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A Note from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Beloved Language Instructors,

It is with great pleasure to present Volume 4, Issue 3 (2025) of the *International Journal of Language Instruction*. This issue features six scholarly contributions that exemplify the diverse perspectives, methodologies, and educational contexts influencing modern language education.

The studies in this issue cover a lot of ground, including gamification in foreign language classrooms, problems with listening comprehension, oral corrective feedback, English for Medical Purposes, how creative writing can help students improve their language skills, and the systemic barriers that English learners in Somaliland face. Together, they show the chances and challenges that come with learning a language in the 21st century.

Specifically, in this issue, Madden, Higgs, Gordon, and Chambers (2025) investigate students' perceptions of Kahoot! in online French classes in Jamaica, particularly in this issue. Using a mixed-methods design, they show that gamification improves vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and motivation, but there are still technical problems that need to be worked out. The study underscores the teacher's pivotal role in facilitating Kahoot!, providing significant contributions to foreign language pedagogy and learner engagement. Pham and Le (2025) examine the listening comprehension difficulties, strategies, and attitudes of English majors at a private university in Vietnam. They discovered problems such as rapid speech, restricted vocabulary, and ambiguous pronunciation through the use of questionnaires and interviews. Students utilized cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies, while teacher support influenced motivation. The study offers significant pedagogical insights for enhancing listening instruction in EFL contexts.

Pham Hoang An (2025) examines the impact of explicit oral corrective feedback on the English-speaking proficiency of high school students in Vietnam. The study employed mixed methods, incorporating classroom observations and student questionnaires, and determined that sentence correction was the most effective, succeeded by question correction and grammatical explanations. The results show how important corrective feedback is for improving accuracy and confidence, giving useful information for teaching English as a foreign language.

Nguyen Ngoc Gia Han (2025) offers an extensive literature review regarding the challenges and strategies in the instruction of English for Medical Purposes (EMP). Some of the main problems are hard-to-understand words, not enough practice in context, and not enough training for teachers. Proposed solutions stress morphological analysis, curriculum design based on needs, multimodal approaches, and collaboration among faculty. This study provides significant insights for enhancing EMP instruction in Vietnam and analogous settings.

Arrogante (2025) qualitatively examines 52 haikus composed by Japanese junior high school students to investigate linguistic creativity. The study delineates lexical, syntactic, and figurative innovations, encompassing themes of nature, nostalgia, and contemporary existence. The findings demonstrate that the structural limitations of haiku promote self-expression, accuracy, and cultural engagement, highlighting its educational significance in cultivating creativity and critical thinking within EFL contexts.

A Note from the Editor-in-Chief

Lastly, Abdi (2025) looks at the problems that students at Moon College in Somaliland face when they try to learn English as a second language. The study utilizes qualitative interviews and focus groups to delineate instructional barriers, environmental constraints, and psychological obstacles. Despite challenges in pronunciation, grammar, and motivation, learners utilize digital tools. The study suggests changes to the curriculum, training for teachers, and the use of technology to help students learn English better.

This issue of the International Journal of Language Instruction features six thought-provoking studies that enhance our comprehension of language instruction and acquisition in various contexts. Even though the contributions have different focuses and methods, they all show how language education is always torn between new ideas and old ones.

Madden et al. (2025) illustrate how gamification via Kahoot! enhances motivation in French classes in Jamaica, whereas Pham & Le (2025) elucidate the challenges faced by Vietnamese students in listening comprehension and their strategic responses. Pham Hoang An (2025) underscores the significance of oral corrective feedback in improving speaking accuracy, while Nguyen (2025) offers an extensive analysis of the challenges and strategies in English for Medical Purposes. Arrogante (2025) focuses on creative expression, demonstrating how haiku writing fosters linguistic creativity in Japanese students. Lastly, Abdi (2025) talks about the systemic, socio-cultural, and psychological barriers to learning English in Somaliland and gives suggestions for how to fix them that are based on the situation.

These studies all call for approaches that are centered on the learner and take into account the situation. From integrating technology and feedback systems to creative writing and changing the curriculum, each contribution shows how important it is to come up with new ways to teach while also acknowledging the structural and cultural barriers that students face.

What makes this issue particularly meaningful is the international representation of its contributors. Scholars from Vietnam, Jamaica, Japan, and Somaliland share their research, underscoring the journal's mission to foster global dialogue and to encourage cross-cultural collaboration in language instruction. Their work illustrates that while challenges may differ across settings, the goal of equipping learners with effective language skills remains universal.

I want to express my profound appreciation to the authors for their important contributions, the reviewers for their thoughtful and helpful criticism, and our readers for their ongoing support of the journal. I also want to thank our Editorial Staff, whose efforts and dedication enable every issue.

On behalf of the editorial board and staff, I wish you insightful reading.

Thanks God for everything!

With warm regards



Associate Professor **Dr. Phyllis V. Phi Ho**
Editor-in-chief

International Journal of Language Instruction

Students' Perceptions of Kahoot!, Gamification, and the Role of Instructor in Online French as a Foreign Language Classes in Jamaica

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ABSTRACT

Gamification is a pedagogical tool that has brought much value to teaching and learning, including foreign languages (FLs), and serves to keep students engaged and motivated. Tools such as Kahoot! have gained much traction in FL contexts, with many studies focusing on their relation to learner enthusiasm and participation. However, the available data focuses primarily on the role of the teacher. The authors sought to gain students' perspectives of Kahoot! in online French classes and the role of the instructor in the process. Sixteen undergraduate students at the University of Technology, Jamaica responded to a questionnaire. The study used a mixed-methods research design. Qualitative content analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data, while descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data. Major findings reveal that Kahoot! is beneficial to FL learning, as it helps to improve students' vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and cultural competence. Kahoot! also aids in the application, retention, and reinforcement of knowledge. However, technical and internet connectivity issues can impact the game's flow. The teacher is responsible for preparing and facilitating the game strategically, as well as reviewing the answers with the students in a manner that promotes metacognition. The study has implications for frameworks of foreign language excitement (FLEX).

Keywords:

Gamification, Kahoot!, Motivation, French as a foreign language, Jamaica

Introduction

Technology is increasingly occupying our lives (Moreno, 2020), and it has brought about notable shifts in various sectors, including education (Tu, 2022). With the rapid advancement of technology, educators have access to numerous applications, gadgets, software, tools, and web resources that can be integrated into the teaching and learning process. Given this wide

variety, there is continuous experimentation, research, and development on the many exploits that technology brings to education. The incorporation of technology in education has made learning less boring and cumbersome, as it makes the process more interesting and engaging (Budhwar, 2017).

In the field of second/foreign language (L2/FL) learning, Pham (2022) highlights that technology is an inevitable and vital asset, as it offers not only “linguistic insight but also attractive social and cultural content” (Moreno, 2020, p. 256). Softa (2022) notes that modern technology assists FL instructors and methodologists with auditory and audio-visual teaching tools that target the four main language competences: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Additionally, in the Jamaican FL context, technology continues to revolutionize the applied linguistics domain through constant advances and exploration in computer and mobile-assisted language learning (CALL/MALL), games, and interactive worksheets, which enhance students’ engagement and motivation (Madden et al., 2024; Madden et al., 2023). In fact, Panagiotidis et al. (2023) argue that “millennials interact continuously and seamlessly with technology and this is affecting both how they want to learn and to be taught in any level of education, and, the teaching and learning practices used” (p. 70).

Lăpădat and Lăpădat (2024) emphasize that motivation is critical to FL learning, as “it can significantly influence students’ engagement, perseverance, and overall achievement in the language” (p. 142). Research shows that gamification is an approach that fosters this motivation. Christopoulos and Mystakidis (2023) define gamification or gameful design as “the strategic application of game design principles, mechanics, and elements into non-game environments” (p. 1223). Gamification is often conducted through digital platforms with the aim of solving problems, enhancing engagement, and motivating participants toward specific objectives (Zhang & Yu, 2021). Thurairasu (2022) notes that gamification in FL can take various forms, including role-playing, board games, and simulations, to enhance grammar skills.

Kahoot! is also known as an increasingly popular gamified tool used in FL pedagogy. According to its website (Kahoot.com), Kahoot! is described as a “game-based learning platform” that promotes learning through “engagement and fun”. Across the globe, numerous studies have been conducted that explore the affordances of this platform to FL education. However, the literature remains limited in Jamaica. An exploratory study conducted by Madden (2022) at a tertiary institution in Jamaica found that Kahoot! helps most students improve their French in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and culture. However, as there is a need for more in-depth studies, this research aimed to ascertain students’ perceptions of Kahoot! and gamification in online French as a foreign language (FFL) classes, as well as the role of the instructor in this regard. To achieve this, the following questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are students’ perceptions of Kahoot! and gamification in FL learning?
2. What is the role of the instructor during Kahoot! games?

Literature review

Overview Gamification in FL Pedagogy

Numerous educational and e-learning tools are available to enhance the teaching and learning process. Gamification is one tool that has experienced increased usage in FL pedagogy, particularly over the last three to four years, due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has altered

many aspects of our daily lives (Vo & Le, 2023). Educational tools, specifically e-learning or online educational tools, have two distinctive aspects: technology for education and education through technology. Gamification falls within the realm of education through technology (Fischer & Barabasch, 2023). Gamification refers to the use of games within an educational context, aiming to meet the educational goals or objectives of a lesson or unit (Staller & Koerner, 2021).

Educators are defined and identified by their philosophy of education and the methods they employ in the classroom within the teaching and learning process. Gamification equally falls within this scope. Gamification should be determined based on the purpose of the game, the goal(s) to be met by the teacher and students, and the physical, metacognitive, social, and social-emotional skills being taught or refined. Kashive and Mohite (2023) posit that gamification should be well-thought-out in terms of the specific game (the type of game being used), its appearance, and how it applies to students' needs, as gamification is not only linked to student motivation but also to student behavior. Specific game features such as points, badges, prizes, and achievements can be utilized to enhance learning motivation and engagement (Pingmuang and Koraneekij, 2022). Gil-Acirón (2022) highlights the importance of motivation and engagement of various linguistics features, the process of communication, and the cooperative learning environment provided through gamification. Additionally, students can become informed consumers of digital information and netiquette in their first and second languages. Teachers can use these moments to incorporate incidental or planned mini-lessons on vocabulary related to technology and the game's features within the instructional process.

However, gamification also has challenges, such as internet connectivity issues and a lack of professional development and knowledge among students and faculty concerning technology integration within the classroom. Kashive and Mohite (2023) cautioned that the gamification of the educational arena must be well-planned and executed, as failure to do so may result in students being disengaged or unmotivated. If the game, its purpose, or medium has not been intentionally prepared and implemented, it can have adverse effects on students and the overall lesson. Additionally, some students may lack social skills, which can hinder the purpose of the lesson and its collaborative approach (where applicable) (Kashive & Mohite, 2023). Furthermore, the immediate feedback provided by gamification, in some cases, is insufficient to help students meet their language goals, or the feedback is limited to prizes, leaderboards, points, and other game-features that merely indicate one's strengths or weaknesses (Staller & Koerner, 2021).

Theories of Motivation and Gamification in L2 Teaching and Learning

Motivation is heavily reliant on individual students and the goals they set for themselves in contexts of second language learning/acquisition (Lin & Smith, 2024). Motivation, since its study from the 1950s, has been as pertinent as the study of a FL in and of itself. There have been three theories of motivation in focus: social psychological factors, cognitive, process-oriented, and –since 2005– a socio-dynamic theory, which encompasses the three theories through a three-dimensional L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS).

Lin and Smith (2024) discuss the following aspects of motivation in detail, which encapsulates the L2MSS: the instrumentality and integrativeness of motivation, L2 motivation as a process, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the L2 motivational self-system, and identity and L2 motivation. The determining factor that influences every facet of motivation, and specifically those listed here, is the self. Put differently, the person acquiring the language, their belief system, and rationale for learning are just as salient as the language acquisition itself. Motivation is dependent on a growth or fixed mindset, which highlights fluidity in the case of

a growth mindset and calcification in the case of a fixed mindset (Wichaidit, 2025). However, while motivation, in some instances, may seem to be so easily defined and discussed, it is still a varying and complex aspect, which is unique to every learner—whether a FL learner or that of any other skill.

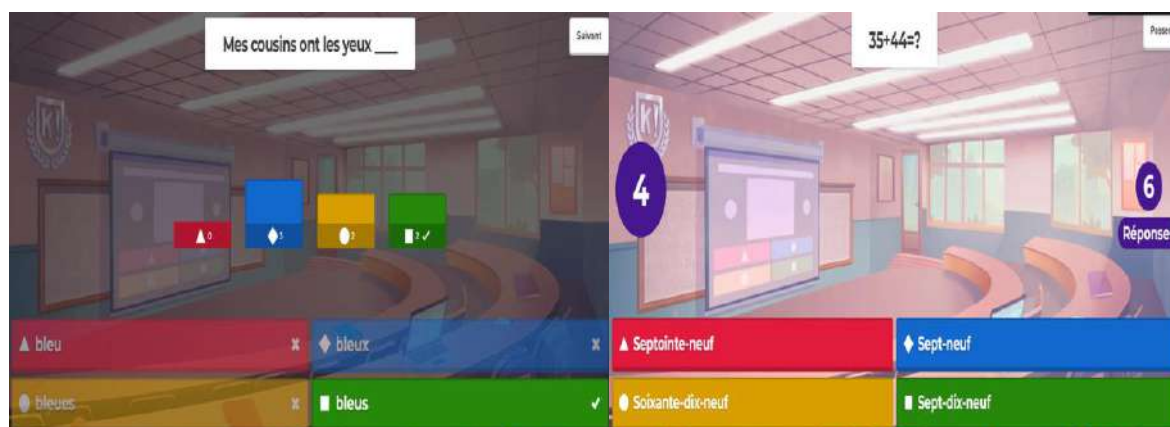
Fixed and growth mindset resembles intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the inner rationale for doing something that a person has—it is their innate ability to be self-motivated, despite other means of motivation. In contrast, extrinsic motivation signifies that external factors are the rationale for one’s motivation—they are unmotivated without external influences (Zhang and Yu, 2022). The lack of motivation, regardless of the theory of motivation, is unique to each individual. Therefore, the reasons for one’s demotivation can vary. Some reasons for a learner’s demotivation can be due to a lack of self-belief, fear of failure or making mistakes, or a dislike for the teacher or subject area. Nevertheless, regardless of the reason a learner may be demotivated, using gamification is one way to support, engage, and motivate them throughout the lesson (Zhang & Yu, 2022). Within the classroom, gamification and game-based learning can be pivotal in motivating students; it is a simple but unique manner to encourage and help them to see that they can learn a FL without the fear of ridicule by peers or “not getting” when everyone else does. The many features that are embedded in a game such as prizes, leaderboards, points, customization of game characters, among others make learning fun and less rigid (Gil-Acirón, 2022)

Overview of Kahoot!

Available via <https://kahoot.com/>, Kahoot! is an interactive tool – developed in Norway – that enables instructors to engage and motivate students actively through game-based learning (Wang & Lieberoth, 2016). Aidoune et al. (2022) describe Kahoot! as a game-based classroom application that facilitates real-time categorization of classroom content for assessment, contributing to both formative tasks and learner reflection. It is available in free and paid versions (Hetesi, 2021). Kahoot! presents multiple-choice questions (see examples in Figure 1) that can be played individually or in groups, using personal electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, or laptops. The questions are projected on a classroom screen, with a 95-character limit per question and a time limit ranging from 5 seconds to 2 minutes. Students earn points based on response accuracy and speed, with a scoreboard displayed after each question, thereby supporting point allotment, rewards and leaderboards in the learning process (Mayor-Peña et al., 2024). Instructors can track students’ progress and scores in real time.

Figure 1.

Sample of Kahoot! multiple-choice questions



Kahoot! also allows instructors to create quizzes, surveys, or discussion questions for their

classrooms. Educators can choose to keep their games private for classroom use or share them publicly for broader use. The platform's flexibility makes it useful for presenting new topics, reviewing material, teaching vocabulary, polling students on opinions, and helping students learn content in a sequential order using the newly introduced Jumble mode (Punyanunt-Carter, 2017; Iqbal & Lodhi, 2024).

Benefits of Kahoot in FL Teaching and Learning

Kahoot! has been shown to positively impact students' interest in subject material and reinforce key concepts in the classroom. Research indicates that gamification tools, such as Kahoot!, improve student engagement and learning outcomes (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018; Chaiyo & Nokham, 2017). It also fosters strategic thinking, as students weigh the risks and rewards of answering quickly versus cautiously (McQuiston, 2023), offering a low-stakes learning experience before high-stake tests (Crouch & Mazur, 2001). Students often prefer these game-based sessions due to their fun and competitive nature, which promotes active participation and peer interaction (Kalleny, 2020). In addition, Kahoot! provides immediate feedback to both students and instructors, enhancing learning by allowing faculty to identify areas of weakness in their students, which subsequently helps to orient their pedagogical strategies, targeting understanding of difficult topics (Wang & Tahir, 2020; Kalleny, 2020; Plump & LaRosa, 2017; Alexander et al., 2009). Additionally, Kahoot! can be used in both face-to-face and virtual learning environments, facilitating engagement across different teaching modalities (Kalleny, 2020). Lloyd (2023) reports that some Jamaican teachers used gamification, including Kahoot! to engage students in remote learning during the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, Kahoot! offers flexibility in content creation, allowing instructors to tailor quizzes, surveys, and discussions to suit their classroom needs. This adaptability enables educators to create assessments that align with learning objectives, while fostering interactive and strategic learning (Crouch & Mazur, 2001; Suchman et al., 2006). Moreover, Kahoot! enhances collaboration and fosters a competitive atmosphere that motivates students to participate and engage with the material. Students report that the competition makes the learning process more exciting and encourages them to study harder (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018), thereby enhancing their metacognitive and interpersonal skills (Madden, 2022). The competitive elements of Kahoot! not only increase participation but also help students retain information more effectively (Kalleny, 2020).

Challenges Associated with Kahoot in FL Teaching and Learning

Amid the affordances of Kahoot!, studies have also highlighted associated challenges. For example, students have reported several issues with the fast-paced nature of Kahoot! games, including problems with internet connectivity and other technical issues that affected their ability to participate actively (Madden, 2022). Although providing additional internet-capable devices or using Wi-Fi extenders may be required to ensure full participation, McQuiston (2023) notes that these measures come with their own set of challenges. A solution could be the use of mobile data where internet fails; however, this may be financially challenging for students who do not have the requisite devices or financial support, particularly in developing economies and rural zones. This raises concerns of accessibility and equity.

Moreover, a lack of teacher training in using online learning tools, as well as a traditional curriculum design that does not support digital tools, further limits the adoption of Kahoot! in classrooms, especially in public schools (Iqbal & Lodhi, 2024). Additionally, educators have highlighted the inadequate character limit, which restricts their ability to pose open-ended questions – a feature that was being explored to be added to the game (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018). In addition, demographic factors such as gender and grade level can influence students'

engagement, with younger students showing higher motivation levels in some contexts (Kalleny, 2020; Rayan & Watted, 2024).

Recent Studies involving Kahoot in FL Teaching and Learning

This section explores recent studies on Kahoot!'s implementation in FL teaching and learning, with a focus on its applications for various linguistic and cultural contexts. It highlights the platform's application in European and minority language contexts. Additionally, it considers regional implications for the broader application of gamified learning in fostering linguistic diversity.

Truong and Dinh (2024) conducted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods study on 49 Vietnamese university students to gain their views on Kahoot! in English vocabulary teaching. Despite its dependence on technology and limited scope to foster higher-order thinking, the results show that Kahoot! facilitated students' learning. The results also highlight the importance of interactions and the balance between ease of use and opportunities for technology proficiency development in ICT-enriched classrooms. Notwithstanding, variations were noted in terms of students' competitive motivation, and inconsequential technical difficulties were observed.

Anane (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study to ascertain students' perceptions of Kahoot! in online FFL classes. The findings reveal that Kahoot! fostered consistently high student engagement and motivation across three semesters, with most students agreeing that the platform positively impacted their learning.

Caruana and Zammit (2024) examined the concerns and emotions of 43 adult international students while learning L2 Maltese with digital resources, including Kahoot!. The findings from this mixed-methods study reveal a range of both positive and negative emotions experienced during their learning of Maltese. The incorporation of innovative technological interventions corresponded with learners' beliefs and motivations, thereby making the learning process more effective, primarily by stimulating positive emotions.

Ahmed et al. (2022) examined the impacts of Kahoot! on 50 Iranian intermediate students learning L2 English using pre- and post-tests. Findings show that Kahoot! not only improved their vocabulary recall and retention but also showed greater active participation and enthusiasm for learning. Similarly, Korkmaz and Oz (2021) investigated Kahoot!'s impact on regarding comprehension in L2 English of 38 students at a Turkish university. Findings from data collected via reading quiz scores and a questionnaire indicate that learners experienced meaningful improvement in their reading scores after seven weeks of intervention. Additionally, students had a positive attitude towards Kahoot! and it enhanced their vocabulary. Overall, Kahoot! can help to improve students' reading comprehension skills.

Kaur and Nadarajan (2020) report on the use of Kahoot! in English classes in an international school involving five teachers and 50 high school students. The study employed a questionnaire comprising 10 items, utilizing a five-level categorical Likert scale, and semi-structured interviews to collect data. Findings show that almost all the teachers found Kahoot! to be an effective instructional and assessment tool, which helps to engage students actively in classes. Similarly, the majority of students reported positive experiences thanks to Kahoot!'s integration, as it influenced them to participate actively in their language learning process.

Kapsalis et al. (2020) investigated the effectiveness of Kahoot! as a formative assessment tool in reinforcing grammar in a beginning-level Greek course among multicultural learners. The study employed an experimental quantitative methodology to compare a group using Kahoot! with another group using traditional assessment methods. Although both groups improved

significantly on their post-tests, the grades were not notably different between the two groups.

This section examined the usage and perceptions of Kahoot! FL education. The studies included have consistently highlighted that Kahoot! enhances engagement, motivation, and active participation among learners, while providing immediate feedback and supporting formative assessment. Furthermore, this tool aids in vocabulary recall and reading comprehension for cultural understanding and linguistic diversity. Kahoot! demonstrated its adaptability to various languages, therefore promoting inclusivity of regional and minority languages. This review confirms that gamified learning, as exemplified by Kahoot!, can be leveraged to enhance learning processes and promote student-centered approaches through its technological advancements. However, the studies did not address the role of the teacher while playing Kahoot!, which the findings in this study hope to address.

Research Questions

To achieve the aims of this study, the authors were guided by the following questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of Kahoot! and gamification in FL learning?
2. What is the role of the instructor during Kahoot! games?

Methods

The aim is to capture the subjective meanings individuals attribute to their experiences, allowing for a deep understanding of their viewpoints.

