitated to use the native language with the concern that L1 interference might negatively impact the acquisition of the target language. Another study has even shown that teachers have feelings of "guilt" and fear of being evaluated while using translanguaging (Wang, 2019). On the other hand, many studies are skewed towards positivity as most of them have unfolded the benefits of this approach (Gunnarsson, 2019).

Vu and Pham's 2023 study is one of the latest to address the topic of translanguaging in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. This study examined the viewpoints of secondary teachers. Key findings include (1) teachers in public schools tend to use translanguaging more than private school teachers; (2) using translanguaging for emotional support was considered less important than its cognitive benefits. Overall, this study favors the implementation of translanguaging in Vietnamese EFL classrooms.

A study was conducted at a Vietnamese university concerning the teacher's perspectives on translanguaging employment in English-medium Instruction (EMI) (Nguyen et al., 2022). Teachers primarily use this strategy to facilitate material instruction, manage the classroom, and address emotional purposes. Additionally, the research indicates that providing instructions

only in English is inappropriate in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. In a similar setting to the EMI program, Phuong (2021) examines the students' perspectives and performances while using their linguistic repertoires in oral presentations. Data was gathered throughout a semester from university students who had studied English for a minimum of 8 years. Findings suggest that students' active use of languages plays a role in creating classroom-level policies, which may or may not align with the overarching policies.

Luong Thi Bich Hue (2019) also contributed to a study at a high school in the rural province of Ha Nam, investigating the impacts of translanguaging practices among high school students from grades 10 to 12. Her research shows that translanguaging seems more appropriate for students with limited English ability at the primary and intermediate levels. Furthermore, she stressed the need to avoid excessive use of translanguaging during English classroom activities.

Despite favorable responses and impacts, translanguaging cannot and should not be imposed as a language policy or a set of social practices (Fang et al., 2022). This is because we need to explore the social, psychological, and emotional aspects of how translanguaging might enhance learning further. In addition to being a theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical framework, translanguaging should be considered a political and decolonizing position (Li, 2021).

### *Research Gaps*

Despite the increasing interest in translanguaging in multilingual education, there is a lack of research on its impact in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. Most of the existing research on translanguaging was conducted where English is a dominant language or second language (García & Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2012). Studies on how translanguaging works within non-English-dominant contexts like Vietnam are underexploited. Research from other EFL contexts, such as China and Turkey, has indicated that translanguaging has the potential to unsettle the traditionally monolingual English-only policy. However, this practice remains understudied in Vietnamese classrooms, especially from the perspective of students, as most previous research focuses on teachers' views (Turnbull, 2017). Also, we are uncertain about whether teachers' and students' willingness to use L1 alongside L2 is influenced by cultural beliefs and institutional policies (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

### *Research Questions*

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of EFL students toward translanguaging practices in EFL classrooms?
2. What are the positive impacts of translanguaging practices in EFL classrooms?
3. What are the negative impacts of translanguaging practices in EFL classrooms?

## **Methods**

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The study was conducted at an English Centre, a prestigious language school in Vietnam that provides English education for a wide range of learners. The participants were 28 students (15-20 years old) from three classes at the center. They are IELTS learners who aim for an IELTS score of 6.0. They were selected through convenience sampling due to accessibility and alignment with the study's scope. The EFL program offered at this center is based on a designed curriculum focusing on the improvement of students' overall English and IELTS four skills:

listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Translanguaging is exploited to examine its effects on comprehension, proficiency, motivation, and specific linguistic problems faced by Vietnamese EFL learners when acquiring communicative competence.

### *Design of the Study*

This research will use a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative data were used to examine the attitudes of EFL learners toward translanguaging. The data is expected to include surveys from 28 students and interviews from 3 students. The sampling procedure would be convenient due to the time constraints of this study. All responses and personal information will remain private from the general public in order to encourage voluntary participation. The survey is divided into three main sections: personal information, a Likert-scale survey, and open-ended questions. The first part collects demographic data, which is subsequently encrypted to maintain participant anonymity. The second part comprises 15 Likert-scale questions that delve into participants' past experiences and perceptions of translanguaging practices. The third part includes 5 open-ended questions. Each interview is estimated to last 10 to 25 minutes, with the first 2 minutes identical to the survey.

### *Data collection & analysis*

SPSS software was used to analyze the quantitative data collected from Likert-scale questions in the Google Forms surveys. First, a "cleaning procedure" was done to ensure accuracy and consistency. Descriptive statistics mean, standard deviation, and frequencies were computed, which summarize participants' perceptions of translanguaging practices. Furthermore, trends or differences that may arise from demographic factors such as language proficiency levels or classroom experiences were examined. Findings are presented in tables and charts to effectively showcase salient patterns and insights.

A thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative data obtained from open-ended survey responses and transcripts of semi-structured interviews. The researcher transcribed the interview recordings and subsequently coded all qualitative responses to gain a thorough understanding of the data. This familiarization phase helps identify preliminary observations or patterns. Data were systematically coded by highlighting significant phrases, sentences, or ideas with relevant keywords or tags. These initial codes captured the essence of concepts such as "clarifying statement," "building confidence," and "creating uncertainty."

After the coding phase, the researcher identified higher-order themes by aggregating similar codes that embodied a pattern or a shared meaning. For instance, the codes "L1 use to ease tasks" and "peer explanations" fell under a broader theme titled "Cognitive Benefits of Translanguaging." The second-order themes were categorized to reveal some relationship or distinction among participant responses, for example, how high-proficiency and low-proficiency learners differ in their views.

In the final stage, results obtained and integrated were analyzed to obtain meaningful information. Themes were refined and compared across the dataset to ensure consistency and depth. Direct quotes or excerpts from open-ended responses and interviews supported each identified theme. Additionally, relationships between qualitative findings and quantitative survey results were drawn to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the data.

### *Validity and Reliability*

Several measures were taken to ensure the reliability and validity of this study. Surveys combined with semi-structured interviews enabled triangulation and cross-verification of data for an exhaustive understanding of learners' perceptions. A small sample of questions from the survey and interview was piloted with 5 learners to fine-tune vague items and enhance content validity.

For the quantitative data, Cronbach's alpha was calculated using SPSS, resulting in a reliability score of 0.81, which indicates strong internal consistency. Descriptive statistics were systematically applied to identify trends and patterns.

### *Ethical considerations*

Confidentiality of the participants was maintained during the data analysis. All questionnaire responses and interview transcripts were anonymized, and identifying information was removed and substituted with participant codes. The data were kept in a secure manner on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the researcher. Backup copies were also encrypted to prevent any unauthorized access. Moreover, all these measures were communicated to the participants beforehand so that they would feel safe while sharing their views.

Transparency was maintained through an open and detailed account of the research process, which included data collection, analysis, and coding procedures. All these measures guarantee that the study is replicable and ethically conducted and that its findings are valid and reliable, which contribute significantly to the comprehension of translanguaging within EFL classrooms.