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study was conducted during the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year to investigate students' perceptions of Kahoot! and gamification and the role of the teacher in FL classes. The participants in the study consisted of 16 undergraduate students (10 male, 6 female), aged 17 to 40, who took a beginning-level French course (FRE3001 – Basic French) as an elective at the University of Technology, Jamaica. They were from different majors: business administration (N = 5), law (N = 2), computer science (N = 4), communication and technology (N = 2), pharmacy (N = 1), economics (N = 1), and mechanical engineering (N = 1). Majority of the participants (N = 10) had prior exposure to French in high school and university, while (N = 6) did not have any. The majority of them (N = 11) were familiar with Kahoot! Before taking the course, (N = 5) were unfamiliar with the game.

The research employed a purposive sampling technique to select the participants for the study. Campbell et al. (2020) state that purposive sampling is used to select participants susceptible to yield appropriate and valuable information. Stratton (2024) notes that researchers select participants based on their presence in a population of interest, specific features, experiences, or other relevant criteria. Typically, purposive research is designed to gain insight into a specific research question.

Design of the Study

A mixed-methods approach guided this study. Shorten and Smith (2017) describe mixed-methods as a research approach whereby researchers collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data within the same study. Creswell (2014) states that this approach provides stronger inference than using either approach on its own. He further emphasizes that the overall objective of the mixed-methods research design is to provide a more comprehensive understanding, offering a richer picture that can enhance the description and understanding of

the phenomenon being studied. Put differently, mixed-methods research helps to understand the holistic picture by combining meanings obtained from different data collection tools.

The online questionnaire items were inspired by the relevant literature and adapted from Alawadhi and Abu-Ayyash (2021) and Anane (2024). The questionnaire is structured into two sections. The first section focused on gathering demographic and students' exposure and attitude towards French, while the second section included both open- and closed-ended questions that examined the impact of Kahoot! and gamification on FL learning and the role of the teacher in Kahoot! games. The primary questions are as follows:

- Do you find that Kahoot helps to improve your French?
- How frequently do you believe Kahoot should be used in class?
- Does knowing that the teacher will play Kahoot motivate you to revise your notes in advance?
- Are there any negatives to the Kahoot games?
- How do you feel when playing Kahoot?
- What are some benefits of using games in foreign language classrooms?
- What role should the teacher play throughout the Kahoot game?

Data collection & analysis

The data were gathered over a five-week period using a questionnaire designed in *Google Forms*. The questionnaire link was shared in class via the Moodle platform and subsequently via the class WhatsApp group. Although 18 students were registered in the course, only 16 completed the questionnaire, which was voluntarily done. Descriptive statistics, which highlight frequencies and patterns, were used to summarize quantitative data through the presentation of graphs, while content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Gheyle and Jacobs (2017) note that content analysis seeks to make sense of the (often unstructured) content of messages, such as audio recordings, images, texts, and symbols with the aim of determining textual meaning. The researchers pulled the qualitative responses from the questionnaire and underwent a phase of familiarization and observation to understand certain patterns. Thereafter, the data were systematically coded, by highlighting significant phrases, sentences, or ideas with relevant keywords. During the process, the researchers noted that some of the data were difficult to categorize into codes due to the diverse responses provided.

Validity and Reliability

Various measures were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. The use of quantitative questions followed by qualitative ones enabled triangulation and cross-verification of data, providing a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of the phenomenon studied. The questionnaire was independently reviewed by all the researchers (N = 4); subsequently, the items were refined to eliminate redundancy and enhance content validity.

Ethical Considerations

The data were stored and treated confidentially throughout and after the analysis process. The participants' information was anonymized and no personal data is traceable. The data were kept in a secure manner on a password-protected computer, accessible only to the lead researcher. All this information was communicated to the students prior to them completing the questionnaire.

Results/Findings

In terms of familiarity with Kahoot!, the majority of the respondents (N = 11) indicated that they had prior exposure to the platform, while the remaining (N = 5) did not have any previous knowledge of it. Those with prior experience were exposed to Kahoot! primarily in educational contexts, whether at the high school or university level.

Students' Perceptions of Kahoot!

When asked if playing Kahoot! helped with improving their French, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (N = 14, 87.5%) selected yes, while the remaining (N = 2, 12.5%) noted somewhat, as seen in Figure 2. This shows that Kahoot! is effective in FL learning.

Figure 2

The effect of Kahoot!' in improving students' French.

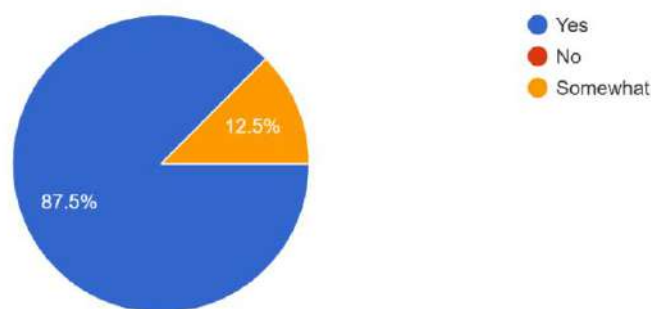


Figure 3 details how Kahoot! helps to improve students' French. Students learned and reinforced new vocabulary and grammatical rules (N = 15, 93.8%), learned and reinforced pronunciation (N = 12, 75%), and learned and reinforced cultural elements (N = 11, 68.8%).

Figure 3

Ways in which playing Kahoot! improved students' French.



Students (N = 4) explained how playing Kahoot! helped to enhance their French competence.

Excerpt 1: *“It helps with understanding more about the language being that there are multiple options, and with my lecturer he always explains why it couldn't be the others.*

Excerpt 2: “Kahoot helps reinforce vocabulary through fun quizzes that challenge me to recall words quickly. It also improves pronunciation, as some questions require listening and repeating phrases. The competitive aspect motivates me to focus on grammar rules to answer correctly, making learning enjoyable.”

Excerpt 3: “They help me learn everything in regards to French because our teacher asks us about the wrong answers instead of just telling us the right ones, which makes us think.”

Excerpt 4: “Very engaging and requires the recollection and application of your knowledge of French.”

In terms of the frequency with which Kahoot! should be played, the majority of respondents (N = 9, 56%) suggested playing it every class, (N = 6, 37.5%) suggested once a week, while (N = 1, 6.3%) mentioned doing it after each unit, as can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Frequency with which Kahoot! should be played.

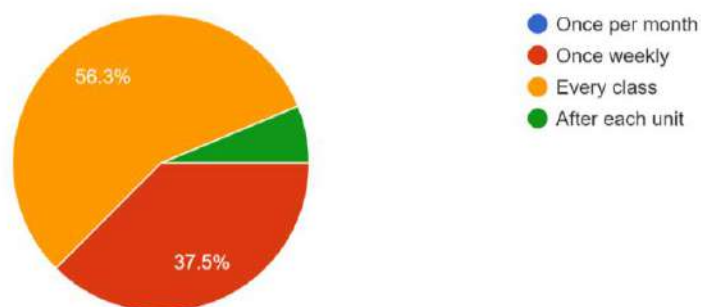
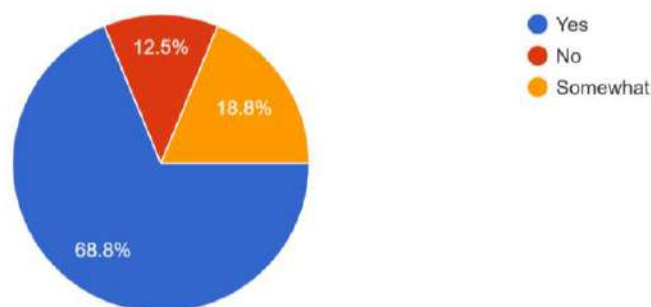


Figure 5 illustrates the correlation between prior knowledge of Kahoot! games and learner motivation to revise their notes. Most students (N = 11, 68.8%) indicated that having foreknowledge of the game prompted them to review their notes. Three students (18.8%) said it had some impact on them, while 2 (12.5%) reported that it had no effect on them.

Figure 5

Correlation between foreknowledge of Kahoot and learner motivation to revise.



Concerning possible negatives associated with playing Kahoot!, (N = 4) students indicated that they had none, while others mentioned problems related to connectivity and technical issues, and the pressures of the game being competitive.

Excerpt 1: *“Sometimes it doesn’t accept the answer.”*

Excerpt 2: *“The questions don’t come up on screen if using your phone. So if you join class using a phone, it might not be so much of a good idea to participate in the game.”*

Excerpt 3: *“One negative could be the pressure of the competitive environment, which might cause anxiety for some students. Additionally, technical issues can disrupt the flow of the game, leading to frustration.”*

Excerpt 4: *“Not necessarily a negative but it inspires and entices competition.”*

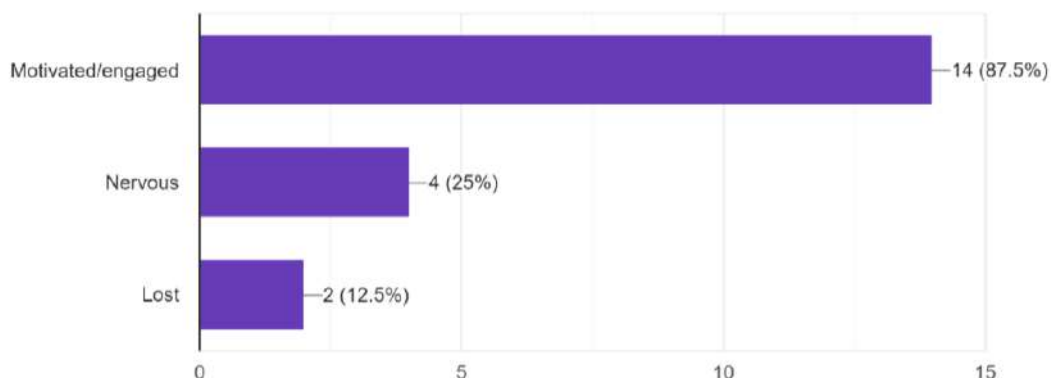
Excerpt 5: *“The questions are not shown on the game, but rather on Zoom which gives little to no time to respond.”*

Excerpt 6: *“Wifi connection”*

Figure 6 shows students’ feelings when playing Kahoot!. Most students (N = 14, 87.5%) reported being motivated, while (N = 4, 25%) felt nervous, and (N = 2, 12.5%) felt lost.

Figure 6

Students’ feelings when playing Kahoot!



Their self-reported declarations provide insight into the reasons behind their feelings.

Excerpt 1: *“It motivates me to compete with my classmates.”*

Excerpt 2: *“Being a part of the game keeps me engaged, resulting in learning opportunity. Whenever I get any wrong, after the explanation by the lecturer, I will learn what I did wrong.”*

Excerpt 3: *“I feel motivated because the game makes learning fun and interactive. However, I also feel nervous due to the competitive nature and the pressure to perform well against my classmates.”*

Excerpt 4: *“Because I have previous knowledge of the language, I just need refresher on some stuff; so when I see multiple words that are familiar with my memory, I get nervous because I don’t want to choose the wrong thing.”*

Excerpt 5: *“I am not familiar with most of the terms, so whenever a question is asked, I’m not sure what it is saying.”*

Excerpt 6: *“Kahoot is about speed and accuracy, so it is a challenge.”*

Excerpt 7: *“Nervous due to wanting to win and not sure if you will. Motivated/ engaged since you want to learn or revise words and statements.”*

Excerpt 8: *“It a competitive and engaging game.”*

Excerpt 9: *“I want to win so I am engaged and actively thinking.”*

Concerning the limitations of Kahoot!, a few students highlighted technical problems such as internet connectivity issues and device navigation difficulties, while others mentioned anxiety provoked by the competitive nature of the game.

Excerpt 1: *“The questions don’t come up on screen if using your phone. So if you join class using a phone it might not be so much of a good idea to participate in the game.”*

Excerpt 2: *“One negative could be the pressure of the competitive environment, which might cause anxiety for some students. Additionally, technical issues can disrupt the flow of the game, leading to frustration.”*

Excerpt 3: *“The questions are not shown on the game, but rather on Zoom which gives little to no time to respond.”*

Excerpt 4: *“Sometimes it doesn’t accept the answer.”*

Excerpt 5: *“Not necessarily a negative but it inspires and entices competition.”*

Excerpt 6: *“Wifi connection”*

Gamification in Foreign Language Learning

Among the primary benefits of gamification in FL teaching and learning, students highlight its positive impact on learner engagement and motivation, as well as the reinforcement and retention of content learned, and the overall classroom climate.

Excerpt 1: *“It keeps students engaged while having fun, helps them to be relaxed and eager to learn if they participate.”*

Excerpt 2: *“Games make learning more engaging and enjoyable, which can lead to better retention of information. They also encourage collaboration among students, fostering a supportive learning environment. Additionally, games often involve friendly competition, motivating students to improve their skills.”*

Excerpt 3: *“They provide an interesting way to learn the content and makes it more beginner-friendly and approachable.”*

Excerpt 4: *“It helps to familiarize with new words and reinforce the ones you already know. Additionally, it helps you to think quickly as there is a time frame in which you are to answer each question.”*

Excerpt 5: *“Competition builds motivation and engagement.”*

Excerpt 6: *“It helps you to understand more and be more focused.”*

Excerpt 7: *“It promotes learning engagement.”*

Excerpt 8: *“Reinforce what was learned in class”*

Excerpt 9: *“Improve the knowledge and learning”**Role of the Teacher during Kahoot! Games*

In terms of the teacher’s role during Kahoot! games, the respondents provided a variety of responses including facilitating the game, correcting and explaining answers, and motivating students.

Excerpt 1: *“Give the question then the answer after we have all answered and explain why.”*

Excerpt 2: *“The teacher should facilitate the game, provide encouragement, and clarify any questions or concepts that arise during the game. They can also offer insights into why specific answers are correct or incorrect, enhancing the learning experience.”*

Excerpt 3: *“Help the persons who get answers wrong understand the differences between the provided answers.”*

Excerpt 4: *“The teacher should continue the role of teaching and asking students about why certain results are incorrect and what makes them that way.”*

Excerpt 5: *“Explain and read through the questions, ensuring that any misunderstanding is cleared up.”*

Excerpt 6: *“Motivating competition”*

Excerpt 7: *“Guidance”*

Additionally, some students noted that the lecturer’s innovative approach and enthusiastic demeanor would encourage them to recommend the course to other students.

Excerpt 1: *“I would recommend the French course to other students. The structured approach, combined with interactive tools such as live worksheets and Kahoot, makes learning both effective and enjoyable. It also opens up opportunities to engage with a rich culture and community.”*

Excerpt 2: *“Our teacher is very cool and very informative as well as enthused. Sometimes his enthusiasm will rub off on you, and that is good. Having someone who loves what they do and enjoys the language they speak/teach is a very good motivator.”*

Discussion

The findings suggest overwhelming support for the inclusion of Kahoot! in FFL classes, as all the participants indicated that the game helped them, in some shape, to improve their French. Kahoot! has a positive influence on different language skills, such as vocabulary (93.8%), pronunciation (75%), grammatical (93.8%), and cultural development (68.8%), as supported by previous studies (Madden, 2022; Ahmed et al., 2022; Kapsalis et al., 2020). This explains why most students want the game to be played in every class (56.3%) or once weekly (37.5%). Unsurprisingly, therefore, most students (87.5%) reported feeling motivated and engaged – a common highlight of Kahoot! (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018; Chaiyo & Nokham, 2017). However, a few felt nervous and lost. Nervousness is linked to the competitive aspect of the game, as well as the quick response time required to select an answer (Madden, 2022). Those who are lost are either unfamiliar with the course content or the features of Kahoot! itself. It is therefore important for students to have the right composure participating in the game so that they are not consumed by anxiety, which can cause them to quit participating or select the wrong

answers.

The competitive nature of the game can have a significant impact on students' motivation and preparation (Bicen & Kocakoyun, 2018). To this end, most students (68.8%) indicated that they would revise their notes ahead of the game, while 18.8% said they would somewhat, once they were forewarned. Consequently, to encourage students to participate actively in the learning process, instructors could utilize gamification, especially in formative assessment contexts, by informing them of the game schedule. This would not only propel them to compete but also recall and apply the knowledge they have learned. Implementing a rewards system for podium finishers (see Figure 7) could also enhance students' motivation to perform well. Basnet (2022) notes that positive reinforcement boosts students' learnability and develops their confidence, knowledge horizon, and cooperative learning strategies in FL contexts.

Figure 7

Screenshot of podium finishers in Kahoot! games



Students encourage the incorporation of gamification in FL classes, highlighting benefits with regard to learner motivation and participation, knowledge retention, reinforcement, and application, and classroom climate. As mentioned by Rincon-Flores et al. (2022), gamification brings dynamism to the classroom, moving from traditional learning methods to creative and innovative strategies that increase learning attention and motivation (Pingmuang & Koraneekij, 2022). Educators who teach in online contexts should, therefore, diversify the learning environment by incorporating the technological tools that will not only engage learners but also improve their FL skills. As noted by a participant, “The structured approach, combined with interactive tools like live worksheets and Kahoot, makes learning effective and enjoyable. It also opens up opportunities to engage with a rich culture and community.”

Despite the many advantages of the game, students expressed some challenges that affect their participation, such as issues with wifi connection and difficulties manipulating their devices to play the game effectively. This supports Sianturi and Hung's (2023) study, which noted that students experienced technical errors such as low connection and inadequate expertise in using technology. Instructors, therefore, have to carefully guide students throughout the process, especially those unfamiliar with the game. Students need to understand the implications of using a smartphone versus a laptop to play the game, as the full extent of the game may not display on a phone. As one participant said, “Technical issues can disrupt the flow of the game, leading to frustration.”

The findings also suggest that the teacher plays a critical role throughout Kahoot! games, from preparation to implementation. The teacher decides on the questions to be asked, the format in which they are posed, the content to be addressed, the length of the game, and when it is played

during the class. Being able to customize the games helps the teacher to focus on specific and troublesome points and deliberately infuse cultural knowledge (Madden, 2022). Having the flexibility to incorporate the game at any point in a lesson helps the teacher to strategize to maximize on enriching learning opportunities. Additionally, the teacher facilitates the game, giving relevant instructions throughout, and corrects and explains the answer. Importantly, during the response moments, the teacher should not only focus on the correct answers but also ensure that students understand all response choices. As stated by one participant, “The teacher should continue the role of teaching and asking students about why certain results are incorrect and what makes them that way.” This approach helps them to mobilize their metacognitive skills (Madden, 2022). Additionally, the teacher should motivate students throughout the game. As explained in the theories of motivation, some students rely on extrinsic motivation to unearth their untapped potential. As a result, the teacher can encourage each student to work hard to make it onto the scoreboard and secure a podium finish.

Another important aspect entails the teacher’s enthusiasm for their subject area, as this can also influence students’ motivation and interest in the target language. This is necessary for foreign language enjoyment (FLE) – “a constructive accomplishment emotion with high motivation emerging from progressive learning action or assignment” (Liu et al., 2021, p. 2). FLE has profitable results for various FL learning outcomes, including FL motivation, commitment, and learning success (Li, 2019; Dewaele & Li, 2021). Pavelescu and Petric (2018) posit that FLE significantly affects communication with animated language instructors who provide diverse engaging and challenging classroom activities to keep learners engaged. FL learning, especially for young adults, requires energy, passion, and innovative pedagogy. Nowadays generations are digitally perceptive and surrounded by technology. Given that it occupies a significant part of their daily lives, infusing it in their learning will prove beneficial and improve pedagogical outcomes.

Conclusion

The study has found that Kahoot! and gamification bring several benefits to the teaching and learning of FLs. Kahoot! has a positive impact on students’ FL linguistic development in the areas of vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax, as well as cultural development. Given its affordances, students welcome the game being played regularly in classes, as it helps them feel engaged and motivated. Playing Kahoot! also helps with knowledge application, retention, and reinforcement. Additionally, Kahoot! and gamification bring creativity, dynamism, and innovation to the classroom, which help diversify pedagogical practices and shift away from traditional teaching methods through the integration of technology. Despite its positives, Kahoot! has its challenges, including issues with internet connectivity and technical problems. The competitive nature of the game can also provoke students’ anxiety. The instructor must prepare for these eventualities and be knowledgeable about how to guide students to resolve them, where possible. The instructor plays a vital role in the Kahoot! game, including preparation, implementation, and debriefing. The teacher should tailor the game to focus on areas where students struggle, thereby capitalizing on learning opportunities. While reviewing the responses, the teacher should not only focus on the correct answers but also on allowing students to explain their incorrect answers. This would help them to develop their metacognitive skills. Where there are gaps, the instructor can provide further explanations. Additionally, critical to gamification are the teacher’s level of enthusiasm and expertise in their content area. An instructor who is passionate about their work and competent in their subject discipline can also serve as motivation to their students. Overall, technology occupies a significant part of

students' daily lives; therefore, instructors should incorporate it in a fun way to enhance the classroom climate and learning experiences.

Future research could explore the use of Kahoot! and other gamified tools in French and other FL taught in the Jamaican classrooms at different levels of the education system. Additionally, as this study focused on Kahoot! in an online teaching context, it could be interesting to incorporate the game into in-person classes to determine its effects. Another study could investigate the correlation between gamification and foreign language excitement (FLEX). This would provide new insights into the concept and create avenues for frameworks.

This study had some limitations. The sample size ($N = 16$) is quite limited, making generalizations of the findings difficult. Therefore, they must be carefully contextualized. However, continuous research on gamification within the university context should be encouraged, even in subject areas such as Academic Literacy, which has vast number of students.

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Listening Comprehension in English Language Learning: Challenges, Strategies, and Students' Attitudes at a Private University

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: listening comprehension, language learning strategies, learner attitudes, perceptions

This study examined the challenges that English majors faced when attempting to enhance their listening comprehension, a crucial aspect of learning a foreign language. It also examined the strategies they used to solve these problems and their attitude toward learning to listen. The researchers employed both a questionnaire administered to 110 students and semi-structured interviews conducted with six students and six lecturers at a private university in Vietnam. This mixed-method approach was useful for gathering both general trends and detailed insights. The findings revealed common difficulties, including rapid speech, limited vocabulary, challenging accents, and difficulty understanding spoken language. Students employed various strategies to address these problems, including cognitive strategies (identifying keywords and inferring meaning), metacognitive strategies (planning and verifying understanding), and affective strategies (maintaining motivation), which aided them during their listening practice. The study also explored students' attitudes, which are both positive and negative toward listening comprehension. In addition, lecturers' perceptions of how students performed were also examined. Overall, the study aims to help lecturers and universities design more effective listening activities so that students can build confidence and succeed in learning English.

Introduction

In today's globalized world, English is a vital language for personal and professional growth (Nishanthi, 2018), and listening is frequently considered one of the most crucial of the four language skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening) to facilitate effective communication. As Purba (2020) argues, acquiring the skill of listening can pave the way for learning other language skills because listening is not just the hearing of sounds; rather, it is the close attention to interpret and understand spoken expressions (Diora & Rosa, 2020). When listening, we attempt to understand the speaker's words and meaning by applying our knowledge and experience; therefore, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) emphasize the crucial role of comprehension, i.e., without understanding, learning cannot occur. However, listening comprehension can be challenging, depending on factors such as the speaker's speed, accent,

topic, and attentional failure (Goh, 2000; Field, 2009; Vandergrift, 2007). Listening also varies in complexity, shaped by sounds, past experiences, and context (Bingol, 2017; Vani & Veeranjanyulu Naik, 2023).

In Vietnam, English is taught as a foreign language, and proficiency is often required for university admission and graduation. However, the school curriculum tends to focus on grammar and reading, with little emphasis on listening or speaking (Phan & Nguyen, 2023). The education system's exam-oriented approach creates this imbalance because it focuses on written assessments through multiple-choice grammar questions and reading comprehension tasks. The education system's emphasis on direct testing leads teachers and students to focus most of their time on tested areas, while communicative skills like listening and speaking remain underdeveloped in classroom practice. This results in students arriving at university with poor listening skills and facing significant challenges in comprehension (Mirza et al., 2021).

Despite growing interest in listening strategies, many studies examine challenges and solutions separately, so there is a lack of integrated research that connects listening difficulties, the strategies learners use, and their attitudes toward listening comprehension. Few studies have explored how these elements interact with each other or considered the role of external factors, such as teacher support and classroom environment. Alzamil (2021) is an example that overlooks the role of educators in shaping student motivation, particularly those who adopt a holistic perspective that supports both cognitive and emotional development. To address this gap, this study investigates the challenges, strategies, and attitudes related to listening comprehension among English majors in Vietnam. By focusing on learners' perspectives, this research aims to offer a more complete understanding of how to support listening development in EFL contexts and provide practical insights for teachers to design more effective listening instruction.

Literature Review

Why listening comprehension matters

Listening comprehension is a foundational component of second language acquisition. Far from being a passive activity, listening is a complex and active process that requires learners to decode sounds, recognize words, interpret grammatical structures, and integrate this input with prior knowledge to construct meaning (Buck, 2010; Rost, 2015). As Field (2009) explains, effective listening includes two important processes: bottom-up processing, which involves recognizing and decoding the speech signal, and top-down processing, which involves using context, background knowledge, and prediction. Vandergrift (2007) also highlights the importance of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Skilled listeners can process language, check their understanding, and adjust their strategies to improve comprehension. These viewpoints show that listening is a central part of communication and should be taught directly and practiced regularly to help learners build independent listening skills.

Additionally, the importance of listening comprehension is reinforced by the challenges learners face in mastering it. Namaziandost et al. (2020) emphasize that input-related issues and emotional factors, such as anxiety, significantly hinder EFL students' ability to understand spoken English. These difficulties highlight the need for targeted strategies, such as planning and monitoring, to support listening development. Similarly, Nushi and Orouji (2020) argue that successful comprehension depends on learners' ability to interpret messages using

knowledge of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, cultural context, and speaker accents—underscoring the cognitive and linguistic complexity of effective listening.

Furthermore, Purba (2020) supports earlier research by emphasizing that listening is a receptive skill that builds the foundation for developing other language abilities. This also highlights its important role as the main source of input for developing key skills such as speaking, reading, and writing. Moreover, Ghafar et al. (2023) depict that listening requires continuous mental engagement, requiring learners to understand, remember, and connect ideas while adjusting comprehension in real time based on new input. Given its complexity and importance, listening comprehension should be prioritized in curriculum design and classroom instruction.

Challenges in Listening Comprehension

For people learning a new language, understanding a speech may be the most challenging (Saraswaty, 2018). If one misses messages, miscommunication could follow (Sharif et al., 2024). Along with differences and the complexity of talks, several elements contribute to these difficulties, including speech patterns and poor audio quality (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Ali, 2020). Knowing the terms does not always help learners understand when they encounter unfamiliar accents (Phan & Nguyen, 2023). Furthermore, limited vocabulary and knowledge of grammar are also significant obstacles (Hermida, 2021; Tran et al., 2021). Tran et al. (2021) found that Vietnamese English majors struggled with unfamiliar topics, especially when combined with unclear messaging, accented speech, or fast-paced dialogue. To address these challenges, learners employed strategies such as focusing on key terms and interpreting nonverbal cues, including gestures. Additionally, Bui (2024) reported that students faced difficulties when topics were uninteresting or unrelated to their personal experiences, and that poor audio quality and a lack of background knowledge (schema) further hindered comprehension.

Moreover, for students who are not familiar with reduced forms, such as “wanna” and “gonna”, as idioms and informal expressions, listening comprehension may be more difficult (Rungsinanont 2024). The comprehension of spoken information can be impeded by the lack of aids in recordings, as students often rely on written words or facial expressions during in-person interactions (Fadili et al., 2024). Finally, affective factors such as anxiety (while doing tests) also impact listening performance. Learners can find it hard to concentrate or may feel less confident if they do not understand the message right away (Li et al., 2023). Thus, improving listening comprehension requires not only language knowledge but also strategic practice and positive learner attitudes.

Strategies for Listening Comprehension

Based on Vandergrift (1999), who classifies these techniques into cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies, researchers have emphasized the importance of listening techniques in enhancing students’ understanding ability and facilitating their grasp and recall of content. These three categories provide a useful framework for teaching and learning listening comprehension in foreign language classrooms.

Employing the active use of cognitive strategies can boost learner engagement and proficiency (Anggarista & Wahyudin, 2022). Using techniques such as note-taking and summarizing can assist students in improving their comprehension (Al Ghazo, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2024). Cognitive strategies focus on helping learners process the information they hear, make connections with what they already know, and remember key points. The studies have consistently highlighted how these strategies can impact student involvement and competency.

Good listeners, according to the term ‘metacognitive strategies’ discussed by Jyoti (2020), are students who can plan, monitor, and reflect on their listening process. Goh & Vandergrift (2021) emphasized their role in promoting learner autonomy and improving self-regulation. These strategies encourage students to take control of their learning by being aware of how they listen and by adjusting their approach when needed. These strategies are employed to manage, evaluate, and change learning styles to regulate or control them. Although the impact on metacognitive awareness was less clear (Pei et al., 2023), recent studies suggest that self-directed online listening can be supported by metacognitive cycles to improve listening comprehension. For example, learners may first set goals for a listening task, check their understanding during the activity, and then reflect afterward to improve next time.

Socio-affective tactics refer to the interactions students have with others to either manage their emotions or facilitate their learning. These include group projects, clarifying questions, and maintaining composure while listening. These strategies are especially useful for lowering anxiety and increasing confidence, which are common challenges in listening activities. For instance, Fathi et al. (2020) and Chriswiyati (2022) found that learners using socio-affective strategies could reduce listening anxiety and improve comprehension. Meanwhile, Prayogi et al. (2019) observed that students had better performance in listening when they used emotional regulation and worked together with classmates. Additionally, as Namaziandost et al. (2019) suggest, to overcome these sources of challenges, foreign language learners are required to be strategic listeners. This means knowing when and how to apply different strategies in various situations. As a result, learners who are familiar with several approaches and know how to apply them can select the most appropriate ones for each listening task. Teachers can help by guiding learners in identifying which strategies work best for different types of listening exercises.

Students’ Attitudes towards Listening Comprehension

Students’ attitudes play a crucial role in the development of listening comprehension skills. Attitudes refer to learners’ feelings, beliefs, and opinions about language learning, and they can significantly influence motivation, effort, and overall performance. In particular, attitudes toward listening in English, such as whether learners view it as useful, achievable, or enjoyable, can strongly influence their willingness to engage in listening tasks, the effort they invest in improving their skills, and the degree of satisfaction they experience during the activity (Goh, 2000). While positive attitudes often lead to better learning outcomes, negative attitudes may hinder effective listening. Therefore, attitude is a key factor influencing learners’ intentions and behaviors in language learning (Getie, 2020). As Saraswaty (2018) observes, students who perceive listening as frustrating, overly difficult, or irrelevant are more likely to disengage from the learning process or perform poorly in listening tasks. In contrast, those with positive attitudes tend to approach listening with greater motivation, openness, and strategic awareness, making them more likely to benefit from instructional activities and develop stronger listening comprehension over time.

When students consider listening as important and beneficial, they tend to invest time and effort in improving their skills. According to Vandergrift (2005), learners who perceive listening as a valuable skill are more likely to use strategies and remain motivated. In contrast, if they view listening as overly difficult or unengaging, they may become disinterested and avoid listening tasks, particularly when coping with the speed of text delivery (Graham, 2006).

It is essential to acknowledge the interplay between emotional, cognitive, and instructional factors in EFL contexts. For instance, Fathi et al. (2020) found that English majors who reduced listening anxiety and increased self-efficacy after metacognitive strategy instruction expressed more positive attitudes toward English listening tasks. Teachers also play a vital role in shaping

students' attitudes by fostering a supportive learning environment. As noted by Paramole et al. (2024), teachers can improve students' learning by giving helpful feedback, using interesting materials, and making the classroom atmosphere more encouraging. In addition, teachers' attitudes, teaching methods, and the use of different listening materials can increase students' motivation and involvement in learning (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the difficulties encountered by English majors at a private university in Vietnam in understanding spoken English, examine the techniques they employ to address these issues, investigate lecturers' views on effective methods for improving listening ability, and assess students' perspectives on their listening experiences and learning processes.

To achieve its objectives, the study aims to address the following questions.

1. What challenges do Vietnamese English majors face in listening comprehension?
2. What strategies do these students use to overcome listening comprehension challenges?
3. What strategies do lecturers perceive as effective in enhancing listening comprehension?
4. What are students' attitudes toward listening comprehension and related learning experiences?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of a private university in Vietnam, where English is taught as a major subject. The university provides a structured English language program that includes listening courses during the first and second academic years.

The researchers employed a small group of participants due to the limited time available for the investigation, which consisted of six English lecturers and 110 English majors in their first and second years. The students were selected for the study because they are currently in the primary process of developing their English speaking and listening abilities, and the lecturers were incorporated to provide additional information from the perspective of a teacher. The researchers were able to identify valuable ideas within a brief period, despite the group being relatively small, which enabled them to complete the study on time. Among the student participants, 6 were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews to explore their attitudes and personal experiences with listening comprehension. Lecturers who have been teaching listening skills for at least three years were invited to participate in the interviews to provide insights into the challenges students face and effective strategies to enhance their listening comprehension.

All participants were selected through convenience sampling, based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. This sampling approach allowed the researcher to efficiently collect relevant data, although it may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Design of the Study

This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, strategies, and attitudes in listening comprehension.

Quantitative data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, which was distributed online via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of 31 content questions, divided into seven parts, and employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The questionnaire had two main sections: demographic information and content questions.

The demographic section asked about students' gender, year of study, English listening experience, and their feelings about their listening level, and the content section focused on two topics:

- (1) Problems that students face when listening to English, namely vocabulary, fast speech, unclear pronunciation, and lack of topic knowledge. These problems were grouped into four areas: the dialogue content, language difficulties, the listener, and the speaker.
- (2) Strategies students use to improve listening, including metacognitive (planning and checking), cognitive (repeating, guessing, using keywords), and socio-affective (asking others, managing anxiety) strategies.

This questionnaire was adapted from Huong et al. (2021) and modified slightly to align with the objectives of this study. In contrast, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams. These interviews were conducted with selected students and lecturers to explore their attitudes, experiences, and suggestions regarding listening challenges and strategies.

In summary, this approach enabled the researchers to obtain two types of information: quantitative results revealed broad patterns, and qualitative insights provided those patterns with greater depth and meaning.

Data Collection

A Google Form with clear instructions was distributed to the students over six weeks. However, there were only 110 responses collected. The questionnaire, consisting of 31 Likert-scale items across seven sections Vietnamese language for better understanding. Its content regarding listening challenges and strategies was adapted from Huong et al. (2021) to suit this study's objectives. After that, the responses were analyzed using SPSS, version 22.0. Before the questionnaire was officially distributed, a pilot study was conducted to test its reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated at 0,943, indicating a high level of consistency across each part and ensuring the items accurately measure the research concepts.

Regarding the qualitative data, six English-major students and six lecturers participated in 25-minute semi-structured interviews conducted via MS Teams. The interviews were conducted and recorded in Vietnamese with participants' consent, and then they were transcribed and translated into English. A faculty expert revised the interview questions, and researchers cross-checked the translations for accuracy. To make the analysis more reliable, the researchers coded some of the interview transcripts separately. Then, they compared their results to see if they understood the answers in the same way. If there were any differences, they discussed and resolved them together to ensure the data was more accurate and trustworthy. The transcriptions were sent back to the interviewees for approval of their accurate ideas.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS version 22.0. Descriptive statistics were used to identify common listening challenges and examine students' attitudes toward listening comprehension. The responses were organized by variable and presented descriptively.

For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers were analyzed using content analysis to explore participants' attitudes and strategies related to listening comprehension. Content analysis was chosen because it helps identify common ideas, recurring words, and significant patterns in the interviews. It is useful for understanding people's experiences and opinions, and helps group similar answers together simply and clearly.

To ensure confidentiality, participants for interviews were coded anonymously: lecturers as L01–L06 and students as S01–S06. This coding system preserved anonymity and supported accurate referencing during analysis.

Results

Question 1: What challenges do Vietnamese English majors face in listening comprehension?

Table 1

Listening Comprehension Challenges

Items	n	Mean	SD
1. I find it challenging to understand the dialogue when there are too many new words.	110	3.62	1.00
2. I find it hard to follow dialogues that use collocation idioms.	110	3.74	1.00
3. I find it challenging to understand when the dialogue has complex grammatical structures.	110	3.57	0.95
4. A long dialogue makes me feel tired or lose concentration while listening.	110	3.76	1.00
5. I find it challenging due to a lack of background knowledge about unfamiliar topics.	110	3.68	1.00
6. I find it challenging to listen to the conversation if I am not interested in the topic.	110	3.32	1.10

Table 1 presents 6 items that illustrate the challenges in the content of the dialog, indicating that these areas are the most critical challenges to comprehension. On average, the most challenging aspect of the content that students face in listening comprehension is long dialogues, which cause them to lose concentration ($M = 3.76$; $SD = 1.00$). Next, many students posed a significant challenge in facing collocations and idiomatic expressions ($M=3.74$; $SD=1.00$). Encountering new or unfamiliar words in dialogues presents a notable challenge for students ($M = 3.62$; $SD = 1.00$), while a lack of background knowledge ranks as the third most critical difficulty ($M = 3.68$; $SD = 1.00$). Regarding complex grammatical structure, it remains a challenge for students ($M = 3.57$; $SD = 0.95$). In addition, the uninteresting topic is less challenging but still significant ($M=3.32$; $SD=1.10$).

Table 2

Challenges associated with linguistic factors

Items	n	Mean	SD
7. I have a challenge following conversations if the sentences are long and complex.	110	3.62	0.98
8. Unclear pronunciation from the speaker makes it hard for me to understand.	110	4.00	0.93
9. I struggle to notice signals that show a change in the conversation's points.	110	3.47	1.17
10. I stop listening and think about the meaning of unfamiliar words.	110	3.24	1.06

As shown in Table 2, a large number of participants reported that the challenge related to linguistic factors was unclear pronunciation ($M = 4.00$; $SD = 0.93$). This suggests that students frequently encounter difficulties in understanding speakers with unclear pronunciation. The second challenge concerns following conversations when sentences are long and complex ($M=3.62$ and $SD=0.98$). For the third challenge in this table, some students often stopped to think about unfamiliar words in a conversation. This indicates that students continue to struggle with vocabulary in listening comprehension ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.17$). The least challenging factor is the difficulty in noticing signals that indicate a change in the dialog, which means that participants find it hard to follow and comprehend the meaning in listening tasks ($M = 3.24$; $SD = 1.06$).

Table 3

Challenges Encountered by Students in Listening Comprehension

Items	n	Mean	SD
11. I cannot focus because I have to both find the answer and listen to the conversation.	110	3.45	1.08
12. I lose track of the conversation because I focus too much on understanding vocabulary.	110	3.33	1.07
13. I find it hard to understand the conversation due to limited vocabulary and grammar.	110	3.46	1.10
14. I am very slow at inferring the meaning of words in the conversation.	110	3.20	1.05
15. I find it hard to recognize and understand unfamiliar accents.	110	3.44	1.07

Table 3 presents the challenges faced by students in listening comprehension. Firstly, Unfamiliar vocabulary becomes a significant challenge that students encounter in listening comprehension ($M=3.46$; $SD=1.08$). However, students can infer the meaning of words in conversation, which accounted for the lowest score ($M = 3.20$; $SD = 1.05$). Additionally, finding the answers and listening to the conversation simultaneously is a third challenge for students ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.08$). Moreover, unfamiliar accents from the speaker are one of the significant challenges ($M=3.44$; $SD=1.07$). Students tend to lose track of the conversation because they focus too much on understanding vocabulary ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.07$).

Table 4

Listening Comprehension Issues Due to Fast and Unclear Speech

Items	n	Mean	SD
16. I struggle to understand words in complex phrases when the speech is fast.	110	3.74	1.01
17. I can not summarize the information from the conversation due to the fast pace.	110	3.46	1.08
18. I have difficulty when the speaker does not pause between sentences.	110	3.68	1.02

As shown in Table 4, students encountered difficulties in understanding a dialogue where the speech was fast and unclear. That means the speaker is the variable that causes difficulties in students' listening comprehension. Three difficulty items can be highlighted as the most common, such as understanding words in complex phrases when the speech is fast ($M= 3.74$ and $SD= 1.10$), when the speaker does not pause between sentences ($M= 3.68$ and $SD=1.02$), and summarizing the information of the dialogue due to fast-paced ($M= 3.46$ and $SD=1.08$).

In short, students responded to four challenges that affect their listening comprehension, including linguistic factors, speech delivery, and the interaction between the listener and the

speaker. Specifically, the majority of students claimed that unclear pronunciation by the speaker makes it hard for students to understand. Additionally, most students feel tired or lose concentration while listening to a long conversation. Furthermore, many students struggle with complex phrases and grammar structure in fast speech. Finally, students have to deal with unfamiliar words and grammar in the conversation.

Question 2: What strategies do these students use to overcome listening comprehension challenges?

Table 5

Employing Metacognitive Strategies during Listening

Items	n	Mean	SD
19. I make sure I understand the purpose of the listening activity.	110	3.80	0.91
20. I have a clear plan in mind about how to listen.	110	3.59	0.87
21. I identify errors after completing a listening passage	110	3.61	0.94
22. After finding the mistakes, I replay the conversation to correct and improve them.	110	3.80	0.89
23. I identify my mistakes I often make and learn from them for future listening.	110	4.00	0.85

The findings for the five questions concerning metacognitive strategies to overcome challenges faced by English major students are presented in Table 5. The most commonly applied strategy was to identify mistakes to learn from for the future listening task ($M = 4.00$; $SD = 0.85$). Specifically, replaying the conversation to listen again and understanding the purpose of listening were the same, as evidenced by a Mean of 3.80, with standard deviations of 0.89 and 0.91, respectively. Next, identifying errors after completing a listening passage is also a strategy that can help students develop listening comprehension ($M = 3.61$; $SD = 0.94$). The least applied strategy was having a clear plan for how to listen.

Table 6

Employing Cognitive Strategies during Listening

Items	n	Mean	SD
24. I pay attention to stressed words in the conversation.	110	3.85	0.92
25. I use note-taking strategies to highlight and note important information.	110	3.68	0.97
26. I use available information to analyze answers and predict outcomes	110	3.94	0.86

In terms of applying cognitive listening strategies, the most commonly employed strategies are focusing on the main ideas, followed by the detailed ideas ($M = 3.95$; $SD = 0.90$). Moreover, using available information to analyze and predict outcomes is an effective strategy that students employ more frequently ($M = 3.94$; $SD = 0.86$). Additionally, noticing the stress in the conversation is ranked 3rd ($M=3.85$; $SD=0.92$) and using note-taking ($M=3.68$; $SD=0.97$), which suggests that many participants recognize its inefficiency. Overall, the data indicate strong engagement with cognitive strategies, particularly those involving highlighting main ideas and predicting the context of the conversation through their background knowledge.

Table 7

Employing Social-Affective Strategies to Enhance Listening

Items	n	Mean	SD
27. I ask my lecturers to explain the unfamiliar words or phrases of the dialogue.	110	3.48	1.02
28. The teacher and I preview the listening questions before starting the dialogue.	110	3.78	1.00
29. I assess my understanding by confirming the content with classmates.	110	3.66	0.89
30. I collaborate with my friends to reduce stress during listening practice.	110	3.82	1.00
31. I ask my classmates when I do not understand the content of the dialogue.	110	3.78	0.98

Meanwhile, participants use social-affective strategies and agree that it is one of the ways to help them be positive in the listening class. The preference in this strategy is collaboration with friends ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.00$). Next, the lecturers help students to review the question and ask classmates when they do not understand the content of the dialog is one of the ways to help students in developing their listening comprehension with $M=3.78$ and $SD=1.00$ and 0.98 , respectively). In addition, assessing understanding by confirming content with classmates is assessed effectively ($M = 3.66$; $SD = 0.89$). When encountering vocabulary difficulties, students ask their lecturers for clarification of unfamiliar words or phrases in the dialogue ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.02$). According to the given result, students also require social-affective strategies to enhance their listening comprehension. The support from friends and lecturers helps students ensure their understanding and reduce stress during listening classes.

In summary, metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategies are surveyed to explore how students' listening comprehension is affected. Regarding the means of listening comprehension strategies, the cognitive strategies ranged from 3.68 to 3.94, indicating a relatively high level of usage among participants, and most students use them to help enhance their listening comprehension. The metacognitive strategies ranged from 3.59 to 4.0, indicating that students frequently employed these strategies to overcome challenges in listening comprehension. Meanwhile, the social-affective listening strategies had mean scores ranging from 3.48 to 3.74, reflecting a slightly lower but still moderate level of use.

Question 3: What strategies do lecturers perceive as effective in enhancing listening comprehension?

All six lecturers emphasized the critical role of listening strategies in language learning. They believe that students need effective approaches to overcome listening difficulties and that integrating strategy training into instruction helps improve listening comprehension. In particular, cognitive strategies, especially note-taking, were consistently highlighted as essential. They viewed note-taking as a practical tool for organizing and retaining information, understanding main ideas, and enhancing overall comprehension.

Several lecturers pointed out the benefits of note-taking:

“Note-taking in cognitive strategy is useful when listening multiple times, as it helps remember key information for answering questions. It helps students focus on other aspects of the text, such as keywords.” [L01]

“The most effective one is note-taking. Students should know how to take notes of the main ideas and how to spot the details that are important to the content of the topic.” [L02]

“Note-taking is probably the most used strategy that I encourage students to use.” [L03]

Others emphasized its role in comprehension and learning transfer:

“I used note-taking to ensure students not only grasped the content in English but also understood it well enough to validate their comprehension across languages.” [L04]

“Note-taking helps students recall and organize what they have heard. Understanding the structure and flow of the listening text is also crucial for comprehension.” [L05]

“The ability to take notes when listening is very important. They need to recall what they have listened to and understand the organization, the structure of the audio.” [L06]

Overall, they consistently promoted cognitive strategies, particularly note-taking, as fundamental tools for enhancing students’ listening skills and comprehension performance.

All lecturers acknowledged the significance of metacognitive strategies—planning, monitoring, and evaluating—as essential tools for enhancing students’ listening comprehension. These strategies were seen as integral to both classroom instruction and students’ independent learning processes.