## **Results/Findings**

### *Surveys*

**Table 1**

Learners' perception of the impact of translanguaging in English classes

<b>Questions</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Q1) I feel comfortable using my native language or other languages I know in the EFL classroom.	28	3.36	0.85
Q2) Translanguaging makes me feel more confident expressing my ideas in English.	28	3.11	0.86
Q3) My instructor encourages translanguaging in the classroom.	28	3.11	0.90
Q4) Translanguaging creates a more inclusive and welcoming classroom environment.	28	3.54	0.68
Q5) Translanguaging improves my overall English language proficiency.	28	3.82	0.80
Q6) Translanguaging disrupts the flow of the class lesson	28	2.90	0.85
Q7) Translanguaging cause confusion in class lesson	28	3.02	0.82
Q8) Translanguaging is disturbing your English acquisition by incorporating another language.	28	2.85	0.80
Q9) Translanguaging is time-consuming	28	2.88	0.83
Q10) Translanguaging is demotivating students to use English	28	2.70	0.75

The results from the table reveal that students' perceptions of translanguaging in EFL classrooms are not straightforward. Overall, the mean values for most of the positive questions do not reach a level of agreement (between 3.0 and 3.5), suggesting that participants recognize some potential affordances of translanguaging while not being fully supportive of its effects. For instance, Q5 has the highest mean value ( $M = 3.82$ ), which indicates that many students think they can benefit from using their L1 to learn English in this course. Q4 also obtains a relatively high mean ( $M = 3.54$ ), showing a high tendency towards favoring social outcomes.

However, there are concerns, especially with the possible negative implications of translanguaging. For instance, Q6 ('translanguaging disrupts the flow of the class lesson') has a mean of 2.90, indicating that students seem to be neutral but slightly agree that translanguaging can be disruptive. The same is true for Q7 ('translanguaging causes confusion in class lessons'), which is 3.02, as students were not sure if translanguaging confuses them.

The standard deviations, generally around 0.80, indicate moderate variability in responses, meaning that not only do some students strongly agree or disagree with these statements but also that the truth lies somewhere in between for many students. This variability speaks to the not-so-black-and-white nature of translanguaging in the classroom and how its implications might be more a matter of personal perspective, language proficiency level, and classroom context.

### *Interviews*

EFL learners' perceptions towards translanguaging in EFL classrooms are multifaceted and reveal a strategic approach to language use. Regarding the types of translanguaging that emerged in class, the majority were instigated by teachers (the 1st type according to Rosemary, 2019). They have reported that they mainly employ translanguaging freely and casually in group discussions and peer interactions (the 2nd type, according to Rosemary, 2019), as not all teachers enable the use of translanguaging in their EFL classrooms. Students often use their mother tongue with each other to translate task requirements or share ideas among group members. Some participants stated that translanguaging is only permitted when their teachers notice a challenging question or when pupils are unable to articulate their ideas.

The primary purpose of translanguaging is functionality, clarifying complex concepts, or adding clues to an implication. One student shared: "*when my teacher uses Vietnamese to explain grammar, he understood it much faster... The past perfect tense made sense only when the teacher compared it to our 'đã' structure.*" Another student shared, "*Idioms like 'as fit as a fiddle' are hard to understand, but when the teacher connects them to our idioms, like 'khỏe như vâm,' I remember them better.*"

According to the interviewed students, teachers may use translanguaging to teach various aspects of the English language. For vocabulary lessons, the teacher may use translanguaging to identify the synonyms or equivalent terms in Vietnamese. For example, when teaching the term "serendipity," a teacher may explain that it is akin to the Vietnamese idea of "duyên" (fate or chance encounter), but with a positive meaning of unexpected good fortune. Teachers may compare or contrast similar grammatical structures or pronunciation sounds to teach grammar



and pronunciation. One student shared, “*My teacher mentioned the structural similarities between "have/has with the past participle" and "đã với động từ" to explain the present perfect tense.*” Another student also stated that he had difficulties memorizing word stresses, but once his teacher contrasted Vietnamese and English last syllables, he grasped the lesson more. Not only does this help students to remember the lesson better, but it builds upon what they already know.

Data from the semi-structured interviews has demonstrated that students’ attitudes toward translanguaging may vary according to their level of English proficiency. A student with better English competence frequently prefers an all-English classroom learning environment, saying, “*I prefer speaking English the whole time. Translanguaging sometimes distracts me because my friends use too much Vietnamese during group work.*”. Furthermore, they exhibit no fear of committing English-speaking errors, acknowledging that such errors are commonplace in EFL schools and that they have improved their learning through their blunders. Three out of five participants noted that when they cannot articulate their ideas in English, they choose to remain mute instead of using the second form of translanguaging, which the students initiate. They also expressed concerns about their peers overusing translanguaging, potentially hindering their language development.

On the other hand, students with lower proficiency seemed to appreciate translanguaging more for connecting the dots in their understanding. One student said, “*Sometimes I can't find a word in English. Vietnamese helps me not feel lost or shy.*” There were hardly any drawbacks associated with translanguaging practices for students with lower English proficiency. They were more willing to draw on their native language when unable to locate a particular word or equivalent terms without much fuss. More importantly, they openly stated that translanguaging prepares them better for authentic interactions. This occurrence has made them much more versatile and flexible as communicators because of this occurrence. While participants have recognized that the primary role of translanguaging is cognitive and pedagogical, its affective functions are less pronounced.

The interviews revealed interesting perceptions regarding translanguaging as a peer collaboration facilitator in EFL contexts, which aligned with the conclusions made by Pham and Nguyen (2024). Three participants stated that translanguaging was more than an instructional tool; it was an essential resource for group tasks and discussions. For example, they often used their first language to negotiate meaning, pin down task procedures, and brainstorm ideas collectively before they had to present in English. This peer-mediated translanguaging often bridges understanding gaps among group members with different proficiency levels, facilitating cooperative learning. A student said, “*When working in groups, we use Vietnamese to organize our ideas first, then translate them into English. It saves time and makes our presentation better.*” Another stated, “*We explain tasks to each other in Vietnamese because not everyone can follow instructions in English.*” Students also pointed out that translanguaging enabled them to co-create knowledge by drawing on cultural references and linguistic metaphors peculiar to the Vietnamese, which made their discussions lively and further engaged them with the text.

However, the interviews also showed one probable challenge: weaker students relied heavily

on translanguaging during collaborative tasks, while their higher-proficiency peers sometimes found this practice unproductive or distracting. The resulting dichotomy calls for a balanced methodology while applying translanguaging strategies so that the collective advantages are maximized without alienating those advanced learners who might prefer communication in English over other languages.

## Discussion

The results and findings indicate that while most students have positive attitudes toward translanguaging in Vietnamese EFL, less competent students tend to be more receptive to this employment. These results align with Jiang's (2022) findings that show non-majored English students are more welcome to use translanguaging than English-majored students. Implementing translanguaging in EFL classrooms may create a less intimidating atmosphere for students, which could be the main reason why less competent learners embrace translanguaging (Krashen, 1982). Removing the policy of solely English, the EFL classroom will resemble any other Vietnamese classroom, which many students are more accustomed to. Conversely, more competent English learners may exhibit reservations towards translanguaging. They may perceive translanguaging as a time-consuming and unnecessary approach in classrooms. During the interviews, they stated that their primary goal in class is to attain fluency and accuracy and that translanguaging has disrupted some of their practice. Consequently, some of them view translanguaging as counterproductive to this objective. Generally, this study suggests a favorable attitude toward translanguaging but a preference for focusing on target language development in the classroom.

Students' attitudes toward translanguaging are different as it depends on many factors, including linguistic backgrounds, proficiency levels, and cultural perceptions. For instance, students with high proficiency often prefer to be immersed in the target language and consider translanguaging a hindrance to achieving fluency (Revera & Mazak, 2017). On the other hand, lower-proficiency students may find translanguaging useful for grasping ideas and building confidence as they can use their mother tongue to understand difficult concepts (Lucas et al., 2023). Besides that, cultural factors play an important role; students coming from monolingual backgrounds may reject translanguaging because they think it undermines language learning, whereas those from multilingual settings may view it as an accepted norm of communication (Leonet et al., 2024). Such varied views only reinforce the fact that teachers need to take into account different student profiles and cultural contexts when applying translanguage practices in class.