Half of the lecturers emphasized the value of planning as a foundational step in helping learners focus on key elements of a listening task. The following opinions proved that point.

“Planning would be good because it’s going to help you with what you need to look for and what you need to prepare to get ready.” [L01]

“Planning is the most important step, in my opinion. Having a clear purpose helps them listen more effectively by focusing on key details rather than trying to process everything at once.” [L05]

“My students need to have a plan to predict, to analyze the questions before listening... and to get some knowledge about the topic beforehand.” [L06]

They also stressed the importance of combining monitoring and evaluation to improve comprehension and learning outcomes:

“Monitoring would help you to keep track of what you’re doing... Evaluating is the kind of reflection when you look at yourself again and learn something new.” [L01]

“I usually ask students to use monitoring most in the low-level classes when they cannot follow long audio... and use evaluating to check their understanding.” [L02]

Beyond the classroom, some lecturers connected metacognitive strategies to self-directed learning, especially in preparation for listening tests or real-life communication:

“Metacognitive strategies are more about how students use them in their self-study process to improve their listening comprehension.” [L03]

“Yes, of course, this is something I strongly emphasize. Each phase of planning, monitoring, and evaluating could have a responsibility in enhancing listening comprehension.” [L04]

The lecturers acknowledged that social-affective strategies, such as peer collaboration, group work, and emotional support, can foster a more engaging and supportive classroom environment. These strategies were primarily viewed as useful for promoting class participation, reducing anxiety, and improving learner motivation.

However, most lecturers agreed that while these approaches create a positive atmosphere during lessons, they are not directly linked to enhancing listening comprehension, especially since

listening assessments are individual tasks. As a result, social-affective strategies were primarily recommended for in-class activities, not for test preparation or skill development.

“Socio-affective strategies improve collaboration and group work skills, but I don’t believe they improve listening skills. They just make the class less boring.” [L01]

“Collaborative technique is useful for class activities. However, since listening is tested individually, I rarely use them for skill development.” [L02]

“Group work creates a more exciting environment. Students support each other instead of facing tasks alone, which can feel too rigid for one student.” [L03]

They highlighted the distinction between classroom interaction and formal assessments:

“We do collaborative listening in class—pairs, small groups, or peer work—but during assessments, listening is individual. That’s the key distinction.” [L04]

“I use peer collaboration sometimes. It’s effective in letting students share ideas and give feedback, but not a central strategy for improving listening skills.” [L05]

“Yes, but not very often. Peer collaboration helps students learn from each other’s perspectives, but it’s not a focus on listening development.” [L06]

In conclusion, all six lecturers agreed on the importance of including listening strategies in language teaching. They especially emphasized cognitive strategies, with note-taking seen as the most helpful for improving understanding, organizing ideas, and remembering information. Metacognitive strategies, such as planning, were also considered important because they help students stay focused and take more control of their listening tasks. Although social-affective strategies were recognized for encouraging participation and emotional support in class, they were seen as less essential for improving listening skills.

Question 4: What are students’ attitudes toward listening comprehension and related learning experiences?

The interviews revealed that the students possessed various attitudes towards listening comprehension and their learning experiences. Some demonstrated responsibility, determination, and positivity, whereas others were only able to provide descriptions of negative emotions such as frustration and self-doubt. Overall, their perceptions were based on personal experience and specific learning environments.

Most students responded to listening challenges with a proactive and open attitude. They emphasized the importance of taking charge of their learning and were willing to face difficulties rather than avoid them. Common approaches included completing tasks carefully, engaging actively in class, and seeking opportunities to improve independently. Their positive outlooks were reflected in the following comments.

“I’m accepting my weakness, so I’m facing it with a positive, more positive attitude.” [S01]

“I’m still trying to improve it, and it has improved a lot, so it’s quite positive to me.” [S02]

“I am studying in a huge environment like a university, so everybody is trying their best, so I want to catch up with them, and I try my best with a positive attitude” [S03]

“... just thinks that it is a word or information, and I can have a chance to improve and understand it.” [S04]

However, two students acknowledged feeling discouraged when they struggled to understand spoken content. Their reactions reflected moments of low confidence or disappointment in their performance during the learning process.

“I react negatively because I feel disappointed in myself” [S05]

“I tend to react negatively sometimes because I feel that I do not know the answer.” [S06]

Despite occasional challenges, most students viewed classroom exercises not as burdens, but as useful tools for development. They often accepted assignments willingly and recognized their value in helping to identify and address weaknesses in their listening skills.

“Yes, I accept the exercises given by my teacher because these exercises help me identify my weaknesses and allow me to work on improving them.” [S01]

“I am satisfied. If it’s easy, I will do it. And if it’s too difficult, I’ll complain to my teacher. But overall, the amount of exercise that I have right now it’s just right for me.” [S02]

“I am willing to do it when I receive a quiz or exercise from my teacher” [S03]

“Yes, I always do it seriously because I think it’s very useful, and it’s like a thing to practice more for the tests and exams” [S04]

“If the topic interests me, I get engaged. Overall, I’m willing to do the exercises. [S06]

Students also emphasized the significant influence of teachers on their attitudes toward listening comprehension. Positive reinforcement, encouragement, and supportive behavior from teachers appeared to enhance motivation and engagement. In contrast, overly strict or critical feedback could discourage students and affect their confidence.

“Teachers have a big impact. If they’re supportive, students will engage more. But strictness can make us feel disconnected.” [S01]

“Encouraging feedback is helpful. But when a teacher says ‘you’re wrong’ without support, it can affect students negatively.” [S02]

“At university, teachers are passionate and attentive. That influences me positively.” [S03]

“Teachers are very important because teachers tell us what to do.” [S04]

“I think Vietnamese teachers could influence us positively because they understand us, they know us more than English teachers.” [S05]

“If teachers are positive, their students will reflect that. Listening needs support in class.” [S06]

In general, English majors expressed a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to improving their listening comprehension. They demonstrated positive attitudes by actively engaging with tasks and showing resilience in the face of difficulty. While a few students reported negative feelings such as doubt or discouragement, these were less common. Most students viewed listening exercises as valuable learning tools. Moreover, the role of teachers emerged as crucial—supportive teaching practices were seen to foster positive attitudes and engagement, while critical or unsympathetic behavior could hinder motivation and confidence.

Discussion

With the survey and semi-structured interview results collected, it can be concluded that students in English language majors still face challenges in listening comprehension, and the role of effective strategies in overcoming these challenges is significant. Moreover, their attitude toward listening experiences and classes is also highlighted through their reactions and feelings. A total of 110 students majoring in English responded to the questionnaire, along with six students and six lecturers who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

Firstly, most of the students agreed that a long dialogue is a key challenge in its content. They feel tired and find it challenging to listen to and comprehend these dialogues. Hence, they face losing concentration while listening. This result supports the finding by Hermida (2021), who noted that when students encounter lengthy conversations, they easily forget what they have heard and lose concentration, which can lead to a misunderstanding of the content.

Secondly, many students identified the speaker's pronunciation as one of the most challenging aspects. They often struggle to listen and understand individual words. Unclear pronunciation challenges listening comprehension and reduces learning effectiveness. As a result, students had trouble identifying key ideas in conversations, affecting their performance in listening tasks and answering related questions. This finding aligns with a study by Namaziandost et al. (2019), who reported that incorrect pronunciation is a significant challenge in listening comprehension for learners of a foreign language.

Thirdly, the students face limited vocabulary, grammar, and unfamiliar accents, which make it difficult for them to understand conversations. This result is consistent with the study conducted by Dong (2022), where students found it challenging to understand the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary while listening. Moreover, the difficulties identified in the research included poor grammar and unfamiliar vocabulary, which prevented participants from understanding the meanings of spoken sentences (Hermida, 2021). Additionally, they cannot manage both tasks simultaneously, including finding the answer and listening to the conversation. That led to misinformation and reduced comprehension.

Lastly, struggling to understand complex phrases in fast speech is a common issue. Formal expressions and idioms became more challenging. This finding is related to the result of Saputri et al. (2025), i.e., fast speech hinders students' ability to understand what they hear, resulting in challenges in looking for the main information in the conversation. As Namaziandost et al. (2019) emphasized, to overcome such challenges, foreign language learners are required to be strategic listeners.

From the lecturers' interviews and students' questionnaire responses, the study identified three types of strategies used by students to enhance listening comprehension: cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies.

In this study, the findings showed that students chose cognitive listening strategies with the highest mean score. This is because they often use the keywords in the questions, predict the answers based on their background knowledge, or pay attention to the teacher's emphasis in the conversation. This supports Vandergrift (1999), who stressed that effective listeners employ inference, key words, and activation of previous knowledge to comprehend spoken texts. Similarly, teachers also agreed that cognitive listening strategies are prioritized to help the students tackle listening comprehension problems, which is in line with Goh (2000), who pointed out that cognitive strategies are the most direct, readily available intervention that both teachers and learners immediately come to mind to improve comprehension.

Metacognitive strategies were also found to be effective. Students prefer to identify their mistakes after each listening task. This reflection helps them avoid their frequent mistakes and pay attention to them the next time. As a result, it can be considered that evaluating their performance is a good way for them to enhance their listening comprehension. These findings align with the study by Rahimi and Katal (2012), which examined the impact of metacognitive awareness on listening performance, specifically, learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening processes.

Students' attitudes also played an important role in the research. The study highlighted the attitudes of English major students toward their learning experience in developing listening comprehension. Both positive and negative attitudes were found during the students' learning process. One of the most important aspects of their attitude is that they accepted the challenges and then found suitable strategies to overcome them. These results are consistent with those reported in Haryanto and Adalta's research (2022); the students had positive attitudes toward listening and learning, and they perceived the importance of the listening practice to improve their skills. This validates the association between challenges, strategies, and learners' attitudes.

Moreover, teachers can also influence students' attitudes. According to the findings of Le & Le (2022), teachers have a significant impact on shaping students' attitudes to learn English, particularly in terms of teacher personality, professional knowledge, and communication. In the present study, students reported that educators who have a positive, supportive, and encouraging approach helped them be more engaged and work harder during class activities. On the other hand, a strict teacher may cause students to be irresponsible, avoiding questions or refusing assignments in class. This could affect a student's performance in listening comprehension.

Overall, the relationship between listening comprehension challenges and strategies is significantly relevant. Although students are studying English as their major, they still face difficulties with listening comprehension. The strategies that English-major students frequently use to overcome these challenges, along with their attitudes, can influence their performance during the learning process. Due to the importance of listening comprehension, students are expected to take responsibility for their learning, participate in listening activities, complete assignments, and respond positively to supportive teachers. It can be concluded that students generally show a more positive attitude in listening classes. Therefore, listening comprehension challenges, the use of strategies, and students' attitudes toward their listening experiences are essential areas to highlight and explore in the research.

Conclusion

This study revealed many difficulties that English-major students face with listening comprehension. These include long conversations, losing concentration, poor pronunciation, limited vocabulary, complex expressions, unfamiliar accents, and fast speech. To manage these problems, both students and lecturers suggested using strategies such as identifying keywords, using background knowledge, and predicting content. Reflecting after listening also allowed students to understand and fix their mistakes. Peers and teachers also assisted in motivating the students. Despite these challenges, most students were willing to improve and were prepared to take responsibility for their learning, and they also acknowledged that teachers played an important role in their growth. Providing students with more opportunities to practice listening, utilizing effective materials, and demonstrating how to apply strategies can make learning easier and more effective. Helping students focus on the main idea, reflect on what they hear,

and stay confident can build their skills over time. A positive classroom environment and teacher support can also help students stay motivated.

This study had some limitations. It was completed in a short time and with a small group of 110 students, so the results may not apply to all English-major students. The interviews with six students and six teachers provided helpful insights, but more voices are needed in future studies. Future studies should involve more students, with more time. In particular, experimental studies should be conducted using pre- and post-tests to assess progress more accurately. Furthermore, they could also be conducted to explore differences between male and female students, or to investigate students' attitudes towards other English skills besides writing, such as speaking or reading.

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The Effects of Oral Explicit Correction Techniques on High School Students' English-Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: explicit corrective feedback, speaking skills, high school EFL, student interaction, second language acquisition

Oral corrective feedback (CF) is a crucial tool in second language acquisition; however, its application in Vietnamese schools in the Mekong Delta region remains underexplored. This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, combining qualitative classroom observations and a quantitative survey, to investigate how English teachers utilized explicit verbal error correction in the classroom. Specifically, four English teachers were selected as the subjects of observation. Each teacher was directly observed during an English lesson, focusing on the feedback strategies they employed when students made errors in communication. Additionally, 171 students from these classes participated in a closed-ended questionnaire to collect learners' views on the effectiveness and impact of explicit corrective feedback on their learning process. The data were analyzed using content analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data. The integration of field observations and learner feedback allowed the study to provide a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the implementation of explicit corrective feedback.

Introduction

Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF) has been extensively studied in the field of language education, particularly in supporting learners to recognize and correct their mistakes during the learning process. Studies by Chaudron (1977), Lyster and Ranta (1997), Sheen (2004, 2007), Lyster and Saito (2010), and Sheen and Ellis (2011) have confirmed the important role of CF in helping learners develop their language skills, including the capability to recognize and correct mistakes in communicative situations. CF can be considered a key factor in increasing language accuracy and improving learners' communicative skills (Ellis, 2009).

According to Sheen and Ellis (2011), CF not only helps learners recognize their own errors but also creates opportunities for them to develop the ability to self-correct, a critical skill in

learning second languages. In fact, mistakes are a critical part of the language acquisition stages, and can appear in the form of lexical, grammatical, or pronunciation errors (Edge, 1989; Hendrickson, 1978). Therefore, providing timely corrective feedback can prevent the reinforcement of these errors, helping learners to progress in using the target language (Li, 2014). Corrective feedback is considered a significant tool for enhancing students' accuracy in a language and supporting their overall development (Long, 1996).

However, although CF has been recognized for its obvious effects in improving learners' language abilities, there is still a lack of research on its application in oral communication, especially in the environment of general education in Vietnam. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the application of explicit correction techniques by teachers to high school students in English-speaking regions of the Mekong Delta.

Literature review

Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF)

Oral Explicit Correction has been studied and defined in various ways in the area of language teaching and learning. Long (1991) found that explicit correction is considered a form of feedback in which the teacher directly corrects the student's mistakes, providing the correct form of the language, and asks the learner to repeat the error correctly. Sheen (2004) also asserts that explicit corrective feedback occurs when the teacher precisely shows the error and supplies the correct form, helping the learner to identify and correct their own language error.

In this way, explicit correction is considered a highly effective method for improving students' language accuracy (Lyster and Ranta, 1997). Loewen (2012) describes this technique as a direct intervention in the student's mistakes, where the instructor not only points out the mistakes but also provides specific information about the correct form. By highlighting errors and providing the correct form, explicit error correction creates targeted learning opportunities that help students improve their ability to use the language more accurately.

Yoshida (2008, as cited in Phuong and Huan, 2018) also emphasized that explicit error correction is often used in correcting students' pronunciation errors, especially in second-language classes. This method is not only effective in detecting and correcting errors, but also helps students become aware of phonetic or grammatical elements that need improvement during the learning process. Also, according to Ellis (2015, p. 23), this technique involves direct feedback from the teacher on the errors that students make during speaking, helping learners to correct them immediately.

In this research, explicit oral error correction is understood as "any feedback from a teacher that supports students in noticing and correcting their mistakes by giving the correct language form or clear guidance on how to fix the errors" (Phuong and Huan, 2018, p. 3). Using this method in English-speaking classes helps students improve their language accuracy and encourages them to recognize and self-correct mistakes naturally, which in turn enables them to communicate more effectively.

The Contribution of Explicit Correction in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Oral Explicit Correction can be considered very important in SLA because it helps students to recognize and correct their mistakes in a transparent and direct manner. In SLA, "acquisition" can be understood as the process where learners gain the ability to use and understand linguistic elements correctly in real-life conversations (Ellis, 2015). Ellis (2015, p. 23) also mentions that "acquisition" can be measured by how well learners can use specific language features

accurately and naturally when communicating in real-life situations.

Explicit correction really has importance in SLA. According to Lyster et al. (2012, p.10), “CF is not only beneficial but may also be necessary to push learners forward in their L2 development”. This technique has an important position in the transfer of language development from intentional second language use (L2) to spontaneous and reflexive use of the second language, helping those who learn to use the language accurately in real-life communicative situations (Ranta and Lyster, 2007; Lyster and Sato, 2010). This finding is consistent with sociocultural theory, which posits that corrective feedback helps students transition from external support (provided by instructors) to internal self-regulation, as asserted by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), Nassaji and Swain (2000), and Sato and Ballinger (2012).

In this context, explicit error correction helps learners identify and correct errors immediately, thereby promoting more accurate language use in communication (Ellis, 2006). Meaning negotiation theory (Pica, 1994; Long, 1996; Gass, 1997) suggests that progress in SLA occurs when learners engage in the process of negotiating meaning in communication, particularly when they encounter misunderstandings or make errors in their language use. In this process, explicit error correction techniques provide “negative evidence” of learners’ language inaccuracies, while simultaneously providing “positive evidence” of correct language use (Long, 1996). It is these adjustments that help learners modify their output and gradually improve their language abilities (Ellis, 2015).

Lyster and Saito (2010) assert that the knowledge gained from explicit error correction situations in communication tends to be applied more by learners in spontaneous communication contexts, thereby helping learners maintain accuracy in language use and increase their ability to communicate effectively. Phuong and Huan (2018) also noted that explicit error correction, particularly in pronunciation, can yield significant benefits for students, enhancing their pronunciation accuracy and increasing their confidence in communication.

Therefore, explicit oral error correction techniques not only help students identify and correct errors but also effectively promote the process of second language acquisition, thereby improving students' communication skills in English learning environments.

Types of Explicit Oral Correction

Verbal explicit correction is a crucial method in language teaching, enabling students to identify and correct their errors directly. The following are common types of explicit correction used in language teaching:

a) Sentence correction

This method involves teachers giving students sentences with corrections so that they can learn from them. In Hernández Méndez and Reyes Cruz’s 2012 study, they found that this technique refers to the purpose of providing explicit information about the correct form.

For example:

- Student: "I have a dog."
- Teacher: "It's not 'has', it's 'I have a dog'."

This sentence form not only highlights the error but also helps students learn how to use the correct verb with the subject 'I'.

b) Providing grammatical explanations

Teachers providing explicit grammatical explanations of errors can help students achieve a deeper understanding of the grammatical structure or vocabulary. According to Ellis (2009), metalinguistic feedback includes providing explicit comments on the type of error, such as using error codes or brief grammatical descriptions.

For example:

- Student: "She don't like it."
- Teacher: "We use 'doesn't' instead of 'don't' with singular subjects like 'she' in the present simple."

c) Correcting questions

When students make errors in the use of question words or question structures, teachers can correct the error by giving the perfect question form (Ellis, 2009).

For example:

- Student: "Why you are late?"
- Teacher: "We have to put the auxiliary verb before the subject: 'Why are you late?'"

The instructor of the classes not only points out grammatical errors but also provides the correct sentence patterns to support students' comprehension and enable them to ask questions more accurately in communication situations.

Effects of Oral Explicit Corrective Feedback

Research has shown that explicit correction has good impact on improving students' grammatical precision. In 2008, Bitchener and Knoch found that giving explicit corrections helps students enhance their grammar accuracy in writing and also in real-life communication. This method can support students in reducing mistakes when interacting and help them understand important grammar rules faster.

However, applying explicit corrective feedback should be flexible and suitable for each student. In some situations, if the feedback is too strong or occurs too frequently, it may make students feel less confident and impact their natural communication. Because of this, teachers should carefully consider when using this feedback method to ensure that learners still feel comfortable and willing to participate in communication activities without worrying too much about being criticized.

Learner's Uptake in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Uptake is considered a crucial concept in second language acquisition (SLA) research, which refers to learners' immediate reaction to a teacher's feedback. It includes cases where learners correct their mistakes after receiving feedback, as well as when they do not correct the errors or still require additional support to improve (Lyster and Ranta, 1997). Uptake is not only about fixing errors, but also related to students' ability to understand and remember the information provided by the teacher's feedback. According to Lightbown and Spada (2013), learner uptake can be seen as "what learners notice and/or retain in second language input or instruction," meaning that uptake occurs not only in error correction but also during the process of learning and memorizing grammar and vocabulary points.

Uptake is considered a "discourse move," a way of communicating in class, rather than a clear measure of language learning (Mackey, Gass, and McDonough, 2000). However, some studies

suggest that uptake may be connected to language learning and can help learners process and memorize language structures more effectively (Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen, 2001). Uptake also reflects how learners understand and respond to teacher feedback, which can affect their learning and support them in improving their language accuracy.

Types of Acquisition: "Repair" and "Need (to be) Repair(ed)"

Lyster and Ranta (1997) had already classified learner acquisition into two main types: one is "repair" and the other is "need (to be) repair(ed)." The "repair" type occurs when the learner corrects their mistake immediately after receiving feedback from the teacher. For example, in a conversation, if the teacher points out a grammar mistake and the student immediately provides the correct answer, this is considered successful acquisition.

On the other hand, "need repair" acquisition occurs when the learner is unable to correct the mistake or continues to use the incorrect form after receiving feedback. For example, in the following conversation:

Teacher: "How much do you tip in a fast-food restaurant?"

Student 1: "No money." (vocabulary mistake)

Teacher: "What's the word?" (asking for a suggestion)

Student 1: "Five... four..." (need correction)

Teacher: "What's the word... in a fast-food restaurant?" (give more hints)

Student 2: "Nothing." (correct answer)

Teacher: "Nothing, yeah. Okay, what tip should you leave for the following..."
(continue lesson) (Lyster and Ranta, 1997)

In this example, Student 1 still did not completely correct the vocabulary mistake and required additional hints from the teacher to provide the correct answer. Meanwhile, Student 2 had already provided the correct answer and completed the correction process, which is considered a successful acquisition. This shows that not all learner responses will lead to correct answers immediately, and in some cases, the teacher still needs to provide additional support for students to fully correct their mistakes.

The Importance of Reception in SLA

Reception plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of corrective feedback in the ESL classroom. It helps teachers to check how well students understand the information and improve their language ability. Some researchers argue that reception does not directly indicate formal learning, but it can be a sign of the learning process, demonstrating that students are able to comprehend and apply linguistic knowledge. Reception theory emphasizes the notion that when learners notice and respond to feedback, they can become more aware of their own mistakes and make progress in language learning (Panova and Lyster, 2002).

Moreover, reception also helps teachers change their teaching and feedback methods, ensuring that students not only receive feedback but also truly understand and apply it in real conversations. Some research finds that when teachers encourage students to think and find the correct answer independently, it can improve their learning and help them use language more effectively (Ellis, 2006).

Previous Studies Related to this Project

Many researchers have found that explicit correction (EC) is significant in helping students to improve their language skills, especially in second language classrooms. These correction techniques not only support learners in finding and correcting their grammar and pronunciation mistakes, but also play an essential role in improving their confidence and English

communication skills. Case studies by Lyster and Ranta (1997), Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001), and Safari (2013) all demonstrate that EC has a positive impact on helping students recognize their errors and develop their language skills.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) demonstrated that EC is a valuable method for learners to identify and correct grammatical and pronunciation errors, particularly in French language classes. However, they also note that the effectiveness of this method is not always high, as students do not always notice or apply corrections properly. This means that using EC should be suitable for various learning contexts and student groups.

Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001) studied EC in ESL classes and found that this method can be very helpful for students in correcting grammar mistakes. However, they also point out that student success depends on factors such as age, language level, and teacher's experience. Explicit feedback may be most effective when used in a class with close teacher support, allowing students to remember and apply grammar rules correctly.

Another study by Suzuki (2005) finds that the uptake rate of EC feedback varies significantly in each case, especially when students do not fully understand the correction. This shows that it is essential to adjust error correction methods according to students' abilities and demands, ensuring that feedback is understood and utilized effectively.

Recent research, such as Amador (2022), Nguyen and Tran (2023), and Roussel and Williams (2021), has also confirmed that EC is effective in improving students' speaking skills, especially in regions like the Mekong Delta. Amador's (2022) study shows that students who receive EC feedback are more likely to correct their mistakes compared to those who do not receive feedback, and their pronunciation and grammar also improve better. Similarly, Nguyen and Tran's (2023) research, which focuses on first-year students in the Mekong Delta, found that EC makes a significant improvement in students' pronunciation and grammar when they participate in oral presentations. However, these studies also suggest that EC's effectiveness depends on whether students are ready to learn and what kind of mistakes they need to correct.

Besides, Roussel and Williams' (2021) study finds that EC not only helps students' language skills but also makes them more confidence in communication. This is particularly important in English class because students often feel shy about using English in real-life situations. They also suggest that EC should be applied flexibly to fit with each student's ability and classroom conditions.

Moreover, other research, such as Wang and Wang (2020) and Pham and Nguyen (2022), also shows that EC plays an important role in developing students' language skills. However, they recommend that EC should go together with other teaching methods to be more effective. Especially in Mekong Delta area, where students may find it hard to learn English, EC should be used in a way that matches with their needs and situations.

Overall, oral corrective feedback is a clearly effective way to improve English speaking skills for learners, especially in areas like the Mekong Delta. However, to make it work best, teachers should use this method in a flexible way that matches each student's learning condition, and also combine it with other techniques to help students improve their learning.

Research gap

The research gap in studying about using explicit correction (EC) in teaching English speaking skills to high school students in the Mekong Delta can be pointed out below:

Although many studies have already explained the effects of EC feedback on learning foreign languages, especially in ESL classrooms, a significant gap in research remains regarding how

this method applies in the Mekong Delta, where the culture and learning habits differ. Most research before focuses on other learning environments, like English classes in big cities or English-speaking countries, but not much specific research talks about how EC use in countryside, especially for high school students in the Southwest of Vietnam (Amador, 2022; Nguyen and Tran, 2023; Roussel and Williams, 2021).

Additionally, although existing research indicates that EC is useful for improving language skills, there is a lack of in-depth analysis on its effectiveness in the specific situation of first-year university students, particularly in speaking skill lessons. Previously, most studies have focused on grammar and pronunciation, but few have discussed how EC affects students' confidence and real communication ability, especially in normal conversations where students often feel shy and lack confidence in speaking English (Roussel and Williams, 2021; Wang and Wang, 2020).

In addition, previous studies often overlook the significant factor of differences in students' ability to receive feedback, particularly those with weak or uneven language backgrounds. Although EC can help students identify and correct errors, applying this feedback effectively can be difficult when students do not fully understand or absorb the corrections given (Suzuki, 2005). Therefore, further research is needed on how to adapt EC to different groups of students in terms of their level, receptivity, and attitude towards feedback.

Finally, there is currently no research specifically examining the combination of EC with other teaching strategies to maximize the effectiveness of this method, especially in speaking skills classes at schools in the Mekong Delta. Therefore, research is needed to explore these factors, thereby proposing more flexible and suitable teaching methods in this specific learning environment.

The above research gaps present opportunities to study further and effectively apply EC in enhancing the English-speaking skills of K-12 students in Soc Trang Province, while expanding the understanding of the impact of this method in various learning environments and with students from diverse backgrounds in other languages.

Research Questions

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

1. What kinds of explicit corrections do teachers utilize in English-speaking lessons for high school students?
2. How often do they utilize these kinds of explicit corrections in their classrooms?
3. How often do students receive explicit corrective feedback during their learning?

By focusing on the explicit error correction strategies teachers use in English-speaking classrooms, this study not only provides a deeper understanding of teaching methods in the high school context but also makes significant contributions to improving pedagogical practices in language teaching in Vietnam.

Methods

Pedagogical Setting

In this project, the author uses a mixed-methods descriptive case study to investigate how teachers in a Vietnamese secondary school context provide explicit corrective feedback on students' speaking performance in the classroom.

To answer three research questions related to the types, frequency of use, and uptake of explicit corrective feedback in secondary English-speaking lessons, this study employs a qualitative and quantitative descriptive research method.

The study is designed as a case study, focusing on English classes in four public secondary schools in Soc Trang province, Vietnam. The aim is to examine how teachers use explicit corrective feedback in their teaching practice, as well as to collect data from students about their experiences of receiving this type of feedback.

Participants

Four teachers, who taught speaking skills to high school students, were selected via purposive sampling based on their experience (a minimum of 5 years) and qualifications (TESOL certification). Simultaneously, 171 students (Grade 10, intermediate proficiency) were chosen via convenience sampling to participate in a questionnaire and collect data on the frequency with which they received explicit corrective feedback during their learning process.

Data were collected through two main sources:

Classroom observations: Each teacher was observed during an English-speaking lesson. The observation form was designed to record the types of explicit corrective feedback that teachers used (e.g., direct correction, corrected repetition, and correct model provision), as well as their frequency during a lesson.

Student questionnaire: A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to students after each lesson to gauge their views on the extent to which they received explicit corrective feedback from their teachers and the degree to which they paid attention to and responded to this type of feedback.

Data collection & analysis

To conduct observations for this project, the author carried out the research primarily in the actual classrooms of the participants. The data from the classroom observations were analyzed using deductive content analysis with a coding framework based on Lyster and Saito (2010) to identify the types of feedback used and their corresponding frequencies. Inter-coder reliability was ensured through double-coding by two researchers, achieving 85% agreement. Meanwhile, the data from the questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage) to reflect the level of students receiving explicit corrective feedback in the classroom.

The integration of quantitative (survey) and qualitative (classroom observation) methods ensures both reliability and depth in addressing the three research questions posed. The quantitative survey data were triangulated with the qualitative classroom observations using an explanatory sequential design.

Results/Findings

This study presents three parts, each corresponding to one of the three research questions. These parts include types of explicit corrective feedback (CF) strategies and how often teachers use them to provide feedback on students' speaking performance as well as the distribution of students' acquisition after each oral CF strategy.

Types of oral explicit corrective feedback strategies

Table 1.

Distribution of explicit corrective feedback types

Feedback type	Teacher 1	%	Teacher 2	%	Teacher 3	%	Teacher 4	%	Total	%
Sentence correction	18	60%	10	56%	19	61%	14	64%	61	60%
Correcting questions	8	27%	6	33%	7	23%	5	23%	26	26%
Providing grammatical explanations	4	13%	2	11%	5	16%	3	14%	14	14%
Total	30	100%	18	100%	31	100%	22	100%	101	100%

The distribution of oral explicit CF types can be seen in Table 1. The findings reveal that sentence correction was the most popular type of feedback used by the four high school teachers in their classes, ranging from 56 to 64 percent, with an overall rate of 60 percent in a forty-five-minute class. The following case can illustrate the high frequency of sentence correction in the classes observed:

Table 2.

Distribution of Students' Uptake Following Oral Explicit Corrective Feedback

Student (S)	<i>He go to school from Monday to Friday.</i> (Error – Using the wrong form of verb)
Teacher (T)	<i>No, it's not go. It's 'He goes to school from Monday to Friday.'</i> (Feedback – Sentence correction)
S	<i>He goes (Uptake-Repair) to school by bus</i> (Error – Pronouncing the wrong sound for 'bus' like 'push')
T	<i>by bush or by bus?</i> (Feedback – correcting question)
S	<i>by bus (Uptake-Repair). He like music class very much.</i> (Error – Using the wrong form of verb)
T	<i>He likes music class very much.</i> (Feedback– Sentence correction)
	(Teacher 1, February 19th)

After sentence correction, correcting question is the second most preferred type of explicit corrective feedback by teachers. In fact, 26% of the feedback from the four teachers falls into this category. Providing grammatical explanations is the least popular type of feedback used by teachers, perhaps because it takes time to explain the grammar points and review old lessons for students.

*Distribution of students' uptake following each of CF strategies***Table 3.**

Distribution of students' uptake in each of observed classes

Types of student uptake	Class 1 (Teacher 1)	%	Class 2 (Teacher 2)	%	Class 3 (Teacher 3)	%	Class 4 (Teacher 4)	%	Total	%
Repair	13	52%	15	63%	20	74%	18	75%	66	66%
Needs-repair	7	28%	3	13%	5	19%	6	25%	21	21%
No uptake	5	20%	6	25%	2	7%	0	0%	13	13%
Total	25	100%	24	100%	27	100%	24	100%	100	100%

The distribution of K-12 students' uptake in the four classes' observation is illustrated in Table 3. Explicit corrective feedback from teachers promotes students' uptake more than no uptake, with 87% and 13% respectively. This may imply that students can recognize the feedback given by teachers and respond accordingly, indicating a high motivation to learn English. In addition, of the two types of repair, students prefer repair uptake (at 66%), which is approximately two-thirds of the CF provided by those teachers. The rate for no uptake for explicit CF strategies is quite low (13%).

To examine the effectiveness of types of verbal explicit CF strategies in promoting students' uptake, the author conducts the following distribution:

Table 4.

Distribution of students' uptake following each of CF strategy types

Explicit CF types	Student uptake types						Total	%
	Repair	%	Needs-repair	%	No uptake	%		
Sentence correction	35	53%	10	48%	5	38%	61	60%
Providing grammatical explanations	13	20%	5	24%	2	15%	14	14%
Correcting questions	18	27%	6	29%	6	46%	26	26%
Total	66	100%	21	100%	13	100%	101	100%

According to the statistics in Table 4, the data indicate that sentence correction is the most outstanding and effective type of explicit correction, at 60%, because students' uptake of this kind of correction strategy was the most prevalent (accounting for 53% of all repair uptakes). It can be concluded that this method helps students recognize and correct their mistakes immediately. However, 48% of students in need of repair uptake and 38% have no uptake means that there are still a number of students who have not recognized their errors or have not made exact corrections for themselves immediately.

Correcting questions accounts for 26% of the feedback, but it has a 46% no-takeup rate. This

means that students may have difficulties recognizing errors when their teachers only provide questions instead of offering direct feedback. However, 27% of students still correct their mistakes successfully, which means that it can be effective in certain cases, particularly when students recognize their own errors.

Providing grammatical explanations is the least used strategy, with only 14% in the feedback. Similarly, the effectiveness of this strategy is significantly lower than that of sentence correction. In fact, only 20% of students can correct their mistakes successfully, while 24% in needs-repair uptake, and 15% have no uptake. This means that explaining grammatical points can help students understand more deeply but it does not bring instant effectiveness in correcting mistakes in speaking.

Discussion

Regarding verbal explicit corrective feedback that teachers employ to assess their students' speaking performance, three main strategies can be observed: sentence correction (60%), correcting questions (26%), and providing grammatical explanations (14%). Sentence correction is the most preferred type of these teachers, followed by correcting questions, while providing grammatical explanations is the least used strategy. To save time in the classroom, these teachers encourage students to correct their own errors with the knowledge they acquired in previous classes.

In terms of the frequency of using explicit CF, the four teachers employed most of the strategies at varying levels. It is also noticeable that these teachers preferred the sentence correction strategy most, followed by correcting questions and providing grammatical explanations. It can be inferred that choosing explicit CF is influenced by the preference of teachers, students' proficiency and especially the various corrective feedback strategies for errors that students made. Moreover, with the same error, teachers can employ different strategies to help their students recognize and correct their mistakes. For example, in an observed class, there was a conversation like the following:

Table 5.

Example of Verbal Explicit Corrective Feedback and Students' Uptake

Student 1 (S1)	<i>He become a hardworking student in his class</i> (Error – wrong form of verb)
Teacher (T)	<i>He becomes a hardworking student in his class</i> (Feedback–Sentence correction)
S1	<i>He becomes a hardworking student in his class. He tries to solves every...</i> (Uptake–Repair)
T	<i>He tries to solve</i> (Feedback–Sentence correction)
S1	<i>*keeps silent*</i> (No uptake)
T	<i>Is there anything else?</i>
Student 2 (S2)	<i>He tries to solve every exercises.</i> (Error – plural noun)
T	<i>He tries to solve every exercise.</i> (Feedback–Sentence correction)
S2	<i>He tries to solve every exercise.</i> (Uptake–Repair)

The outcomes of this study align with previous research on explicit corrective feedback in

teaching speaking skills, particularly in enhancing student accuracy and confidence (Sari, 2023). This finding is similar to the results of the current study, in which sentence correction was the most commonly used method by teachers to correct students' grammatical mistakes (60%).

Additionally, in 2009, Ellis emphasized that the effectiveness of corrective feedback depends on the type of errors students make, as well as their language proficiency level. This finding is consistent with the current study's finding that the choice of corrective feedback type is clearly influenced by teacher preference, student proficiency, and, in particular, the various forms of corrective feedback used to address errors made by students.

Moreover, this study found that teachers can employ different strategies to correct the same error, depending on the classroom context. This finding is consistent with Sheen's 2007 study, which suggests that a combination of different strategies by teachers helps students recognize and correct their errors more effectively.

In terms of the distribution of students' reactions towards oral explicit CF strategies in this study, all oral explicit CF was used, leading to students' participation. Sentence correction was the most successful in facilitating correction uptake (60%), followed by correcting questions (26%) and providing grammatical explanations (14%). This means that sentence correction and correcting questions were effective in encouraging students to recognize their errors, even when uptake of forms of correction was considered.

Regarding the various oral corrective feedback (CF) methods that prompt students to respond, the outcomes of this study are somewhat similar to those of Bitchener and Knoch (2008), which found that providing explicit correction helps students improve their grammar accuracy in speaking skills. This result is in contrast with the study of Lyster and Ranta (1997) which stated that explicit correction is an ineffective CF strategy.

The differences in the findings of those studies can be attributed to variations in research scenarios and factors across diverse classroom contexts, such as students' age, English proficiency levels, target language, teachers' preferences, and teaching experience (Suzuki, 2005; Kaivanpanah et al., 2015). As a result, an explicit CF strategy that seems effective in one study may yield contrasting results in another study, and vice versa.

Self-reflection

This project provided an insight into oral explicit CF strategies used, the ways students interact with these strategies, and the frequency of these strategies in the classroom. In fact, the results regarding frequency provided insight into teachers' preferences and the distribution of strategies in the classroom. Therefore, researchers can identify which explicit CF strategies were used most and more effective in promoting students' learning. In addition, by observing teachers' activities and analyzing explicit correction strategies in EFL classes (such as sentence correction, correcting questions, and providing grammatical explanations), the study provided valuable information about these strategies and contributed to informing teaching activities that improve students' learning results. Moreover, the study focuses mainly on how students interact with explicit correction strategies, which helps researchers understand how learners manage and combine corrected versions, a process that is crucial in understanding how learners identify and make corrections. This contributes to the theories about second language acquisition (SLA) by clarifying the process of identifying errors and correcting them.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that there are hidden limitations in the SLA process for this project. Although this project provided valuable information about classroom activities and students' interactions, it cannot capture the full complexity of SLA processes, which are

influenced by individual, social, and contextual factors. Additionally, this qualitative study may be influenced by the authors' views and interpretations of the results. This project also provided an instant photo of the interactions in the classroom at a specific time, which is limited in capturing long-term effects on language development or the trajectory of SLA over time. For further research, it is suggested that longitudinal studies tracking students' learning progress would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sustained impact of explicit corrective feedback on SLA.

Conclusion

The purpose of this descriptive study is to investigate the types of verbal explicit CF given by teachers to their students' errors in EFL classes, the frequency of those methods, and the extent to which students engage with corrective feedback. The outcome is that sentence correction is the most popular strategy used by teachers, following by correcting questions and providing grammatical explanations. In addition, sentence correction promotes a high level of repair uptakes, but a number of students need further repair or show no uptakes, indicating they struggled with recognizing errors or making immediate corrections. Correcting questions had a high no uptake rate, suggesting that indirect feedback can be challenging for students. Finally, providing grammatical explanations had lower effectiveness in improving students' spoken accuracy.

The findings of this study contribute to the progress of teachers by understanding how to support their students in high schools in Vietnam to improve their speaking skills. This study not only enhances knowledge about how to make explicit CF, which influences student participation in speaking activities, but it also provides teachers with valuable insights into the effects of explicit CF in speaking instructions. This study reminds teachers that they can use a variety of strategies, including new ones, to promote and support students in developing their speaking skills.

This study suggests important teaching ideas to enhance the speaking skills of students in EFL classes, particularly those in K-12. To use these strategies more effectively in teaching English, it is essential that teachers attend seminars or workshops where they can learn to provide effective feedback.

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Biodata

Pham Hoang An is an English teacher at a high school in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. With 15 years of teaching experience, I have worked with students of diverse educational backgrounds. My interests include English language teaching methodologies and adapting instruction to meet learners' varying levels of cognitive development.

Challenges and Strategies in Teaching English for Medical Purposes: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: English for Medical Purposes (EMP), medical terminology, curriculum design, vocabulary acquisition

English for Medical Purposes (EMP) has emerged as a critical subject in medical education in non-English speaking countries, enabling professionals to access research, communicate internationally, and update evolving healthcare practices. This literature review aims to provide an overview of the challenges and strategies in the teaching of EMP. The review reveals that the key challenges include complex medical terminology, limited contextual practice, and inadequate teacher training. Proposed strategies involve structured morphological analysis, needs-based curriculum design, and multimodal teaching methods, such as role-plays and simulations, to enhance students' engagement and retention. Interdisciplinary collaboration between English lecturers and medical professionals is also emphasized to align instruction with real-world applications. These findings contribute to ongoing efforts to refine EMP instruction in Vietnam, including future studies to explore discipline-specific EMP approaches and assess the impact of pedagogical innovations on students' medical English proficiency.

Introduction

Since the late 20th century, English language learning has become universally important for increasing career prospects in non-English-speaking countries (Mohamad, 2023; Smith, 2015). To improve the effectiveness of English education for non-native speakers, a wide variety of teaching methods have been adopted (Pirmani et al., 2023). Among the approaches based on learners' professional needs, English teaching is classified into two main categories: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the former of which focuses on general English skills required for academic study, while the latter specializes in English skills tailored to specific professions or fields (Ruiz-Garrido et al., 2010). This article focuses on the latter approach.

In order to fulfill the specific needs for learners in their professional fields, ESP has to meet certain specific criteria. Firstly, it is required to create courses based on detailed analysis of

learners' goals so as to ensure desired, effective outcomes (Hutchinson, 1987). Moreover, this approach emphasizes real-life materials, practical language use, and technical terminology specific to various professions such as engineering, law, and medicine (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991).

English for Medical Purposes (EMP) is one of the main branches of ESP. Specialized in English terminology for anatomy, diseases, and medical treatments as well as special skills in clinical communications, EMP became a compulsory subject in medical colleges and universities (Chu, 2017; Wette & Hawken, 2016). This subject is aimed at building skills in clinical communication (Zrníková & Bujalková, 2018) and at training learners to write medical reports, patient records, and other documents essential in healthcare. Consequently, EMP focuses on teaching medical vocabulary related to anatomy, diseases, treatments, and procedures (Dirckx, 2006; Niazi, 2012). In addition, it also addresses cultural sensitivity and effective communication with patients from diverse backgrounds (Liang, 2024).

In Vietnam, EMP serves as a compulsory subject in medical colleges and universities (Bui et al., 2024; Michelle, 2019). A number of textbooks and resources have been adopted to facilitate the learning process, ensuring that Vietnamese medical students can make the most out of these modules and become capable and well-qualified for their future medical career (Minh et al., 2023; Le et al., 2021). Despite its importance, the process of teaching and learning EMP has not yet been studied systematically and extensively enough to provide a comprehensive understanding of its challenges and potential improvements.

Research Objectives

This study aims to address two objectives:

- (1) To identify the challenges faced in teaching EMP, and
- (2) To propose strategies to improve the EMP teaching process.

By investigating these aspects, this article seeks to contribute to the enhancement of EMP education, ensuring that it meets the medical students' professional and practical needs, especially in Vietnam.

Literature Review

This section reviews the relevant previous studies to investigate important elements relating to teaching medical English, including the role of English in medicine, the teaching of medical English, the roles of translation in teaching medical English, and features of English medical terminology, from which research gaps and questions are identified.

English Language in Medical Field

English is a crucial tool for professionals to acquire technical knowledge in their field (Bharathi & Pushpanathan, 2022), as professional texts (i.e., books, encyclopedias, and journals) were written in English (Pritchard & Nasr, 2004). In fact, 52% of the most visited websites were displayed in English (ETS Global, 2020). In the last decades, the mastery of English not only enhanced knowledge acquisition, accelerated career growth (Nguyen, 2024) and offered easy access to infotainment, but under such emergent situations as the COVID-19 pandemic, it also saved lives by providing vital, up-to-date information regarding the latest research on the microbes, their nature, growth, control as well as drug interactions (Bharathi & Pushpanathan, 2022).

The international dominance of English in scientific fields resulted in the emergence of English for Medical Purposes in the late 20th century (Ferguson, 2012; Micic, 2008). Its main goals were to help medical learners master specific technical vocabulary, idioms and improve communications in English in medical settings (Niazi, 2012). Furthermore, the increasing international collaborations in medical specialists resulted in a growing interest in the study of medical terminology and its translation (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022).

Mastering medical English was essential for professional medical performance and development in multicultural contexts, where medical staff attended international conferences and seminars or participated in exchange programs (Niazi, 2012). Under such circumstances, the lack of proficiency in English or proper use in medical terms would impede information exchange (Antic, 2007; Bharathi & Pushpanathan, 2022). Secondly, a good command of medical English was important when one wished to publish medical articles in reputable journals (Antic, 2007; Niazi, 2012). Additionally, as most medical texts, websites, literature review and journals were published in English, the capacity of understanding medical terms and reading medical English was necessary for doctors and nurses alike to conduct word study (stems, prefixes, suffixes) (Niazi, 2012) and to update latest medical information and discoveries (Milosavljević et al., 2015).

Furthermore, most medical students found it extremely important to have high English proficiency to perform their studies and jobs effectively, with reading ranked as the most important skill, followed by writing, speaking third, and listening fourth (Niazi, 2012).

The teaching of English for Medical Purposes (EMP)

As English for Medical Purposes (EMP) was the specialized English used by doctors, nurses, and other personnel in medical professions (Maher, 1986), the teaching of English for Medical Purposes had the following features and focuses to fulfill the specific English language needs for different learners.