To effectively implement translanguaging in EFL classrooms, instructors should adopt a structured approach, balancing the use of students' native languages with the target language. Teachers can strategically incorporate translanguaging to clarify complex concepts, explain cultural nuances, or promote inclusivity during discussions (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). To enhance comprehension and engagement, lesson plans should integrate multilingual resources, such as bilingual glossaries or culturally relevant examples (MacSwan, 2022). It is also crucial to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their multilingual

teaching practices (Khote, 2023). Finally, regular feedback from students can help refine the application of translanguaging and address any challenges, ensuring that it complements language acquisition goals (Nguyen et al., 2022).

## Conclusion

This investigation seeks to clarify the role of translanguaging by looking into students' attitudes and experiences with it. The findings revealed that personal experiences, linguistic proficiency, and even cultural factors might influence how pupils perceive and use translanguaging. The study also found that cognitive and pedagogical aims are more prevalent in EFL classrooms. Translanguaging may facilitate the teacher's teaching and the student's learning process but also slow down the English acquisition process. In this particular research situation, the advantages of translanguaging exceeded the disadvantages. However, teachers must establish teaching strategies that capitalize on the benefits of translanguaging while limiting its drawbacks. A proposed strategy entails normalizing translanguaging in educational contexts while preserving a balance between the two languages. Finally, by acknowledging the benefits and difficulties of translanguaging, linguistics can provide the groundwork for refining educational tactics or sparking innovations that will change this approach from a mere distraction to a significant component of language performance.

Longitudinal studies are needed in the future to explore the impact of prolonged translanguaging on learners' English proficiency and confidence in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. In addition, the generalizability of findings would benefit from larger and more diverse sample sizes from multiple institutions. It is imperative to have professional development programs for teachers to equip them with skills for instilling translanguaging while maintaining an equilibrium between the English language and their mother tongues. Structured translanguaging strategies — such as bilingual glossaries - can be used to maximize benefits for more difficult concepts. Last but not least, future studies should seek to investigate the cultural and institutional determinants of the willingness of both teachers and students to use translanguaging practices.

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### **Biodata**

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## EFL In-service Teachers and Teachers' Perceptions of Challenges in Teaching Idioms to B1 Learners

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** teaching idioms, preliminary learners, in-service teachers, teachers' perceptions in teaching idioms

Teaching idioms in English language classrooms has been extensively investigated by researchers around the world. This study examines the difficulties that EFL in-service teachers and teachers face when teaching idioms to B1 learners and their perceptions of the cultural aspects involved. The findings indicate that teachers encounter challenges due to learners' difficulties with understanding the figurative meanings of idioms, limited availability of suitable textbooks, and a lack of opportunities for contextual learning. The findings also highlight the importance of culture in understanding idioms and suggest that integrating cultural insights can improve idiomatic proficiency and communication skills. The study emphasizes the necessity of implementing contextualized teaching strategies to address these challenges.

### Introduction

In the globalization epoch, English has been recognized as the most important means of communication. In an attempt to fulfill the needs of modern society, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training has promulgated a new scheme of English teaching for learners from grade 3 to grade 12. The shift from teacher-centered to learning-centered and learner-centered methodologies has caused remarkable challenges and opportunities for teachers and learners (MOET, 2018). According to the new scheme, learners of general institutions are expected to achieve English proficiency of level 3 in “The Vietnam Six-levels of Foreign Language Proficiency Framework” when they graduate high school (MOET, 2018). Therefore, teachers need to meet the new requirements and standards of Vietnamese learners' communicative competence.

Neuman and Dwyer (2009) defined vocabulary as “words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)”. Rizq (2015) asserted that lexical knowledge plays a pivotal role in L2 learners' communicative competence and second language acquisition. In other words, vocabulary has



been highly marked as a primary element in building learners' daily conversation as well as producing their natural sounds (Alqahtani, 2015).

As regards idioms, they are an integral part of language and culture, and their role in the contribution of learners' linguistic competence is just as crucial as vocabulary (Rizq, 2015). Idioms bring vivid and profound expressions to language through their colors and patches, creating images that convey meanings beyond the individual words that compose them (De Caro, 2009). All in all, idioms are considered a crucial key to successful communication among learners by helping them speak better and understand native speakers more easily (Suhodolli, 2019; Inuw & Sule, 2022).

In English-speaking countries, idioms are particularly rich and widely used (Fomenko et al., 2020). Native speakers frequently use idioms in all forms of communication, including daily conversations and written documents. However, when it comes to an L2 classroom context, idioms are considered difficult and hard to convey completely due to their characteristics (Liontas, 2017). Many teachers found teaching idioms especially challenging when they had to translate English idioms to their mother tongues. The teachers and learners mentioned idioms as a source of perplexity even though they are aware of the significance and frequency of idioms in the English language (Gathigia & Njoroge, 2016).

Idioms are said to be "hard nuts to crack " (Ke, 2019), yet they play a tremendous role in language use and communication. According to Cooper (1999), English learners may come across idiomatic expressions in all forms of discourse, from academic to real-life contexts such as books, newspapers, movies, television programs, or daily conversations. Furthermore, Nation and Meara (2020) affirmed the fact that formulaic language (including idioms) contributes to the proficiency and native-like accuracy of target learners. Consequently, mastering idioms apparently results in a thorough understanding of foreign languages, especially English.

Contrary to the new English teaching curriculum, teaching idioms in the Vietnamese classroom context is likely to receive less attention than it is supposed to (Vũ, 2009). Vũ claimed that the lack of idioms in textbook sources is a challenge for local practitioners in teaching such figurative components. He indicated that the current English textbooks only provide L2 learners with a few idiomatic expressions in the form of rote learning accompanied by several exercises. Although many studies have already been conducted on different fields of vocabulary acquisition and utilization, the areas of idiomatic research are quite open to expansion in linguistics. Needless to say, EFL teachers should not ignore any idiomatic provision to their learners in an L2 setting as they play an important role in facilitating learners with knowledgeable input.

Previous studies acknowledge the importance of idioms to language competence of target-language learners and suggest teacher approaches to effectively equip learners with comprehensible input (Chan, 2021; Fomenko et al., 2020; Li, 2010). This study concerns the perceptions of English in-service teachers at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, and Thuc Hanh English Center teachers towards the importance of idiomatic expressions at the Intermediate level (B1) and the contribution of cultural contexts in teaching idioms.

## Literature review

### *Definitions and types of idioms*

There are various definitions for the term "idioms" as well as many controversies about the components that form an idiom. Oxford Learner's Dictionaries define idiom as 'a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words' and is 'used by particular people at a particular time or place (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Similarly, Baker (2018) defined idioms in her book 'In Other Words' as frozen patterns that regularly resist variation in form and carry a meaning that cannot be predicted by understanding their constituents individually. However, the most well-known definition of idioms belongs to Cooper (1999), in which he emphasized that idioms are multi-word units with non-literal meanings.

Apparently, idiomatic expression is complex and does not follow any logical rules for its semantic features. In the paper regarding teaching idioms, Cooper (1998) presented that idioms are *non-literal* or figurative language frequently appearing in discourse. Such expressions contain metaphors, similes, and proverbs, which makes it challenging to learn and use since each element of an idiom may not mean what it states literally. Cooper demonstrated several cases in which the meaning cannot be predicted from the literal meaning of individual words. For example, suppose English learners hear the expression 'to lead a dog's life' and immediately come up with the meaning by looking at the literal meaning of each word. In that case, the flourishing message of this idiom will never be revealed and comprehended. The paper also recommended some insights about approaches to teaching idioms to learners, especially through metaphorical context.