Firstly, needs analysis by medical schools or lecturers prior to teaching EMP played a critical role in developing EMP curriculum courses to ensure its alignment with learners' professional goals, as in other English for Specific Purposes (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022). Needs analysis involved the identification of medical students' specific requirements, the selection of relevant study materials, and the creation of context-specific tasks (Bharathi & Pushpanathan, 2022). An EMP course relevant to professional requirements also helped graduates in being equipped with the language skills necessary for future professional success, increasing their learning motivation, and promoting their lifelong learning (Antic, 2007). Bharathi and Pushpanathan (2022) recommended a series of steps in designing EMP curriculum, consisting of analyzing learners' needs, selecting appropriate study materials, designing context-specific tasks and activities, following an iterative process of testing and redesigning.

Secondly, authentic medical teaching materials were often used to ensure the effectiveness of EMP courses. This could include a combination of authentic medical texts, locally produced resources, and commercially published textbooks (Ferguson, 2012). The importance of content-based and context-based curricula should be emphasized to ensure consistent linguistic competence (Milosavljević et al., 2015). Moreover, EMP classrooms must simulate real-world contexts and expose students to real-world language use (Antic, 2007). To be more specific, its courses should include vocabulary-focused activities and role-plays to simulate real-world communications (Brown, 2013; Schmitt, 1997). Another learning method was to adopt a dual lesson format where vocabulary was introduced in lesson 'A' and applied in lesson 'B' through contextual activities such as chart analysis and role-playing (DuGas et al., 1999).

Thirdly, vocabulary or technical terminology acquisition was central to EMP teaching. The focus was to enable medical students to analyze medical texts, to infer or guess meanings using the clues from their context, and to familiarize themselves with medical word parts, abbreviations, and common medical topics (Joshani-Shirvan, 2008; Schmitt, 1997). Context-based learning and the use of computer-assisted tools were key components of vocabulary learning strategies to increase active engagement and efficiency (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022). Abidova and Guzacheva (2020) suggested three essential vocabulary learning stages, starting from the presentation of new vocabulary, followed by the formation of lexical skills, and ending with the review and reinforcement of new vocabulary.

Fourthly, a learner-centered approach was typically employed in EMP teaching (Antic, 2007). The emphasis was on increasing learners' autonomy and self-directed study by providing diverse learning options and fostering habits of continuous learning, particularly outside the classroom. This was due to the diversity of students' needs, the common over-reliance on lecturers, and the necessity for self-directed learning outside the classroom.

Finally, the teacher's role in EMP changed from being a sole knowledge provider to a facilitator, organizer, and motivator (Antic, 2007). Their main responsibility was to design curricula that not only met linguistic needs but also engaged students in meaningful and practical activities. Since teachers had limited knowledge in specialized medicine compared to their learners, their flexibility, openness, and adaptability of new methods were crucial for effective instruction (Milosavljević et al., 2015).

To sum up, the teaching of EMP focused on addressing medical students' professional needs through needs analysis, authentic materials, vocabulary acquisition, learner-centered approach, and teachers' role as facilitators and motivators.

Translation in English for Medical Purposes (EMP)

Features of EMP Translation

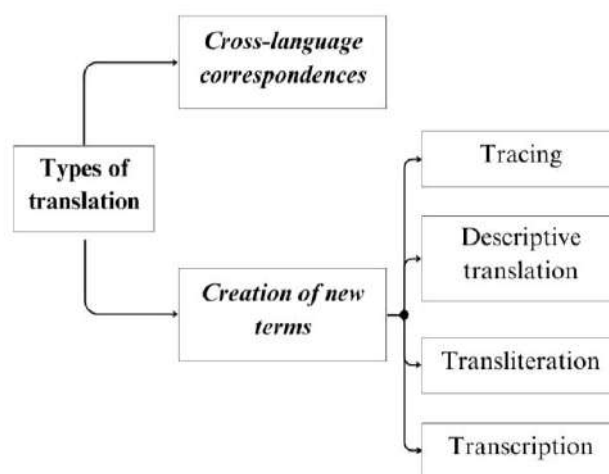
The role of interpreters and translators in medical terminology translation was to express the deep cognitive content of the terminological units as clearly, concisely and familiarly as possible to the recipients of the target linguistic culture (Azimbayevna & Vohidovna, 2021). However, EMP translations involved more than selecting the appropriate register to suit readers of different professions (Al-Kufaishi, 2004; Azimbayevna & Vohidovna, 2021; Micic, 2008). It was also a perceptive activity that prioritized understanding and conveying meaning, including the processes of analysis and synthesis, communicative language use, the reproduction of structured discourse, and the sharpening of comprehension skills (Al-Kufaishi, 2004; Micic, 2008).

Types of EMP translation

Two main types of translation operations in EMP were the cross-language correspondences (or equivalents) and the creation of new terms, the latter of which included transliteration, transcription, descriptive translation, and tracing (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Types of English for Medical Purposes Translation



Cross-language/ lexical correspondence was an equivalent term in the target language that matched the meaning of the source language term, which was common among the Latin-originated languages. For instance, the English term *Hypertension* is translated into *Hipertensión* in Spanish, and *Diabetes* into *Diabète* in French.

Tracing was the word-for-word translation of medical terms or phrases from the source language to the target language. This was less common in medical translation since it could sometimes result in awkward or incorrect phrasing if the structure of the target language differed significantly. For example, the phrase *High blood pressure* in English could be translated to *Haute pression sanguine* in literal French, though this translation was less common than the term *Hypertension artérielle*.

Descriptive translation or *explication* involves adding explanatory information to clarify the meaning of a medical term. This was useful when translating to non-specialist audiences, but it was less common in professional medical documents where standardized terms were preferred.

Transliteration was the conversion of the characters of a medical term from the source language into the corresponding characters of the target language, to preserve the sound of the original term. This was common for proper nouns, drug names, medical devices, or procedures that are internationally recognized. For example, *Aspirin* in English becomes *Aspirine* in French.

Transcription was the phonetic representation of the sounds of a medical term in the script of the target language. It was commonly used for abbreviations or terms that are pronounced similarly across languages, such as ECG (*electrocardiogram*).

Requirements for EMP Translation

Translators of medical English must have deep theoretical knowledge of medical science and be well-prepared in written translation, functional stylistics, text linguistics, and terminology (Azimbayevna & Vohidovna, 2021). Azimbayevna (2020) outlined a more detailed group including 3 requirements for medical translation, including content requirements, form requirements, and pragmatic properties.

Requirements for content consisted of the following aspects: semantic consistency

(correspondence of the meaning of the term as a lexical unit and its meaning in this terminology), unambiguity (the desire for unambiguity within the framework of one terminology), completeness (ensuring the term includes sufficient features to identify the designated concept), and the absence of synonyms. Terms must accurately reflect the concepts represented and avoid ambiguity within a specific terminology.

Requirements for form included brevity (elimination of meaningless elements), derivational term ability (ability to form new words), compliance with language standards (elimination of deviations from grammatical and phonetic norms, summing up language standards, elimination of professional jargon), the requirement of invariance (invariance of the form of terms), and semantic transparency (display in the structure of a given term of the relationship with the concept it calls, etc.). Terms should be concise, adaptable, and linguistically consistent.

Requirements for pragmatics included modernity (supplanting outdated terms), internationality (matching the form and content of the term in at least three national languages), implantation (adoption of the term by specialists), harmony, and esotericism (striving for different formulations for isolating professional communication). Terms should be up-to-date, internationally recognized, and adopted by specialists in the field.

In terms of the medical translation produced by students, students needed to possess and increase linguistic, documentation, and technological skills (del Mar Sánchez Ramos, 2020). Apart from traditional documentation tools such as dictionaries, terminological databases, and glossaries, more modern tools (i.e., corpora and terminology extraction) were now available for translators.

Medical English Terminology

Medical terminology was science-based vocabulary used to describe the human body, its components, conditions, and processes, and consisted mostly of nouns (Dirckx, 2006; Niazi, 2012). However, in nonscience-based contexts and daily conversation, terms for gross anatomy or visible human parts were taken from the vernacular in most languages (Niazi, 2012). Medical terminology generally has an international character, maintaining lexical unity by adopting specialized vocabulary across languages (Azimbayevna & Vohidovna, 2021).

Although teaching vocabulary was a primary focus in EMP courses, medical terminology remained a significant challenge for many individuals, including medical staff, lecturers, students, doctors, and even those proficient in English (Khan, 2016). One of the primary reasons was the complexity of medical terms borrowed from Greek and Latin languages with various components including prefixes, roots, and suffixes. Moreover, in non-English speaking countries where medical English was taught by lecturers of English, not by medical professionals, the challenges intensified because only medical experts knew the exact meaning. Additionally, the rapid development of medical techniques and devices led to the lack of unified medical terminology (Džuganová, 2013). Furthermore, medical terminology was rarely taught as an academic subject but was typically obtained through clinical courses and studies in which students got to know the new English terms alongside the clinical knowledge they learnt at school (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020).

Formation of Medical English Terminology

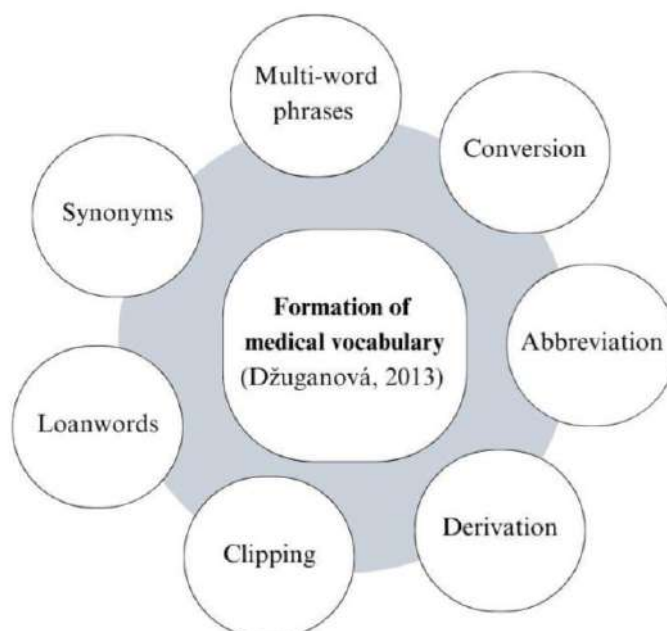
English medical terms were derived morphologically from Latin and Greek (Džuganová, 2013; Niazi, 2012). As a result, Latin was a prerequisite subject in medical education in Europe until 20 years ago. Even today's new medical vocabulary was mostly created from the elements or roots from Latin and Greek languages. However, medical terminology was low-frequency words which appeared in medical texts only, and were of very low frequency in other fields

(Akbari & Tahririan, 2009).

Medical vocabulary was not a closed, fixed system but an open system in which new words, mostly low-frequency ones, were created continuously (Yang, 2005). Nowadays, many commonly used terminological compounds have turned into abbreviations (Džuganová, 2013). Generally, a new term was formed in 3 ways, including derivation (e.g., *Hypertension* was formed from *hyper-* = *excessive*, *-tension* = *pressure*), the formation of multi-word phrases (e.g., *Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease*), abbreviation (e.g., MRI stands for *Magnetic Resonance Imaging*), conversion (e.g., the verb *to diagnose* was later converted into a noun *diagnosis*), clipping (e.g., the term *Influenza* is clipped into *Flu*), synonyms with same meaning but different words used by professionals and common readers (e.g., *Hypertension* may be used by doctors but *High blood pressure* were used preferably among patients) loanwords (e.g., *In vitro* in Latin meant "in glass" – referring to experiments done outside a living organism) (Džuganová, 2013) (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Formation of Medical Vocabulary (Džuganová, 2013)



Proposed strategies in learning English medical terminology

A strong foundation in general English is highly recommended before learning medical terminology (Sinadinović, 2013). Since terminology is not used in isolation but within a professional context, students with stronger English communicative competence can more effectively learn to use specific medical terms (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020).

Repetition was vital in learning medical vocabulary. Since the mastery of medical terms was achieved through repeated exposure, inference and memorization, it could be helpful if teachers used a communication-oriented approach where speech behaviors similar to real-life professional scenarios were created (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020).

Learning to guess the term's meaning from context was reported to be useful, which could be reinforced by making synonyms, or antonyms for specific terms. Moreover, students should also analyze the prefixes, roots, and suffixes of medical vocabulary to better understand

complex terms (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022).

Collaborative activities, such as role-playing and group projects, should be emphasized to enhance the learning experience. Practical experience, including internships or final projects in clinical settings, is recommended to increase relevance and engagement. The incorporation of internet-based activities and projects is seen as an effective way to enhance engagement (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022).

More importantly, audio-visual materials reflecting real medical scenarios were used to aid in memorizing complex medical terms and improving pronunciation, which was especially beneficial for visual learners. Finally, extended course durations were advocated for by students, with the suggestion that materials should support courses lasting longer than three months to ensure a solid grasp of medical vocabulary (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022).

Research Gap

The previous studies put strong emphasis on the critical role of English for Medical Purposes (EMP) within the broader framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including the role of English in Medicine, features to be considered in EMP teaching and EMP translation as well as the complexity of medical English terminology. Despite the advancements in EMP education in non-English speaking countries with EMP being compulsory in medical institutions, there is a lack of comprehensive studies on its teaching and learning challenges, hindering the identification of effective improvements. This literature review aims to bridge these gaps by identifying the challenges and proposing context-specific strategies to enhance EMP teaching.

Research Questions

In line with the study's objectives, the theoretical review aimed to address the specified research questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by teachers in teaching EMP?
2. What strategies can be employed to improve the EMP teaching process?

Methods

Design of the Study

The research employed a library-based methodological approach, which involved an extensive review of diverse theoretical frameworks related to the subject matter under investigation. This comprehensive review provided insights to address the research problems.

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The pedagogical setting of this theoretical review is centered on the instructional frameworks, challenges, and strategies associated with English for Medical Purposes (EMP) as derived from existing scholarly literature. Theoretical reviews focus on aggregating and interpreting existing knowledge to develop a framework for understanding in the chosen field (Cohen et al., 2018). As a result, human participants were not applicable in this theoretical review article.

Data Collection & Analysis

In this literature review, the research materials predominantly comprised subject-related articles, books, reports, and other academic publications which were chosen for analysis due to the following reasons (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Snyder, 2019):

Relevance: The selected materials directly focused on the research topic or provided

insights into related concepts, theories, or methodologies.

Credibility: The reliability of the authors and publishers provided credibility to the research materials.

Recency: Preference was given to recent publications to ensure the incorporation of the latest findings, developments, and perspectives in the field.

Diversity: A range of perspectives and approaches represented in the research materials enriched the analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The data analysis methodology was based on the principles of descriptive qualitative analysis, ensuring a thorough interpretation of the gathered information.

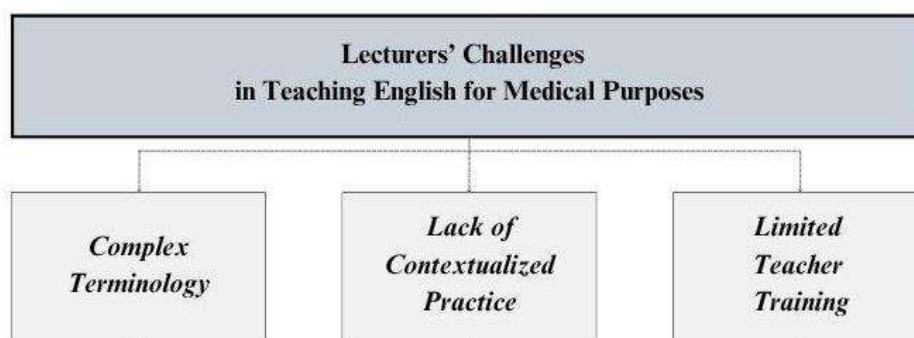
Findings & Discussion

Result 1: The challenges faced by lecturers in teaching EMP

The challenges in teaching EMP include the complexity of medical terminology, the limited opportunities for contextualized students' practice, and the lack of training for teachers/lecturers. For illustrative purposes, **Figure 3** is provided below.

Figure 3.

Challenges Faced by Lecturers in Teaching English for Medical Purposes



Complex medical terminology

The teaching of English for Medical Purposes (EMP) faces challenges rooted in linguistic, pedagogical, and systemic factors. One of the primary difficulties is the complexity of medical terminology.

Medical terminology, rooted in Greek and Latin, with complicated morphological structures (e.g., prefixes, suffixes), poses significant barriers to students' retention and application in practical contexts (Khan, 2016; Džuganová, 2013), particularly when students lack foundational strategies to decode terms. Additionally, the absence of unified medical terminology, the outdated and limited EMP textbooks available on the market, and the rapid evolution of medical technologies and practices further complicated the teaching process (Džuganová, 2013). This leads to the disconnection between classroom content and real-world medical communication and application (Džuganová, 2013). Furthermore, students often struggle with low-frequency medical vocabulary, which appears infrequently in general English but is critical for specialized medical contexts (Akbari & Tahririan, 2009; Nation, 1994).

In short, complex terminology poses a challenge for EMP lecturers due to its Greek/Latin roots, morphological complexity, low-frequency vocabulary, unstandardized terms, and outdated

textbooks.

Lack of contextualized practice

Limited contextualized practice is another major challenge in teaching and learning EMP. As a separate subject in medical programs, EMP classes provide students with very little connection with other of their specialized medical subjects at school and with insufficient exposure to actual world medical scenarios, hindering students' ability to apply medical English in real-world clinical settings (Reynolds et al., 2023). This is partly because EMP was often taught by English lecturers who were well qualified in English linguistics and teaching methodology but with little or no medical knowledge and experience to be able to explain medical terms accurately and integrate medical scenarios into teaching properly. Moreover, there was also a lack of communication among faculties and stakeholders (especially between EMP lecturers and medical lecturers). This could lead to the disconnect between linguistic instruction at schools and the practical needs for medical students in real life (Khan, 2016) (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020; Džuganová, 2013). More often than not, large class sizes resulted in the insufficiency of teachers' feedback on student's medical vocabulary use, limiting students' ability to refine their medical language skills (Reynolds et al., 2023).

To sum up, such factors as disconnected curricula, insufficient real-world exposure in and outside of classrooms, lack of communication between English and medical faculty, large class sizes, and limited feedback from teachers on students' medical English use make it more challenging for EMP lecturers to integrate effective contextualized practice into their educational settings.

Limited teachers' training

Limited teacher training in EMP pedagogical methods is a critical issue. EMP lecturers, qualified in English pedagogy but not in medicine, lack the necessary skills to design curricula that align with the linguistic and professional needs of medical students (Antic, 2007). With most of the EMP textbooks designed by non-native Vietnamese experts, and a heavy reliance on outdated or fragmented resources, lecturers often fail to meet the demands of contextualized medical education (Ferguson, 2012). Moreover, a lack of EMP created for certain unpopular but specific fields of medicine such as dentistry and pharmacy leaves students and EMP lecturers in these disciplines feeling neglected and underprepared (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022).

Additionally, insufficient communications among related faculty and stakeholders, consisting of lecturers of EMP, lecturers of medicine and medical experts, further hinders relevant and real-world EMP communicative approaches, such as role-plays or simulations, which are critical for bridging theory and practice (Antic, 2007; Milosavljević et al., 2015; Reynolds et al., 2023). As a result, EMP lecturers struggle to create relevant, authentic scenarios for their students to better apply medical terminology (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022; Reynolds et al., 2023).

Finally, non-specialist English lecturers often lack the medical expertise required to clarify nuanced terminology, leading to an over-reliance on rote memorization rather than active, context-driven learning (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020).

In summary, the lack of teacher training in EMP could result in poor interdisciplinary collaboration, inadequate simulation-based learning, insufficient medical knowledge among lecturers, and overemphasis on rote memorization.

As a final point, the major challenges encountered by EMP lecturers consisted of the complexity of English medical terminology, limited contextualized practice inside and outside the

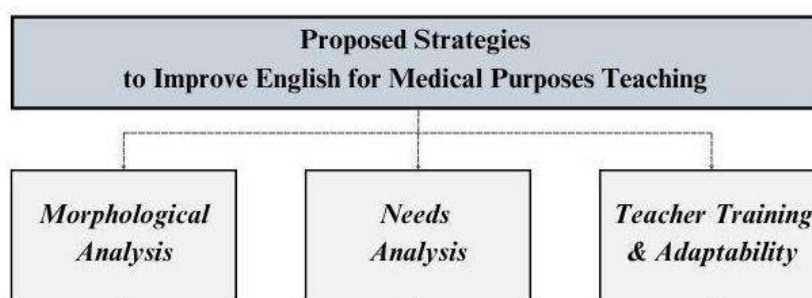
classrooms, and the limited teacher training programs.

Result 2: Strategies recommended to improve the EMP teaching process

Based on the challenges above, several strategies could be proposed, consisting of a detailed analysis of morphological elements in medical English terminology, a thorough survey and analysis of students' needs and stakeholders' requirements, as well as a much-needed series of teacher training to improve their adaptability. For illustrative purposes, the following **Figure 4** is provided.

Figure 4.

Recommended Strategies to Improve EMP Teaching



Enhancing morphological analysis

A strong foundation in general English is highly recommended before learning medical terminology (Sinadinović, 2013). Consequently, it was essential for universities to create an entry English examination or preparatory courses to make sure that medical students meet the minimum English proficiency before attending EMP courses.

To enable lecturers and students to overcome the medical terminology complexity, explicit instruction in morphological analysis (including prefixes, roots, and suffixes) and mnemonic devices should be systematized, adopted, and evaluated (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020; Shirvan, 2008). Context-based learning and computer-assisted tools are crucial to vocabulary learning strategies to increase active engagement and efficiency (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022). Three essential vocabulary learning stages are presentation of new vocabulary, formation of lexical skills, and review and reinforcement of new vocabulary (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020).

Repetition is crucial for learning medical vocabulary. A communication-oriented approach, where teachers create speech behaviors similar to real-life professional scenarios, can promote repeated exposure, inference, and memorization (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020).

Learning to guess a term's meaning from context is reported to be useful, which could be reinforced by making synonyms, or antonyms for specific terms. Moreover, students should also analyze the prefixes, roots, and suffixes of medical vocabulary to better understand complex terms (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022).

In summary, a combination of ensuring students' strong English foundation, creating detailed systematic morphological analysis of prefixes, roots, and suffixes, using communicative repetition in real-life scenarios, integrating computer-assisted tools, and applying vocabulary learning stages—presentation, practice, and review—is vital for enhancing students' medical terminology acquisition, understanding, and usage.

Conducting needs analysis

Carrying out a needs analysis with the involvement of as various stakeholders (lecturers,

medical experts, students, hospital administrations) as possible prior to designing EMP courses is essential to make the courses aligned between linguistic instructions and students' future professional goals (Bharathi & Pushpanathan, 2022; Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022). A careful needs analysis could lead to an EMP course relevant to professional requirements, helping graduates in being equipped with the language skills necessary for future professional success, in increasing their learning motivation (Nguyen et al., 2024), and in promoting their lifelong learning (Antic, 2007). The needs analysis process includes identifying students' specific requirements, selecting relevant study materials, and creating context-specific tasks and activities that simulate real-world medical scenarios (Antic, 2007; Bharathi & Pushpanathan, 2022).

In creating context-specific tasks in EMP courses, it is important to integrate authentic materials, including medical journals, case studies, real-world medical documents, locally produced resources and commercially published textbooks so as to bridge the gap between academic training and professional practice (Antic, 2007; Ferguson, 2012). These materials could provide students with exposure to the use of terminology in actual medical settings, enhancing their ability to apply EMP in their future careers. Content-based and context-based curricula are also encouraged to expose students to authentic language use and improve their linguistic competence. (Antic, 2007; Milosavljević et al., 2015)

Adopting multimodal approaches such as role-plays, simulations, and technology-assisted vocabulary acquisition tools can enhance engagement and retention. Zafirovska and Xhaferi (2022) recommend collaborative activities such as group projects and role-playing to simulate real-world medical communications. Additionally, the use of mnemonic devices, visual presentations, and documentaries can aid in memorizing complex medical terms and provide contextual understanding (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022). As students advocate for courses lasting longer than three months with the inclusion of audio-visual materials that reflect real medical scenarios (Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022), this approach can improve pronunciation, visual context, and overall comprehension, particularly for visual learners.

Finally, tailoring textbooks to specific medical fields and incorporating internet-based activities can address the diverse needs of students across various specializations. Online integration and concise materials that consolidate multiple topics into a single resource can enhance engagement and accessibility.

Overall, a thorough needs analysis involving stakeholders (i.e., lecturers, medical experts, students, and hospital administrations) ensures EMP courses align with medical professional goals. Integrating authentic materials, including medical journals and case studies, alongside multimodal approaches such as role-plays, simulations, and technology-assisted tools, could enhance students' engagement and retention. Visual aids, including documentaries, and online integration through tailored, concise resources could further support diverse learning needs, preparing students for professional success.

Increasing teachers' adaptability and training

Teacher training is essential for better addressing the linguistic and professional needs of medical students. EMP lecturers assume diverse roles as facilitators, using or designing relevant curricula and syllabi to engage students in meaningful and practical activities (Antic, 2007). These activities can ultimately lead students to become lifelong learners and acquire sufficient skills and knowledge for self-directed learning post-graduation.

To this end, teacher training programs should strongly emphasize pedagogical adaptability to prepare lecturers to transition from knowledge providers to facilitators of student-centered

learning (Antic, 2007; Milosavljević et al., 2015), due to the diversity of students' needs, over-reliance on teachers, and the need for self-directed learning outside the classroom.

Moreover, increased collaboration and communication among university faculties, particularly between medical professionals and English lecturers, should be encouraged to provide up-to-date knowledge for EMP classroom teaching. In addition, observational sessions or practical workshops can benefit EMP teaching by enabling lecturers to learn practical teaching methods within a medical school or across medical schools in an area.

To conclude, effective EMP teaching requires specialized pedagogy and curricula, with lecturers serving as facilitators to promote student-centered learning. Faculty collaboration with medical professionals and regular observation/workshops enable lecturers to learn from each other and to enhance adaptability.

By way of conclusion, morphological analysis of English medical terminology, detailed needs analysis consisting of varied stakeholders, and teaching training programs are encouraged to ensure a productive and effective teaching and learning process for both lecturers and students of EMP.

Discussion

The findings interpret three major challenges in teaching EMP, including the complexity of medical terminology, limited opportunities for contextualized practice, and insufficient teacher training. These challenges align with the previous research outlined in the literature review. To be more specific, the complexity of medical terminology, rooted in Greek and Latin with complicated morphological structures, poses significant difficulties for students, as noted by Khan (2016) and Džuganová (2013). Additionally, the morphological complexity (e.g., prefixes, suffixes) and low-frequency nature of medical vocabulary hinder retention and application, as Akbari and Tahririan stated in their study in 2009.

Secondly, the lack of contextualized practice, due to disconnected curricula and limited real-world exposure, aligns with the concerns raised by Antic (2007) and Abidova and Guzacheva (2020) about the need for authentic materials and role-plays to simulate professional scenarios. Furthermore, this research emphasizes the critical role of interdisciplinary collaboration between English and medical faculty to enhance contextualized learning, a gap not fully explored in earlier literature.

Thirdly, the challenge of limited teacher training aligns with Antic's (2007) and Milosavljević et al.'s (2015) study. This issue is heightened by English lecturers' lack of medical expertise, leading to over-reliance on rote memorization (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020).

To address these challenges, the proposed strategies—enhancing morphological analysis, conducting thorough needs analyses, and increasing teacher training—align with prior recommendations but offer more specific solutions. For instance, apart from the emphasis on systematic morphological analysis and mnemonic devices (Abidova & Guzacheva, 2020; Zafirovska & Xhaferi, 2022), the finding of this study calls for preparatory English courses to ensure a strong general English foundation. Finally, the focus on teacher training through faculty collaboration and practical workshops builds on Antic (2007) and Milosavljević et al. (2015), offering a more structured approach to enhancing lecturer adaptability.

Conclusion

The findings investigated significant challenges faced by lecturers in teaching English for Medical Purposes (EMP), including the complexity of medical terminology, the lack of contextualized practice, and limited teacher training. These barriers made it difficult for effective instruction to align EMP education with the linguistic and professional needs for medical students. To address these challenges, possible strategies were proposed, including enhancing morphological analysis with roots, prefixes and suffixes instruction and translation, conducting needs analyses to improve curriculum content and teaching practice, as well as increasing teachers' adaptability through specialized training and workshop programs.

This study highlights the need for structured curriculum reforms, continuous faculty collaboration, and pedagogical innovation to improve EMP instruction. By connecting teaching methods with professional requirements and increasing interdisciplinary expertise, lecturers can enhance students' proficiency and readiness for medical communication in English.

However, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and the absence of empirical classroom observations or student performance assessments. Future research is recommended to focus on longitudinal studies, qualitative interviews, and experimental interventions to measure the effectiveness of proposed strategies in real teaching contexts.

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Biodata

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Linguistic Creativity in Japanese High School Students' Haikus: A Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Linguistic creativity, haiku composition, Japanese junior high school students, poetry, creative writing

Although haiku has gained attention as a pedagogical tool in second language (L2) instruction, its use in junior high school EFL classrooms remains underexplored. This study examines how Japanese junior high school students navigate the limitations of haiku to create meaningful and imaginative expressions of language. A qualitative descriptive analysis was conducted on 52 student-written haikus from a classroom-based writing activity. Findings reveal students demonstrate lexical creativity through vivid sensory imagery, nature-based vocabulary, emotional expressions, and modern references. Syntactic creativity emerges in omitted subjects and verbs, unconventional word order, and fragmented structure. Figurative language use, including metaphor and symbolism, enables students to convey complex emotions and abstract ideas. Thematic analysis highlights recurring themes such as seasonal imagery, nostalgia, personal reflection, and contemporary influences like technology. The study highlights haiku's pedagogical value in fostering self-expression, linguistic precision, and cultural engagement. This demonstrates that structural limitations can serve as a catalyst for linguistic and creative development in young EFL learners.

Introduction

Linguistic creativity has received recent emphasis in language instruction as something crucial for developing not just language skills but also higher levels of critical thinking. Language classes at all levels are now encouraged to engage students in creative writing exercises as a means of both stimulating language use and encouraging self-expression (Eriksson, 2022). Poetry, a more condensed form of creative writing, is often left out of such exercises, but some language teachers have found its use to be yet another way of making language classes more engaging. Literature suggests that creative writing promotes language competence and develops critical thinking and self-expression in students (Banegas & Lowe, 2021; Crahay, 2024). Using different poetic genres, specifically haiku, has become an effective pedagogical strategy because of its brevity and focus on rich imagery and affective resonance (Rosenhan & Galloway,

2019). This practice aligns with the increased focus on culturally enhanced pedagogy to advance linguistic ability while promoting cross-cultural awareness (Kim, 2022).

Haiku is a short form of Japanese poetry traditionally composed of three lines with a 5-7-5 syllable structure, often capturing a moment in nature or an emotional impression through vivid imagery and seasonal reference (kigo), emphasizing simplicity, subtlety, and depth (Higginson & Harter, 1985). Despite the heightened integration of haiku in language classrooms, some challenges and research gaps have manifested. Of concern is the absence of research investigating the role of specific poetic genres, including haiku, in shaping learners' linguistic acquisition, especially at the secondary level (Ghani & Din, 2017). Although the literature has approached linguistic creativity in the context of general writing or among adult populations like university students, there is a significant gap in understanding how junior high school students work around the structural limitations of haiku to be creative through lexical, syntactic, and figurative devices (Hancı-Azizoğlu, 2018). In addition, there are questions about how the strict form of the haiku will affect students' expression of complicated ideas and feelings and the thematic and linguistic patterns that may result from their writing (Bielo, 2019). This research responded to these concerns by observing how junior high school students express linguistic creativity in haikus.

This study focused on the lexical, syntactical, and figural use of the language, the dominant types or themes of the linguistic choice, and how the structural boundaries of the haiku affect the creative work of the students (Sundari et al., 2018). In doing so, the study intended to address a wide gap in the literature and augment the existing body of knowledge on the ways and means through which haiku can facilitate linguistic creativity in the classroom (Sadiq, 2023). The implications of this study's findings have important applications to researchers, curriculum writers, and language educators in terms of the facilitation of more informed teaching of the language through the employment of creative writing exercises, like haiku, in the classroom (Alanezi, 2024).

Furthermore, the present study emphasizes the useful role of various writing genres in promoting language skills and creativity (Yazdanjoo & Fallahpour, 2018). The findings have significant implications in informing language teachers on how to bring a balance of grammatical competence and opportunities of self-expression, enhancing the acquisition of the language in their junior high school students (Manzoor et al., 2020). Adding haiku to the curriculum widens its scope and provides students with new and personalized ways of accessing the language. Thus, promoting a more integrated method of language teaching (Marina, 2018).

Haiku as a pedagogical device poses a fascinating challenge in the development of linguistic creativity, especially in the context of junior high school students, who are in the beginning stage of learning a new language, such as English. In exploring the dynamic tension of structural constraints and expressive freedom of haiku, this study hopes to enrich the broader context of creative writing in the field of foreign, second, or other languages, while keeping in mind the need to incorporate culturally responsive and expressive pedagogy in the curriculum (Fitria, 2024). Findings of the study carry implications beyond the classroom walls, sharing useful insights concerning the ways in which teaching strategies can produce more dynamic and engaging class learning, and value creativity and critical thinking (Banegas & Lowe, 2021).

Literature review

Linguistic Creativity in Education

Instruction of linguistic creativity in the pedagogical classroom is a rich phenomenon encompassing many facets of the use of language, pedagogy, and cognitive processes in the learning of languages. Empirical evidence in the literature attests to the development of creativity in instruction to promote learning and engagement of students generally. For example, Corsino et al. (2022) note that the behavior of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers in facilitating students' creativity towards English learning accounts for a high extent of high school students' English learning. The finding attests to the viability of creative instructional strategies engaging the students in active participation in English learning. Akintayo (2024) also seeks to conceptualize novel routes of the uptake of multilingualism in the classroom, hypothesizing that embracing linguistic diversity enriches the learning exercise and develops creativity in students. Sakaryalı (2024) proved that environments with multilingualism enhance creativity, and Phan (2023) noticed that collaborative learning in writing classes “makes the environment more dynamic, participative, and exploratory” (p.48), thus creating a favorable environment for creative language uses. Similarly, Dang (2024) claimed that peer feedback enhances students' expressive ability and writing outcomes through collaborative creativity in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting.

Incorporating creative writing and other innovative teaching methodologies has been proven to improve language learning outcomes. Creative writing in EFL classrooms supports language development and stimulates students' creative expression (Mardiningrum, 2024). Huh and Lee (2019) corroborate this by stipulating the centrality of creative pedagogy in developing a learning environment that promotes creativity and linguistic ability for foreign language learners. Furthermore, Jones (2019) comments that there is an increasing perception among language teaching practitioners on the necessity of including creativity in teaching practices to help develop a more interactive and lively learning environment. Additionally, the literature indicates that particular instructional designs may systematically develop creativity. Mróz and Ocekiewicz (2021) take the stance that educators must develop students' creativity, which may be done through focused pedagogical interventions. Similarly, Kirss et al. (2021) present a systematic review of the success factors in multilingual education, highlighting the necessity of efficient teaching approaches in fostering creativity and linguistic competence. As suggested by Cuong (2024), the supportive learning ecosystem concept also supports the notion that creativity must be incorporated into the general learning environment to improve student performance. The recent literature on linguistic creativity in education highlights the teacher's pivotal role, pedagogic creative practice, and multilingual and multicultural approaches in developing students' creativity. By adopting these variables, teachers can make language learning more enjoyable and practical. Thus, developing linguistic competence and students' creative potential.

Haiku as a Pedagogical Tool

Haiku, a classical type of Japanese poetry, has been adopted as a successful pedagogical technique in various educational settings. This paper provides the cultural and historical background of haiku in education, the structural elements of haiku, its potential to evoke creativity and self-expression, and the pedagogical merits of haiku in Second language (L2) acquisition. Haiku, a genre of Japanese origin defined by concise brevity and orientation towards nature, is historically deep-seated. It is a literary device and a vehicle of cultural transmission and epistemological construction. "Hana wa sakuragi, hito wa bushi" is a phrase

conveying the beauty aspect of the flower theme of the cherry blossom in Japanese tradition and custom, one not too unfamiliarly enshrined in haiku verse (Ramlan, 2021). This aesthetic value translates into educational contexts where haiku can be employed to learn about Japanese aesthetics and cultural values. Including haiku in curricula can promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, by enabling students to experiment with expressions focused on observation and reflection on nature (Gil, 2018).

Haiku is defined by its structural constraints, traditionally having three lines following a uniform syllable pattern of 5-7-5. This style both refines and condenses linguistic usage, requiring students to express elaborate feelings and sensory details in a limited space. Also, the use of kigo (seasonal words) and kireji (cutting words) greatly improves the haiku, adding new levels of meaning and richness in the poetic pieces (Iida, 2017). These structural components not only cognitively challenge students to create imaginatively with language but also improve their capacity for building imagery and communicating emotion through the economy of expression (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023). Haiku is an excellent tool for facilitating creativity and self-expression in the students. Studies have shown that haiku writing can decrease the affective filter so that students can write about their feelings and emotions more freely (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023).

Such personal connection is vital in learning environments that might otherwise be dehumanizing (Iñiguez & Rodas-Pacheco, 2022). Haiku writing has also been associated with self-transcendent emotions, which can promote well-being and life satisfaction (Kato, 2024). Students can discover more of themselves and their emotions by looking at nature and their own lives, thereby developing a better relationship with their creative processes (Ihanus, 2022).

Pedagogical Advantages of Haiku in Second Language (L2) Learning

The use of haiku in L2 instruction offers several pedagogical benefits. Writing haiku allows learners to use the target language in a functional context, hence facilitating the acquisition of the target language through imaginative engagement (Iida, 2017). Syntactical constraints of haiku writing can also guide learners toward finding their true voice in the target language, while, at the same time, overcoming the difficulty of summarizing abstract concepts effectively (Iida, 2017). Empirical studies suggest that haiku can also support EFL students in academic writing, hence supporting both linguistic competence and cognitive processes (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023; Iñiguez & Rodas-Pacheco, 2022). Writing haiku not only develops one's vocabulary but also helps in identifying a sense of ownership of the target language, as students create texts meaningful to their lives and close to their cultural environment (Liu et al., 2022).

Hong-Nguyen and Wolff-Michael's (2019) work highlights that including haiku in curricula has multiple benefits that extend beyond learning formal writing structures: they involve aesthetic, intellectual, and therapeutic levels, empathy development, and transformative learning experiences. Reviewing online resources for haiku education, they identified two key pedagogical discourses, "talking about" and "doing," and recommend embracing authentic practice ("doing haiku") more to maximize their advantages. As an example, they describe that teachers teach haiku not just to study syllabic structure but also to initiate emotional engagement and reflection upon oneself, often in unconventional learning situations like social work and health education. This demarcates that by shifting theoretical knowledge to practical practice within one's learning environment, students learn not just a knowledge of poetry but also advanced emotional expression, empathy building, and introspection opportunities, thus affording students a holistic creative writing education that goes beyond structure of language.

Haiku as a pedagogical tool provides a favorable learning atmosphere that supports creativity, personal connection, and target language learning. Because of its cultural and historical richness, structural simplicity, and utility in L2 instruction, it highlights its specific role in modern instruction practices. By incorporating haiku in curriculum planning, language teachers can create more dynamic and fruitful learning situations that address students on various levels and language abilities.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on Carter's (2004) theoretical framework of linguistic creativity. In Carter's view, linguistic creativity is a central feature of everyday use of language rather than a property of advanced literary composition. He underlines the fact that creativity occurs through playful manipulation of the language, pointing out that creativity can be applied by individuals even in structured situations, such as in the case of poetry (Carter, 2004). The work of Carter is important to the study of linguistic creativity in that it provides a theoretical platform that clarifies how creativity in expressions can be achieved in different situations, including in classrooms. Carter's claims of how creativity and language interact have had uses in applied linguistics, specifically in the fields of language instruction and the study of creativity in mundane communication (Jones, 2019). This orientation invites teachers to note and develop the creative potential of students, thus creating a classroom environment that supports linguistic innovation and exploration. Carter's seminal research on linguistic creativity highlights that creativity is an omnipresent feature of language use, which can be investigated in several forms, including ordered poetic forms such as haikus. The model supports examining students' lexical, syntactic, and thematic decisions, referring to how creativity is achieved within formalized poetic structures.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do junior high school students demonstrate linguistic creativity in their haikus through lexical, syntactic, and figurative language use?
2. What patterns or themes emerge in the linguistic choices made by students in their haikus?
3. How do haiku constraints shape students' linguistic creativity?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study's participants were 15-year-old junior high school students from a Japanese junior high school in Northern Japan. Although there was no formal testing, the English level of the students can be classified as beginner. These students composed their haikus in English as class activities under creative writing. The students were given five sessions, each lasting 50 minutes, to write their Haikus. The first session was an introduction to haikus, during which they watched a video on how to systematically write a haiku in English using the sensory method. The remaining sessions were allocated to the actual writing of the students' haikus with the guidance and support of their English teachers.

Fifty-two haikus were gathered for analysis to provide a good mix of the students' creative works. Every haiku expressed the individual voices and opinions of the students since they were

allowed to write about anything they wanted. In order to uphold ethical integrity, the students' anonymity was preserved by giving a unique code to every haiku. No demographic information, including gender or age, was attached to the respective haikus since the sole interest was in the creative content of their written productions. The students were at a beginner's level in English.

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants. The selection was non-random, as the study specifically aimed to examine the linguistic creativity of students composing haikus in an educational setting. A total of 52 haikus were collected for analysis. The focus was on the students' linguistic and thematic choices rather than their demographic information.

Design of the Study

The present study utilized a qualitative descriptive model to examine the linguistic creativity of haikus written by Japanese students at the junior high school level. This qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it enabled the deep exploration of the students' use of language, creativity, and theme choice. This descriptive approach seeks to expose underlying patterns, themes, and stylistics of the haikus while avoiding strict quantitative parameters. This analysis framework was deliberately balanced in keeping with the students' original creations so that it could highlight their natural linguistic potential and capabilities. By using this methodological approach, the study sought to examine the processes by which students create innovation in the classical haiku structure while expressing personal, cultural, and emotional narratives.

Data collection & analysis

The first step of data collection included the gathering of haikus written by students in the classroom context. The author collected the written pieces from the students to ensure that the process was unobtrusive and natural. Before the inclusion of the haikus in the study, permission was sought from the responsible teacher of the relevant class. The examination of the haikus used Thematic Linguistic Analysis, which combines qualitative content analysis and linguistic analysis to uncover the patterns of creativity. Thematic analysis, upon which the approach is based, systematically identifies, examines, and reports the patterns of creativity (themes) apparent in qualitative data. According to Miles et al. (2014), thematic analysis facilitates the researcher's exploration of the data for recurring concepts and themes. Therefore, this method is eminently applicable when investigating the intrinsic complexities of poetry as a means of creativity in the classroom context (Gao & Zhang, 2020).

The first stage of the analysis requires a close interaction with the data, whereby one repeatedly reads through every haiku in order to develop a deep sense of its meaning, tone, and stylistic features. This approach accords with Mayring's (2014) qualitative content analysis methodology, which supports a close interaction with the data in order to discover its intrinsic qualities. Notes initially are taken of salient themes, evocative words and phrases, and motifs of the work, in keeping with the iterative nature of thematic analysis by Flick (2014), which emphasizes revisiting the text in theme development.

Following preliminary orientation, a systematic coding system is applied in order to isolate the essential elements of linguistic creativity. For enhancing transparency and methodological rigor, coding was carried out using an iterative and systematic approach. First, the haikus were inductively thoroughly read, and codes were developed manually through annotation of both thematic and linguistic features present in the haikus. The researcher recorded incidences of lexical creativity (such as figurative language and sensory vocabulary), syntactic creativity (such as sentence fragmentation and irregular word order), and thematic features (such as seasonal imagery, tone, and cultural reference). Haikus were analyzed line by line. Categories were repeatedly refined through constant comparative analysis to maintain consistency. Memo-

writing was used throughout the process to record analyses and patterns of emerging themes. To further establish reliability, coded data were inspected once again following a two-week interval in order to assess internal consistency as well as coding stability. Coding falls under three primary categories: lexical creativity, syntactic creativity, and thematic development. Lexical creativity deals with the use of unusual lexical choices, sensory detail, and figurative words conveying metaphorical meaning, which reinforce the depth of the poem. Empirical studies supporting the use of lexical choice in enhancing the emotional and imagery-evoking potential of words are evident in studies revealing how specific words provoke emotion and generate imagery (Furman et al., 2007). Syntactic creativity is defined by the divergence of traditional haiku composition in the use of discontinuous sentences and narrative orderings, which create a more expressive poem. This trait is a primary object of analysis since it is the novel use of language diverging from traditional composition, a theme that is investigated in a variety of academic studies of poetic composition (Arcilla Jr., 2024).

The development of themes reinforces the recurring motifs present, including seasonal imagery, emotional passion, and cultural reference. Analysis of the themes goes beyond mere motif detection; it also involves the interpretation of the meaning of the motifs in the larger poem message. This view is supported by the work of Ariani (2024), whereby she clarifies the capabilities of thematic elements of poetry to trigger imagination and creativity and thus enrich the reading process. In addition, thematic study in poetry can provide deep insights into emotional and cultural truths, as expressed by Indrawati et al. (2020), highlighting the thematic connections in a pedagogical context.

Thematic and linguistic analysis provides a solid basis for deconstructing the haikus. This method allows a deep exploration of linguistic innovation by using the systematic application of qualitative content analysis combined with thematic interpretation. It also aids a deeper understanding of poetic forms and contributes to a more engaging discourse in literary study in terms of creativity.