Idioms have been categorized into three main types according to their syntactic and semantic features. According to Irujo (1986), there are three types of idioms: identical, similar, and different. She hypothesized that identical idioms are the easiest to understand and use since they can be translated word-by-word in learners' first language. Similar idioms are a bit different in the conceptual metaphors, but learners can find the idiomatic equivalents in their native language. Different idioms include patterns and meanings different from the learners' native idiomatic language. The study indicated the difficulties and ease of L2 learners during their transferring and interpreting process of idioms in L1 and L2.

### *The importance of idioms*

Pollio et al. (2023) estimated that an English native speaker would use around 20 million idioms over a lifetime. It is highly possible to see such expressions displayed in daily media such as newspapers, radio broadcasts, television programs, movies, and songs. Defining the structure of idioms and then understanding and translating those idiomatic expressions into the mother language is not easy work, though, as idioms do not say what they mean (Irujo, 1986). Being able to express idioms appropriately causes fluent and natural speech. The idiomatic understandable ability, as known as idiomatic competence, is associated closely with cultural knowledge rather than the original word meanings (Saleh & Zakaria, 2013).

De Caro (2009) examined the learners' use of idioms at Universidad Santo Tomás- Colombia. A group of 11 undergraduates and a teacher were asked about their use of idioms and how idioms are important to them. The teacher also demonstrated a lesson aimed at teaching idioms to learners to improve their speaking skills and vocabulary. The study indicated that the acquisition and utilization of idioms enable learners to improve their knowledge of linguistics and communicative skills.

Suhodolli (2019) conducted a study to investigate the importance of idioms in learning English among Albanian learners. The author proclaimed that learning idioms helps learners communicate better and understand native speakers more easily. Thus, learning idioms is inseparable from learning English, as idioms are part of the culture. The paper also implied that teachers need to support the learners in acquiring idioms and help them know how to use such expressions in real-life contexts. No specific idiom teaching activities are recommended though. Interestingly, idioms are not included extensively enough in the L2 classroom settings. Moreover, Asl (2013) mentioned that EFL teachers tend to ignore idioms but focus more on rules of grammar and sentence patterns, which makes it simpler for learners to understand the language.

Similarly, Hinkel (2017) presented the benefits of idioms in teaching and learning foreign languages at any level of proficiency, comprising beginning or intermediate learners. Thanks to acquiring idiomatic expressions, L2 learners may enhance receptive and productive competencies; otherwise, the absence of these language units can lead to ineffective communication in neither written nor spoken forms. Nonetheless, the paper claimed that idiomatic formulas are still comparatively less established in teaching materials than vocabulary or grammar structures.

In addition, regarding one of the most commonplace English assessment tests – IELTS (International English Language Testing System), idiom highlights its role as a significant criterion associated with learners' English language proficiency (British Council, 2024). Aridasarie and Tabiati (2022) carried out qualitative research with IELTS test-takers in Indonesia to investigate the use of idioms in their Speaking section. The participants were given a mock pretest to assess their use of formulaic phrases under the circumstances when idiomatic expressions are not paid attention to in their classroom. An IELTS simulated post-test is given after the participants are exposed to a three-month training course and put idiomatic language into practice. The authors acknowledged the meaningful contribution of idiomatic expressions in attaining higher IELTS band scores, specializing in Speaking skills. The results indicated considerable differences in the participants' performance before and after they were taught to implement idioms in the Speaking test. Moreover, the study also pointed out some inaccuracies in terms of grammar that the participants have made due to the fact that they struggle with managing subject-verb agreement in the sentence and uttering idiomatic expressions simultaneously during the test. However, the study merely observed the modest number of samples (5 IELTS learners), the findings can be varied in different contexts and populations.

In summary, idioms play a vital role in language proficiency, facilitating fluency and a deeper comprehension of cultural aspects in communication. Native speakers frequently employ idioms, enriching the language with idiomatic expressions. Thus, EFL learners striving for native-like mastery of English must comprehend and utilize idioms effectively on a regular basis. Consequently, previous research acknowledges the importance of idioms and emphasizes the practice of integrating them skillfully into language instruction to enhance learners' overall communication ability and bridge the gap between formal education and real-world language use.

### *Perspectives in teaching idioms*

The greatest concern of teaching and learning formulaic language (collocations, phrasal verbs, idioms, etc.) is the differences between their literal and figurative meanings (Maisa & Karunakaran, 2013). Moreover, teachers surely get in trouble in encouraging learners to use and apply their idiomatic knowledge outside of the schooling since there might be not any conditional expansion for this language comprehension and use (Amin, 2019). This lack of

understanding of idioms can result in communication failure when learners come across idioms in their real-life contexts. Çakır (2011) concluded that the more teachers use idiomatic expressions in English classroom environments, the better learners master them. Accordingly, L2 learners are motivated to use idioms better when they know what and how to apply the comprehensible input, which is a hard goal especially when the meaning of the idioms can not be inferred through individual analysis of each word (Chuang, 2013). As a result, the differences between literal and figurative meanings are the biggest obstacles teachers face when teaching learners to understand the meanings. De Caro (2009) presented that idioms frequently occur in speaking and writing, so educational programs require most teachers' attention as a primary significance in the curriculum.

There are many studies making efforts to answer why idioms are considered the rough rock by both foreign language teachers and learners. Specifically, Vasiljevic (2015) conducted a study highlighting learners' difficulties in comprehending idioms and suggesting instructional strategies for teaching idioms. He stated that the acquisition of idioms and other lexical areas is quite the same through the cognitive processes. The first stage is noticing the input, in which learners must attend to language with the context. The initial input provision needs to be frequent so that learners are able to perceive figurative meanings before knowing exactly what they mean. Once learners have noticed the input, they move on to the second stage of cognitive processes: encoding. To facilitate the figurative idiomatic memorization, learners should be trained to define the speakers' concepts and sources, recognize the words through visual aids, create mental images, and analyze the semantic etymologies. Vasiljevic also inferred that the more various and complex codes invested in processing the input, the better capabilities enhanced in memorization and recall of information. Besides, the feelings and motivation of learners during this stage also impact their storage capacity. However, storing information becomes useless if it cannot be retrieved. Successful retrieval depends on the time since input provision and processing the input, the interrupt of other input, and the frequency of the retrieval. Hence, the findings suggested that learners should practice and review what they have learned to reinforce their understanding.

Idioms paint a colorful picture and turn up the noisy sounds to daily English conversation, but they are complicated for EFL teachers and learners during schooling. Saleh and Zakaria (2013) conducted a study to investigate what factors prevent learners from gaining enough knowledge to use idioms effectively. The data collection was analyzed through SPSS from the responses of forty learners inside and outside the University of Technology Malaysia (UTM) setting. The results mentioned that one of the difficulties of learners comes from the way their teacher begins to deliver idioms, along with striking contrast between those idiomatic meanings figuratively and literally. Another reason is that the teacher might not frequently encourage their learners to practice with the vocabulary they have learned in their daily routine, so they could not easily use those words in idiomatic analysis. Additionally, they agreed with the idea that learners and teachers need to apply more than one strategy to understand the idiomatic meanings, specializing in contextual and conceptual strategies. Finally, the study recommended that the teacher and learners use the guessing strategy and connect the L1 meaning strategy, which might be the most productive.

A study was conducted in the setting of English faculty at the Vietnam University of Commerce to examine the teaching of English idioms as a foreign language and its impact on first-year learners' speaking skills (Linh, 2021). The study employed a quantitative and qualitative approach and collected data from two different groups, (1) a hundred first-year participants with a pre-intermediate level of English aiming to reach a C1 level for their graduate certification, and (2) ten instructors with a Master's degree in teaching English who were working at the same

faculty. The perspectives of these two groups were compared through the two stages of data collection: a questionnaire for all of the hundred learners and ten teachers, and an in-depth interview with ten learners and five to gather more extensive and interesting information. The findings revealed that the barrier to learning idioms comes from the unequal contribution to the four skills, which mainly focus on reading but very little on speaking. Although all respondents agreed that learners show a positive attitude and effective performance during idiom-related classroom activities, these achievements primarily stem from reading-designed tasks that neglect the development of speaking skills. The study confirmed the overlooked significance of idioms and emphasized the complexity and difficulty of teaching them. It is recommended that EFL schools pay appropriate attention to idioms and other future research to determine the integration of idiom learning with national cultures to enhance learners' speaking proficiency.

Accordingly, to examine the reality of teaching and learning English idioms as a foreign language in the Vietnamese undergraduate context, Tran (2012) proved that both teachers and learners gain sufficient intake during the process of learning idioms. The study involved nine teachers from the English faculty at Hanoi National University of Education and fifty-six student-teachers who are almost done with the pedagogical training in the final semester to become an English teacher. The participants were selected for the case study using three mixed methods: questionnaires, interviews, and guided-reflective written products posted via email. After fifteen weeks of observation and evaluation, the study revealed that, firstly, the effectiveness of learning idioms takes place when the learners regularly contribute to classroom activities with great motivation and confidence. Secondly, learners not only achieved idiomatic knowledge but also were able to demonstrate their knowledge through writing reflective products. The study concluded that what and how to use teaching activities relating to idioms is the key to success in learning. Also, the study suggested that the process of idiom learning should begin with receptive skills through a clear context and have learners practice with productive skills. In spite of many positives in learners' idiomatic achievements, the conceptual metaphors in idiom-related classroom activities are undoubtedly absent. Those missing metaphors might lead to the glass ceiling in the utilization of idiomatic expressions. Finally, the findings claimed that learners would use idioms in daily conversation better if they had more chances to practice with more close-reality activities.

A more noticeable study combined an empirical and a doctoral study to emphasize teachers' perspectives in teaching idioms at English university levels in Kosovo. Suhodolli (2022) set the research context in three popular schools, AAB College, Fehmi Agani Public Uni, and Universum College, and gained support from their national neighbor findings - Albania. The findings concluded that it is crucial and compulsory for teachers to allow their learners to receive the idiomatic expressions in the context at the beginning of the lessons. Data also explained that using idioms is the key to success in English competence and performance, for they can communicate naturally and native-like as well as understand what the locals write in the typical texts. Additionally, the author highlighted the need to teach idioms in the university curriculum (Bachelor's level) as a specific subject or mixed with other subjects as well.

Teachers refer to idioms as "cultural products" and "reflections of culture" (Rizq, 2015). Rizq conducted a study with 10 teachers (ranging between 21 and 45 years old) to explore their perspectives on teaching idioms to L2 learners. The findings of the study reveal that all participants recognize the significance of idioms in teaching the English language due to their frequent use. While some teachers tend to avoid idioms in order not to prevent confusion among learners, they proclaimed that the use of idioms was inevitable. The author explores ESL teachers' views on the challenges of teaching idioms, their cultural connections, effective instructional methods, and the obvious challenge of finding equivalents in learners' first

language. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences and methods in teaching idioms, providing a broader understanding of the obstacles and effective practices in idiom instruction. Regarding teaching methods, the study divided the teachers into three groups based on their approach to teaching idioms: explicit, implicit, and hybrid. One-fifth of the teachers who applied the traditional explicit method expressed concerns that idioms are already vague and that guessing their meaning could result in misinterpreted misunderstandings. In contrast, two teachers preferred the implicit teaching method by having learners exposed to a story or movie in order to make them acquire the idioms more effectively, while others stated that they combined both methods in their classrooms.

Jiang (2000) proved that the relationship between language and culture is inseparable. The words relating to daily speech and activities in English and Chinese were highlighted through a survey combining metaphors and conceptual context. The research stimulated the ten words and required all participants to add on about six other words to make a complete meaningful phrase. There were 28 paper items for native English speakers valid among forty handouts in total, and twenty-eight items for native Chinese speakers were also valid among thirty ones. The results revealed that language remains meaningful when it is closely associated with culture, and the two national responses show their own cultural features. Those expressions are the entities towards social and cultural existence, even though their form is words or phrases. In short, this relation is interactive and corresponds to indispensable support from each other.

### *Research gap*

A large number of studies pay attention to the characteristics of idioms, such as their literal and figurative meanings and their syntactic rules and structures (Wray, 2000; Wang & Li, 2014; Siyanova-Chanturia & Martinez, 2015). Other research focuses on definitions of idioms as well as the teaching strategies that should be applied in the classroom to teach the idiomatic definitions (Tran, 2012; Vasiljevic, 2015). However, one of the most remarkable barriers to teaching idioms is the national cultural differences instead of the meanings only (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999; Benson, 2003). As a result, there is limited research from authors exploring English idioms in Vietnam, where idioms are regarded as a new insight. The next significant barrier is the English level of learners when learning idioms. MOET (2018) required that high-school learners gain the expected language outcomes (ELOs) at level 3 in equivalence with pre-intermediate level (B1), but researchers take very short notice of how those B1 levels learn English idioms through their cognitive ability in the foreign language setting (Suhodolli, 2022). This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the practical challenges education practitioners encounter and their perceptions of cultural aspects in teaching idioms to B1 learners, providing insights to inform more effective pedagogical strategies.

### *Research Questions*

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges that in-service teachers and teachers often encounter when teaching idioms to B1 learners?
2. How do in-service teachers and teachers perceive the cultural aspects when teaching idioms?

## Methods

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

We conducted a survey involving a total of 32 participants, comprising 16 in-service English teachers enrolled in the Master's program at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Lang University and 16 teachers from the E.S.C Language Center. The participants' ages range from 21 to 40 years. A shared feature among all participants is their background in teaching English, specifically at the B1 Preliminary level and higher, along with experience in incorporating idioms into their classroom instructions.

### *Design of the Study*

Our study is a quantitative research. The questionnaire items were primarily adopted from relevant literature, drawing from the questionnaires used by Orfan (2020) and Rizq (2015). The survey is structured into two sections. The former section, comprising three questions, focuses on gathering background information about participants' English teaching background. The latter section contains eight multiple-choice questions that look deeper into participants' viewpoints on the challenges of teaching idioms and their perspectives of combining cultural factors in teaching idioms. The survey questions can be found in Appendix A.

### *Data collection & analysis*

Printed survey questionnaires were distributed to in-service teachers enrolled in the Master's program at Van Lang University and teachers from the E.S.C Language Center. Participants were briefed on the research objectives, asked to complete the survey, and instructed to return the completed forms within a specified timeframe. Out of the 50 copies given out, 32 respondents met the research criteria, specifically targeting teachers with experience teaching at the B1 Preliminary level. Following this, the data was manually imported and analyzed using Microsoft Excel software, with the findings presented through various forms of figures.

## Results/Findings

### **Figure 1.**

Do you think idioms are difficult for your learners?

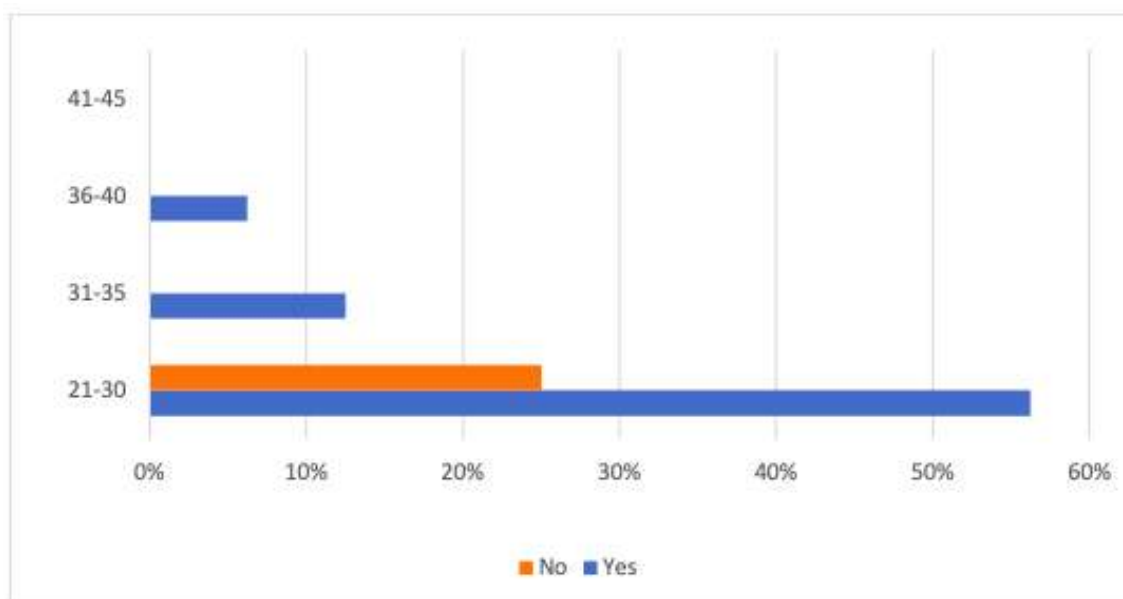


Figure 1 examines teachers' perceptions of the difficulty their B1-level learners face with idioms. It is indicated from the chart that a significant portion of surveyed teachers, particularly in the 21-30 age group, believe idioms are challenging for their learners, with nearly 60% indicating "Yes". This age group also has a smaller, yet remarkable, percentage of people (around 25%) who believe idioms are not difficult for their learners. Similarly, smaller percentages of teachers in the 31-35 and 36-40 age groups— 13% and 6% respectively—also think idioms are challenging, but no teachers aged 31 and above responded no. Overall, the findings highlight a prevalent belief among teachers of all age groups that idioms pose a considerable challenge for B1 level learners and reveal the confidence in the learners' language competence among younger teachers.

### Figure 2.

What difficulties do you encounter when teaching idioms to B1-level learners?

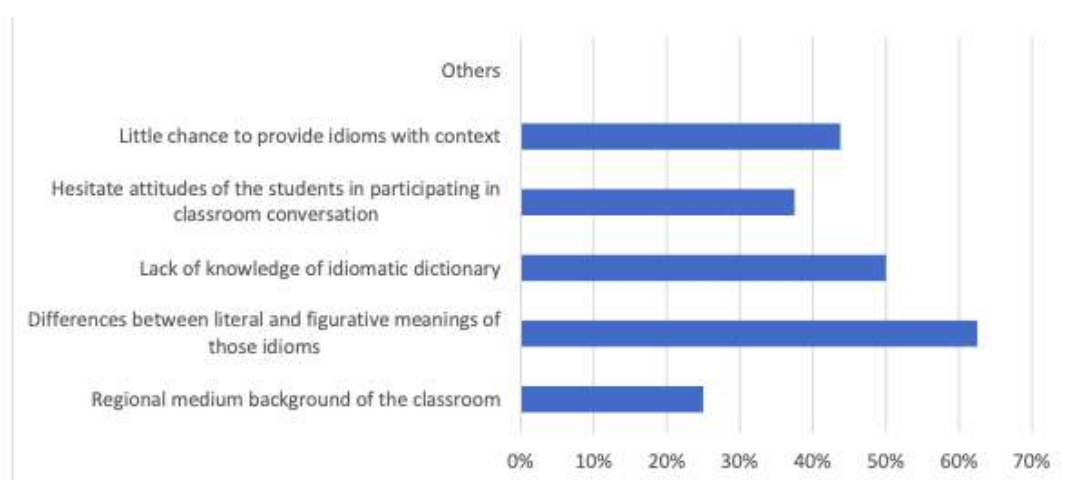


Figure 2 illustrates teachers' various difficulties when instructing B1-level learners on idioms. The most significant challenge, accounting for over 60 % of the answers, is helping learners understand the differences between literal and figurative meanings. This indicates a significant obstacle in learners' ability to understand idioms beyond their direct meanings. Around half of the surveyed people face issues due to a lack of knowledge of idioms and little chance to provide idioms with context, underscoring the perspective of educational practitioners toward the importance of meaningful context in learning idioms. About 30% of respondents note that they encounter the barrier of learners holding hesitant attitudes towards participation, which may stem from a lack of confidence or fear of making mistakes, thereby hindering active engagement and practice. The regional medium background of learners is a challenge for about 15% of teachers, indicating that regional linguistic variations can complicate the teaching and understanding of idiomatic expressions. The findings suggest a need for improving meaningful teaching context, diversifying the learning resource, and strategies to boost student confidence in learning idioms.



**Figure 3.**

How do you usually teach new idiomatic expressions?

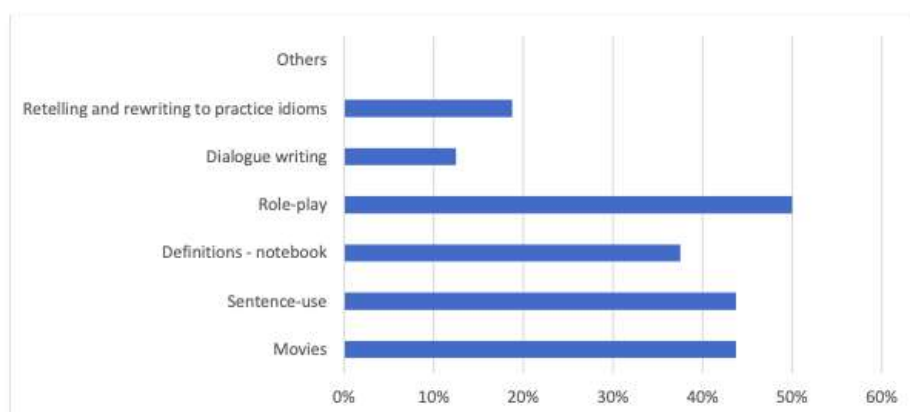


Figure 3 shows the teaching experience of in-service teachers regarding idiom-related lessons in their English classroom. The most popular teaching activity they might apply for teaching idioms in the classroom is role-play, accounting for 50%. The second most frequent teaching activities are sentence use and movies, with a percentage of 44% each. The third highest percentage of conducting teaching activities for idiomatic expressions is the teachers having their learners take notice of definitions in the notebook (38%). The findings suggest that more diverse teaching activities should allow learners to acquire idioms flexibly rather than relying solely on mechanic drills. Because there is a striking contrast between the cultural meanings of idioms in Vietnamese and English, teachers must apply more idiomatic activities to enhance learners' retention.

**Figure 4.**

How often do you use idioms for learners of the B1 level?

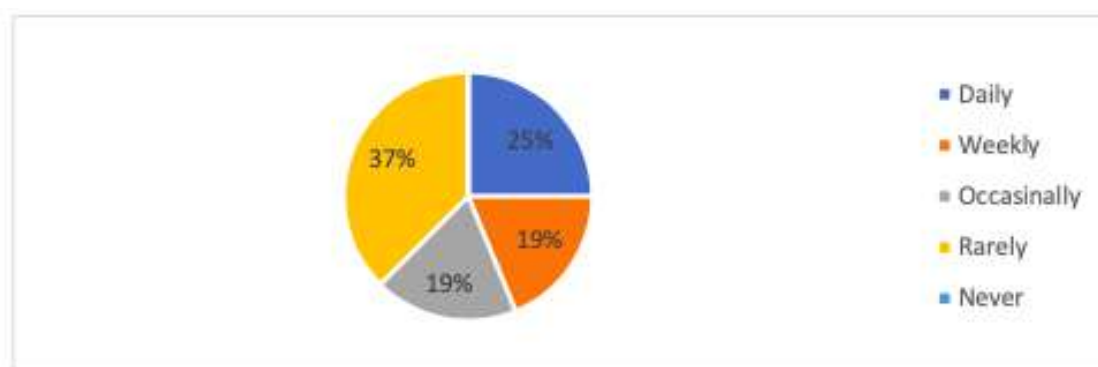


Figure 4 illustrates the frequency with which teachers use idioms when teaching B1-level learners. According to the survey, the majority of the surveyed teachers rarely use idioms in their lessons (37%). A quarter of the respondents (25%) incorporate idioms on a daily basis, suggesting a consistent approach to integrating idiomatic expressions. Over a third of the surveyed teachers reported using idioms weekly and occasionally with equally 19% of each frequency. Notably, no participants selected "Never," indicating that all surveyed teachers employ idioms to some extent. The findings suggest that at the B1 proficiency level, it is inevitable for teachers to use idiomatic expressions in language instruction and teaching

progress.

**Figure 5.**

How often do you teach idioms to learners of B1 Level?

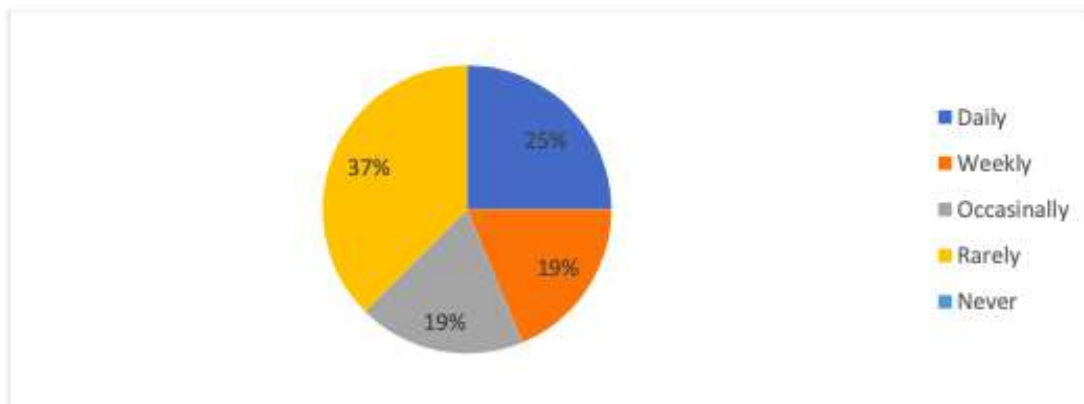


Figure 5 shows the frequency with which the survey takers conduct idiom-related lessons in their B1 level classroom. The highest percentage of responses to the popularity of teaching idioms is rarely (37%). The next highest percentage towards the popularity of teaching idioms is "daily" (25%). Although the percentage of teaching idioms in the classroom that happen occasionally is as low as "weekly" (19%), there were no responses indicating "never" in terms of how often the participants teach English idioms (0%). Regardless of the importance of idioms and how effective frequently using idioms in daily conversation is, most of the in-service teachers have not yet integrated the idiom expressions into the lesson on a regular basis. The English communication skills of learners may improve when idioms are taught more frequently and with greater emphasis. To have learners perform their speech naturally and meaningfully, the teacher needs to deliver idiom-related tasks for his learners in order to familiarize them with new images and conceptual metaphors related to the topics.

**Figure 6.**

Do you believe that idioms play an important role in teaching and learning English?



Figure 6 indicates the beliefs and perspectives of the participants regarding the importance of idioms teaching and learning in their English classroom. The results demonstrate that idioms' role in the teaching and learning process is important for most respondents. Out of thirty-two in-service teachers surveyed, twenty-four (75%) asserted that idioms are indispensable in teaching and learning, while only eight people (25%) said that idioms have minimal impact on teaching and learning. Moreover, it proves that these education practitioners have positive perspectives on the role of idioms since their English competence and performance also become better when they use English idioms regularly in daily conversation. This knowledge helps them to enhance their teaching and learning proficiency. In contrast, some respondents reported that the role of idioms may not be remarkable, but they might unintentionally incorporate idioms into their pedagogical approach.

**Figure 7.**

Do you think there is a relationship between idioms and culture?

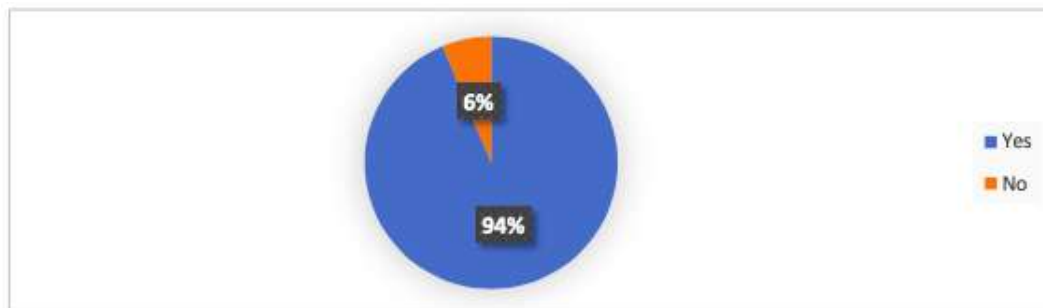
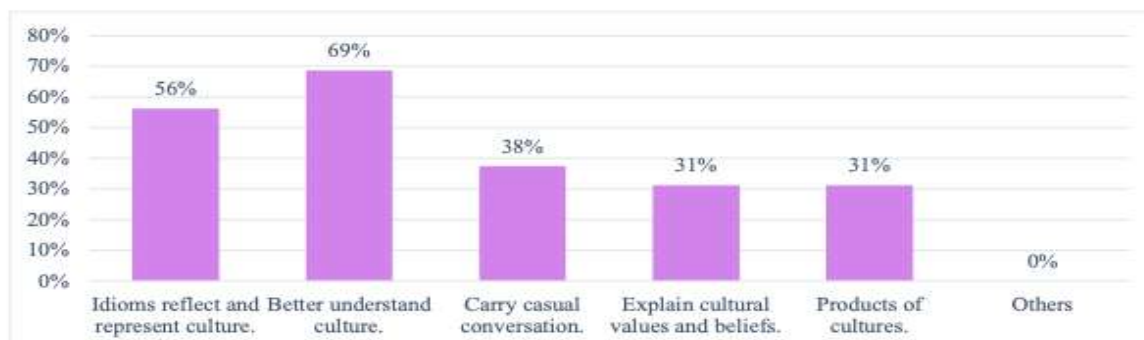


Figure 7 reveals the teachers' opinions on the relationship between idioms and culture. The majority of surveyed teachers perceive a connection between idioms and culture, with 94% affirming this belief and merely 6% denying it. None of the answers responded negatively to the correlation between idioms and culture. The finding displays a strong agreement among teachers that idioms are closely tied to a cultural context, which can result in significant challenges regarding teaching and learning the idiomatic language.

**Figure 8.**

What is the relationship between culture and idioms, do you think?



According to Figure 8, the survey takers share their perspectives on how culture and idioms positively impact each other. There has been a close association between culture and idioms, from which responses can be multiple choices. Specifically, the percentage of respondents who claimed that idioms deepen their understanding of English culture is the largest, making up to twenty-two approvals (69%). The next largest percentage (56%) supported the idea that idioms reflect and represent culture with eighteen approvals. Twelve people agreed with the idea that idioms are used in casual conversation, comprising the third largest percentage (38%). Thirty-one percent of respondents found that idioms explain cultural values and beliefs and agreed that idioms are products of cultures. Their learners and themselves feel more excited about idiomatic topics because idioms provide cultural knowledge for the learning and teaching process. Therefore, there is no doubt that their mutual cultural understanding will be enhanced with their confidence.

## Discussion

The current research investigated (1) the challenges that in-service teachers face when teaching idioms to B1 learners and (2) their perceptions of the cultural aspects involved in idiomatic expressions in learning, teaching, and daily conversation. The findings share common concerns with previous research on the challenges in teaching English idioms to EFL learners at the Pre-intermediate level, particularly in the Vietnamese EFL context.

### *Challenges in teaching idioms to B1 learners*

The teachers' perception of the role of idioms is predominantly positive, which aligns with the studies conducted by De Caro (2009), Suhodolli (2019), and research by Orfan (2020), which claimed that EFL teachers and learners have a high awareness of barriers of learning and understanding idioms. The findings of our study reveal that in-service teachers encounter several key challenges when teaching idioms to B1 learners. With regard to the various sorts of language domains, the most reported difficulty (over 60% of respondents) is helping learners understand the differences between literal and figurative meanings. This aligns with Vasiljevic (2015), who emphasized that idioms require cognitive processing beyond word-for-word translation. Additionally, approximately half of the participants noted a lack of appropriate idiomatic teaching materials and contextual learning opportunities, which echoes Vũ (2009), who found that Vietnamese English textbooks provide limited exposure to idiomatic expressions, and in connection with Orfan's study (2020) which states that the schooling context restricts learners' exposure to English idiomatic language and they rarely have the opportunity to apply idioms. Instead of focusing on designing activities for learners to naturally and effectively communicate with idioms, lessons often focus on grammatical structures and rules (Thach, 2022). There is an evident gap in English competence among most EFL learners, who lack knowledge and information about idiomatic meanings. A number of words and images in English do not usually take place in the Vietnamese context, which might lead to the learners' insufficient knowledge (Tran, 2012). Words that have no equivalent features in their native language can drive learners to problematic learning systems. Another significant issue is learners' hesitation and low confidence in using idioms actively in conversation, a challenge also identified by Saleh and Zakaria (2013), who stressed the importance of encouraging learners to apply idiomatic expressions in real-world communication. These findings suggest that EFL teachers need more structured methodologies and resources to teach idioms effectively.

### *Teachers' perceptions of culture in teaching idioms*

This study also explored teachers' perceptions of the cultural significance of idioms. Boers (2000) described cultural domains as the key to meaningful communication, and they are the fundamental framework of values and beliefs that mainly contribute to and explain the language's meaning verbally and non-verbally. Similarly, Ramlan et al. (2018) shared the common definition of culture and a system of shared values, ideas, and attitudes that form others' perceptions and actions, which considerably impact the teaching and learning process. According to Yağiz and Izadpanah (2013), language has a close association with culture. The overwhelming majority of respondents in our study agreed that idioms are deeply connected to culture and play a crucial role in enhancing learners' understanding of English-speaking communities. This supports Jiang (2000), who claimed that language and culture are inseparable. Furthermore, more than half of the participants (69%) emphasized that idioms provide a better understanding of English culture, reinforcing Boers' (2000) assertion that metaphorical expressions are embedded in cultural frameworks. However, some respondents expressed concerns about the difficulties of bridging the cultural gap, particularly when learners

struggle to relate English idioms to their native Vietnamese context (Nguyen Quyen, 2024). These concerns align with research by Suhodolli (2019), in which the author asserted that idiomatic meaning is often tied to culturally specific metaphors that do not have direct equivalents in other languages. For that reason, there is a need for more culturally integrated teaching strategies to enhance idiomatic comprehension. Jiang (2000) proved that the relationship between language and culture is inseparable. The results revealed that language remains meaningful when it is closely associated with culture, and the two national responses show their own cultural features. Those expressions are the entities towards social and cultural existence, even though their form is words or phrases. In short, this relation is interactive and corresponds to indispensable support from each other.

## Conclusion

### *Limitations and Suggestions*

One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size (32 participants), which may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives among EFL teachers across Vietnam. Internal factors such as emotions, classroom conditions, and teaching adversities probably impact the respondents' attitudes and perspectives. Additionally, the study covers and investigates the situations of teaching at the B1 level only, and does not fully look at the problems at other levels. In that case, further research needs to predict variable expansion. Moreover, other researchers may conduct an in-depth interview to explore more objective and specific barriers that those often encounter in teaching idioms, as it is essential to interview teachers to obtain their teaching methods and activities that they may apply in idiom-related lessons.

Based on the collected data, several implications emerge for EFL teaching practices. As many teachers cited difficulty in explaining figurative meanings, incorporating explicit instruction methods, such as visual aids and metaphor-based teaching, may enhance the comprehension of the students. Additionally, EFL lecturers must be responsible for supporting and encouraging learners to use these idioms in real-life communication. What is more, the latest paradigm from MOET (2018) raises the expectation towards the learners to not only obtain accurate forms of the foreign language but also apply these target forms in the real context of communication appropriately and meaningfully. Therefore, education practitioners must develop course materials relating to contextual idioms that can improve learners' intercultural knowledge and communicative competence (Çakır, 2011). Also, as contrastive meanings are coming from the regional medium background of the speakers that lead to idiomatic dissimilarities (Yağız & Izadpanah, 2013), the teacher ought to implicate the appropriate teaching methods and approaches to enhance learners' idiomatic language acquisition.

### *Conclusion*

This study investigated the challenges in-service EFL teachers encounter when teaching idioms to B1 learners and their perceptions of the cultural aspects of idiomatic instruction. The findings indicate that teachers face several key challenges, including the need for learners to grasp the figurative meanings of idioms, a lack of appropriate teaching materials, and students' reluctance to use idioms. Additionally, while teachers recognize the strong connection between idioms and culture, many find it difficult to incorporate cultural insights into their teaching due to differences between English and Vietnamese idiomatic expressions. To achieve effectiveness in idiomatic languages, the teacher should appropriately link the knowledge with certain cultures in the classroom. It brings good to EFL learners' communicative competence when the target culture is combined with the target language. Language teachers must have sufficient

cultural knowledge of the target language as well as create opportunities for learners to comprehend idiomatic expressions in a cultural context. Besides, both EFL teachers and learners need to have a high regard for their native cultures, which impacts the learning and teaching process as well. Mutual understanding of intercultural expressions improves the acquisition of the target language as a foreign language in Vietnam. Consequently, defining the challenges in teaching idioms makes language learning and acquisition productive, eventually fostering English teaching and learning experience.

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## Biodata

*Nguyen Duong Nhu Quynh is a postgraduate of Van Lang University's Faculty of Foreign Languages in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, discusses Tesol-majored teachers' challenges in teaching idioms to EFL B1 students, as well as those teachers' strategies to teach idioms effectively. The Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Lang University is where she is currently conducting her research.*

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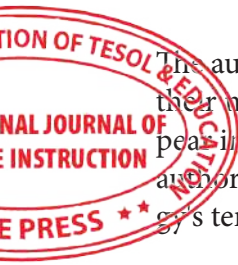
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