Results

Research question No. 1: How do junior high school students demonstrate linguistic creativity in their haikus through lexical, syntactic, and figurative language use?

Linguistic Creativity

This study investigated the ways in which the junior high school students expressed linguistic creativity in their lexical, syntactic, and figurative language use in haikus. Results showed students using a wide variety of creative strategies to achieve maximum meaning under the structural limits of the haiku. Students expressed rich imagery, emotion, and personal thoughts using lexical choice, syntactic structure, and figurative use of words.

Lexical Creativity

Students' lexical creativity in haikus is realized in the use of descriptive sensory detail, reference to the time of year, and appeal to the emotion, demonstrating their ability to craft evocative imagery and create emotional responses within the haiku's constraints. This creativity is not a result of self-expression alone but also of instructional actions that facilitate emotional connection and linguistic play. As the literature indicates, haiku writing exercises can bridge affective barriers and facilitate linguistic processing activity in helping students to open up and express

their feelings and emotions, thereby facilitating creativity in the use of words and meaning construction (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023).

Sensory and Nature-Based Vocabulary

Lexical creativity in haikus is shown in the extensive use of sensory words catering to the different senses of the reader. It is best realized in the depiction of nature and the four seasons. In Haiku No. 5:

*Golden wave locusts
Jumping in father's paddy
Deep red, the evening sun*

The metaphor of "golden wave" describes the locusts and suggests movement and rhythm, adding to the haiku's visual beauty. Such imagery aligns with cognitive poetics' precepts, which focus on how sensory experiences inform our understanding and appreciation of poetry (Vandaele, 2021).

Haiku No. 37 also uses color and imagery to describe a peaceful night scene:

*The toy fireworks
Blooming on a quiet night
Like a full moon*

The fireworks are compared to blooming flowers, reinforcing their fleeting beauty. The allusion to the "full moon" appeals to traditional haiku beauty and demonstrates a profound sense of nature's transitory nature, which is a key to successful haiku writing (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023). Sensory language in these haikus engages the reader and encourages them to participate in the evoked emotions and scenes.

Emotional Expressions and Personal Reflections

In addition to nature imagery, students successfully express personal feelings through word selection. For instance, Haiku No. 28 conveys unspoken grief with sparse but evocative words:

*I loved you
Looking up at the summer sky
Tears falling*

The stark brevity of "I loved you" heightens the poem's emotional impact. The contrast of the generally bright summer sky and the atmosphere of bereavement demonstrates the students' use of word choice to create contrast. This emotive connotation is also reinforced by studies that indicate that haiku, as a type of poem, is a powerful vehicle of the expression of deep and complicated feelings and experiences (Sulastri et al., 2022). Likewise, Haiku No. 13 captures nostalgia and friendship:

*The last summer
Together with my baseball teammates
I will not forget my best friend*

"The last summer" is a poignant farewell, and the use of remembrance in a direct manner provides a personal touch. This shows the manner in which the students blend personal emotion and poetic lexis, creating a thick and textured web of emotional meaning and engaging the reader (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023; Sulastri et al., 2022).

Modern and Everyday Vocabulary

Some of the students' haikus tried to avoid the traditional nature imagery by using modern elements that depict the realities of contemporary student life. In Haiku No. 41:

Summer festival
Home alone
Watching YouTube

This haiku contrasts the thrill of a "festival in summer" and the loneliness of "watching YouTube" to imply a realization of the role that technology plays in defining contemporary experiences. Its use of common words makes the poem contemporary while commenting subtly on shifting social relations. Such use of contemporary concerns is in agreement that the verse art of poetry is able to reflect social milieus and personal lives (Santillán-Iñiguez et al., 2023; Sulastri et al., 2022). Blending the conventional haiku forms and contemporary words indicates the flexible character of poetic composition and its applicability in contemporary society.

The lexical creativity of students' haikus is a three-dimensional effect of sensory engagement, emotional connection, and contemporary relevance. Students use words purposefully to create sensory pictures and stir emotion, illustrating lived experiences and common social concerns. The teaching potential of haiku writing exercises also reinforces students' linguistic ability and emotional communication. This type of poem is hence effective in the classroom. By continually experimenting and creating in the haiku genre, students are aiding in the development of poetic language and meaning.

Syntactical Creativity

Haikus have a specific pattern of syllables, but the students proved imaginative in writing because they omitted subjects and verbs, rearranged the sentence order, and wrote with fragmented sentences to convey thoughts and refine their poems. Modifying their sentences is significant because using new ways with their words makes them more engaged with poetry (Fithriani, 2021; Jesudas & Sajeevial, 2022).

Omitting Subjects and Verbs

One common technique was omitting subjects and verbs to create ambiguity, requiring the reader to infer meaning. For instance, in Haiku No. 7:

Children fireworks
Together
Shining eyes

There is no explicit subject-verb relationship, which allows the meaning to be interpreted in various ways. This approach aligns with contemporary poetry studies regarding how omission can generate feelings and get readers to pay more attention to what they read (Tamesis et al., 2022; Anggiamurni, 2020). The reader is asked to picture children viewing or igniting fireworks, their bright eyes indicating excitement and amazement. Similarly, Haiku No. 3:

Mid Summer
Nap cool wind
Comfortable

Here, the student does not have a verb or a subject. This makes the reader imagine a body lying peacefully in the wind. This is evidence that omissions can engage the reader more because

they can use their minds to visualize the image (Yuana et al., 2023). Another example, Haiku No. 24:

*Weak wind
Katori Senko smells
Quiet night*

It gives a sense through the senses but does not say so, leaving the reader wondering what is omitted. This is a typical means of writing poetry in which sensory information is more significant than the narrative, with the feelings being more central (Yuana et al., 2023).

Rearranging Sentence Order

Another way the students accomplished this is by rearranging the sentences to emphasize specific meanings or to surprise the reader. Haiku No. 36 exemplifies this technique:

*Summer night
Even in the dark
The light of the fireflies will not lose*

Here, the phrase "Even in the dark" interrupts the natural flow of the sentence, enhancing the contrast between darkness and the fireflies' persistence in glowing. This syntactic disruption is consistent with research that suggests such techniques can create tension and highlight thematic contrasts within poetry (Fithriani, 2021). Likewise, in Haiku No. 21:

*Light-up decorations and a star crown
Dress on the tree
I will start this happy day*

Putting "Dress on the tree" amid two other independent thoughts places it with a new, profound significance that makes the readers realize the cheerful mood. This also agrees with the research: rearranging the things in a poem can enable us to derive more meaningful things and make reading more vibrant (Jesudas & Sajeevlal, 2022). A second illustration is Haiku No. 46:

*Cool summer night
The flowers blooming in the sky
It is like you are stopping with me for a moment*

This haiku rearranges the poem's words to create the illusion of being dreamy and contemplative. It also establishes how the structure of the sentences can elicit powerful emotions (Abdelkadir, 2023; Lila, 2023).

Using Fragmented Phrases

Students also used fragmented phrases for poetic effect. Haiku No. 42 illustrates this:

*I am running fast
Going sliding with my glove
The stadium is full of cheers*

The sentence structure mimics the breathless, rapid movements of the scene, using short, action-driven phrases to build intensity. This technique has been noted in recent poetry analyses to convey urgency and immediacy, allowing readers to experience the action as if they were part of it (Khan et al., 2023). Another example is Haiku No. 35:

*A silent night
I am playing games
Very sleepy*

The suddenness is like the drowsiness people experience from staying up late playing. This is evidence that research indicated that the use of short sentences can easily express emotions and times, which can reinforce the poem (Tamesis et al., 2022; Bezugla & Tkachivska, 2022). Also, Haiku No. 17:

*Hot summer day
Playing sand in the eye*

...

This haiku uses short sentences to create a vivid image. It makes the reader experience the irritation in the eye from the presence of the sand. This is similar to contemporary speeches in poems. They illustrate how broken and condensed sentences can create vivid images (Fithriani, 2021; Romanova, 2023).

These trends indicate how the students use imaginative sentence forms in developing their haikus. By omissions, word rearrangement, and sentence fragmentation, the learners demonstrated the realization that the use of haikus can be dynamic poems. This corroborates research indicating that the use of creative writing is essential in teaching languages because it aids in the enhancement of the languages as well as emotional competencies of the learners (Yuana et al., 2023; Корольова, 2021).

Research question No. 2: What patterns or themes emerge in the linguistic choices made by students in their haikus?

Themes and Patterns

The analysis of students' haikus indicates significant insights regarding their lives, emotions, and attitudes as Japanese junior high school students. Trends and repetition of linguistic use in their haikus indicate their creativity and awareness of how they perceive their environment, cope with interpersonal relationships, and deal with cultural pressures. These haikus serve as a lens through which we observe young students' daily life, dreams, and problems, and how they relate closely to nature, schooling, present time, and emotional introspection.

Nature and Seasonal Imagery

The students' use of seasonal terminology and imagery resonates with the cultural sensibility of kacho-fugetsu (花鳥風月) or the "flower, bird, wind, moon". It is a deep appreciation in Japan for the ephemeral character of the seasons. This, along with the education on and memory of haiku, creates a link with nature that can be a source of strength to propel forward into the future. For instance, Haiku No. 26:

*Cool spring day
Under cherry trees
I ate a three-colored dumpling*

This haiku is related to the tradition of hanami (flower viewing), a common event celebrated in Japan. Resting under a sakura tree while eating a dango (a dumpling) is comforting, connecting, and representative of cultural heritage. Therefore, students associate nature with family and community (Williams & Shipley, 2019).

Similarly, Haiku No. 30:

*Blowing cool wind
Waving rice stalks
I study while looking at it*

This piece connects education with nature, inspiring students and bringing them love for their surroundings. This contrast of moving rice stalks and still studying, on a subtle level, describes the balance between diligence and daydreaming, a common phenomenon among junior high school students. These connections encapsulate the Japanese idea of *mono no aware* (物の哀), or the awareness of impermanence, the seasonal shifts that reflect the ephemeral nature of childhood and youth (Williams & Shipley, 2019).

Emotional Reflection and Nostalgia: The Transition from Childhood to Adolescence

Many haikus express yearning, nostalgia, and the passage of time, which may represent the transitional period of junior high school students between childhood and adolescence. It is a time when social experimentation, friendship building, and a realization of change and impermanence are in full force. For instance, Haiku No. 13 expresses the spirit of valuing friendships while in school:

*The last summer
Together with my baseball teammates
I will not forget my best friend*

The reference to "the last summer" invokes an impending transition to high school, where students may have to leave behind close friends. It means saying goodbye to childhood friends but remembering them and all the memories, ties, and fun (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021).

Similarly, Haiku No. 27 conveys the energy and nostalgia of youth:

*The shining fireworks
The sound beats with my heart
This is youth*

Fireworks (Hanabi, 花火) are another staple of Japanese summer festivals (*natsu matsuri*, 夏祭り), during which students spend their evenings away from home and relish their joy and freedom with friends. The saying "this is youth" indicates that the moment matters and that junior high school students tend to romanticize their experiences, knowing they are transient (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021).

Conversely, themes of loneliness and isolation also emerge in the students' haikus, as illustrated by Haiku No. 23:

*Like soda bubbles
Lonely summer days
Next year, too?*

The analogy of loneliness to bubbles in soda poignantly encapsulates solitude's transient but recurring quality. The question at the end, "Next year, too?" suggests doubts a student may have regarding whether solitude will last. This haiku captures how some students experience a disconnection from shared experiences with their peers, which is common during adolescence (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021).

Similarly, Haiku No. 41 contrasts vibrant communal traditions with modern digital isolation:

*Summer festival
Home alone
Watching YouTube*

This juxtaposition reflects how technology shapes contemporary youth culture, allowing students to participate in social events virtually but not necessarily emotionally (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021).

Modern Influences: The Impact of Technology and Contemporary Life

Although haiku is a traditional form of poetry, some students incorporate modern experiences and urban life, demonstrating that haiku remains a relevant and evolving expression.

For instance, Haiku No. 45:

*Because I am free today
Play at an amusement arcade with a friend
But I do not have money*

This haiku captures the playful yet frustrating experience of wanting to enjoy free time but lacking the means. The mention of an amusement arcade reflects contemporary leisure activities, illustrating how students blend traditional poetic structure with modern life (Williams & Shipley, 2019).

Similarly, Haiku No. 44:

*Eat oysters
Spend New Year's Eve in the bathroom
My father and younger sister*

This humorous haiku reflects the intersection of food, family, and personal misfortunes, showcasing how students innovate with haiku conventions to create relatable anecdotes. The use of everyday experiences in haikus indicates a shift in how young poets adapt traditional forms to reflect contemporary realities, making their work more engaging and relevant (Williams & Shipley, 2019).

2.4. Symbolism and Metaphors: Developing a Deeper Understanding of Life

Many haikus go beyond literal descriptions, using symbols to represent abstract emotions, suggesting that junior high school students are capable of philosophical and poetic thinking. For example, Haiku No. 36:

*Summer night
Even in the dark
The light of the fireflies will not lose*

In this haiku, fireflies symbolize perseverance and hope, reflecting an awareness that small light sources can endure even in dark times. This metaphor shows the struggles of the students with academic pressure, troubles in building relationships with peers, and discovering self-identity (Stephenson & Rosen, 2015).

Similarly, Haiku No. 15 employs fireworks symbolizing fleeting joy:

*Senkou fireworks
Our happy summer
Keeps going forever*

While fireworks never last longer than a few seconds, the statement "keeps going forever" indicates that the feelings and memories can outlive the moment. This desire to hold on to the fun as time goes by deeply resonates with students who are undergoing change (Stephenson & Rosen, 2015).

Junior high school haikus in Japan express a deep sense of attachment to the natural setting, cultural heritage, emotional introspection, and contemporary life. This ability to combine personal lives and poetic words shows that haiku is not only a classroom assignment but also a viable vehicle of self-expression and meaning-construction. These findings attest to the emotional maturity and linguistic creativity of student participants and support the legitimacy of poetry in foreign/second-language learning as a site of identity, emotion, and environmental probing (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021; Shipley & Williams, 2019; Stephenson & Rosen, 2015).

Research Question No. 3: How do haiku constraints shape students' linguistic creativity?

The Influence of Haiku Constraints on Linguistic Creativity

The conventional structural constraints of haiku (5-7-5 pattern, brevity, reliance upon implicit meaning) influenced the creativity of students in a variety of ways. Additionally, the findings suggest that the constraints assisted students' linguistic creativity in general in that they allowed students to refine the choice of words, enhance the ability to express abstract meanings and attain flexibility in creative sentence formation. This aligns with the notion that structured forms can foster innovative thinking and expression (Sage & Null, 2022).

Encouraging Concise and Impactful Language

Students had to prioritize essential words due to the syllabic limitations of haiku. For example, Haiku No. 9:

Sweat all over my uniform

...

...

This captures exhaustion in just a few words, emphasizing the intensity of physical activity junior high school students sometimes do at school. Similarly, Haiku No. 27:

The shining fireworks

The sound beats with my heart

This is youth

This haiku illustrates how the compact form heightens emotions, allowing students to encapsulate a profound personal experience within a limited space. The brevity of haiku forced students to carefully select words that conveyed strong imagery and emotion, enhancing their ability to communicate meaning with fewer words. This skill is beneficial in various writing contexts, as noted in studies highlighting the effectiveness of concise language in educational settings (Iñiguez & Pacheco, 2022).

Fostering Creativity through Implied Meaning and Minimalism

Some haikus required readers to infer meaning rather than providing explicit details. For instance, Haiku No. 10:

Very hot summer day

I sip quickly

Cold Chinese food

Meanwhile, it suggests relief from the summer heat through action rather than direct description. Additionally, Haiku No. 31:

*The air conditioner's wind is blowing in summer classrooms
At first, it was very cool
But as time passed, it was cold*

This implies the passage of time and a shift in comfort without explicitly stating it, making the poem more open-ended and layered. The need to exclude extraneous details and rely on the reader's inference also teaches students to construct dense and multi-layered meaning in their writing and helps them become more effective storytellers. This supports the argument that minimalist writing provokes more reaction and interpretation by the reader (Friedenberg et al., 2023).

Enhancing Sensory and Imagery-Based Expression

Interestingly, many of the students' haikus leverage on sensory details to make readers feel a specific moment. For example, Haiku No. 22:

*The sound of melting ice
In barley tea
...*

This haiku pairs sound and flavor, so the readers feel the moment fully. Similarly, Haiku No. 40:

*The hottest summer day
We ate lovely watermelon
By the riverside*

They use a variety of senses - temperature, taste, and atmosphere - to draw the reader in and transport them to the scene. These samples show how the students learned to craft textured and evocative experiences using descriptive words, which improved their use of imagery in other types of writing. Research has shown that sensory engagement in writing can significantly enhance reader connection and emotional response (Zhang & Wang, 2025).

Encouraging Playful and Metaphorical Thinking

Some students employed humor and exaggeration to make their haikus more engaging. For example, in Haiku No. 44:

*Eat oysters
Spend New Year's Eve in the bathroom
My father and younger sister*

This haiku uses an unexpected and humorous contrast to create an amusing yet relatable scene. Others utilized symbolism, as seen in Haiku No. 15:

*Senkou fireworks
Our happy summer
Keeps going forever*

Here, fireworks represent fleeting yet cherished summer memories. The ability to think metaphorically and incorporate symbolic meaning in a restricted form like haiku indicates growth in abstract thinking and creative expression, skills applicable in poetry and narrative

writing. This reflects broader educational trends that advocate including creative writing to develop critical thinking and imaginative skills (Baer, 2024).

Reinforcing a Reflective and Observational Mindset

The haiku form encouraged students to slow down and observe small details, fostering mindfulness. For instance, Haiku No. 30:

*Blowing cool wind
Waving rice stalks
I study while looking at it*

This demonstrates the connection between nature and reflection. Similarly, Haiku No. 52:

*In a dark walkway
Fireflies
Give directions*

This suggests a quiet moment of observation, using fireflies as a metaphor for guidance. Writing haiku trains students to focus on their surroundings, capturing moments with precision and depth- a practice that improves their ability to describe events and settings in any form of writing. This mindfulness aspect has been linked to enhanced cognitive and emotional well-being in educational contexts (Matsumoto et al., 2023).

Beyond the individual effects of conciseness, implied meaning, sensory detail, and metaphorical thinking, haiku influenced students' linguistic creativity by requiring them to adapt language innovatively within structural constraints. The need to fit meaning into the strict 5-7-5 form pushed students to experiment with unconventional word order to maintain syllable limits, strategic omission of subjects/verbs to maximize impact while adhering to structure, and the use of figurative language to compress complex ideas into a few words.

In addition, students had to think beyond literal meaning, and they wrote more evocative, expressive, and nuanced materials. Although restrictive, the haiku structure, paradoxically, opened up possibilities for more flexible and artistic manipulation of language, a role that potentially could transfer to other styles of writing and communication. This aligns with the latest research on the role of restricted creativity exercises in enabling linguistic creativity and flexibility (Friedenberg et al., 2023).

These outcomes show how haiku constraints encouraged students to refine their language, think metaphorically, and engage in their worlds imaginatively and meaningfully. In general, haiku offered a site of linguistic creativity, wherein students could seek out and mold their expressiveness in a structured poetic form.

Figure 1.

Thematic map illustrating the key themes and sub-themes identified in students' haiku writing.

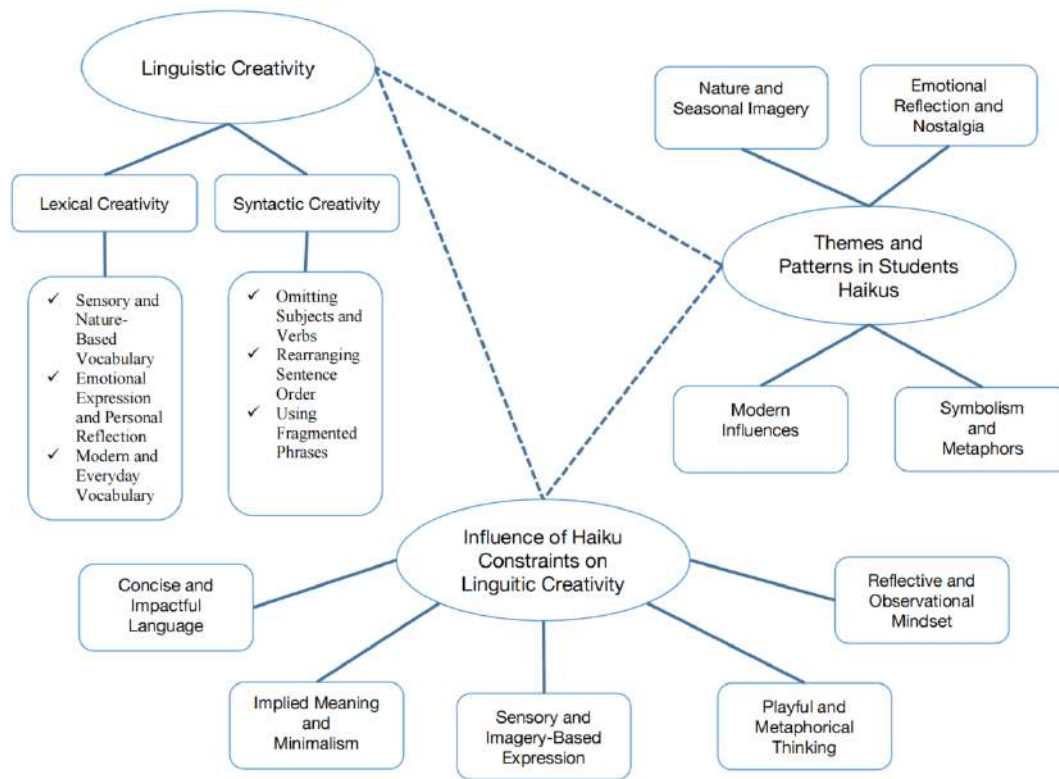


Figure 1 is a visual representation of the major themes and sub-themes found in the students' haikus. It reveals their linguistic creativity, thematic expressions, and how the students navigated haiku's constraints.

Discussion

Previous research studies have primarily focused on students at the tertiary level or general writing conventions (e.g., Mardiningrum, 2024; Hancı-Azizoğlu, 2018). The present study contributes to the literature by highlighting the haiku writings of Japanese junior high school students as a source of linguistic creativity. Although prior work has firmly established the pedagogical value of haiku for emotional and aesthetic expression (Iida, 2017; Stephenson & Rosen, 2015), this study follows up on these findings with empirical evidence that demonstrates how young EFL learners, like junior high school students, creatively work within the limitations of vocabulary, syntax, and thematic material when writing haiku. In contrast to many earlier studies that have been focused on general writing themes of cultural transfer or language acquisition, this analysis provides a close-up account of how the structural limitations of haiku enable creative linguistic expression. By focusing on a younger age group within an academic teaching context, this study stands out due to its investigation of reflective practices, metaphorical thinking, and the creation of new themes in poetry writing, factors that were primarily absent in prior studies. This study highlights the value in studying creative writing across developmental stages and teaching contexts.

This research supports the role of haiku in assisting students in linguistic creativity at the junior high school level. In the constraints of haiku, students displayed the ability to condense lexical alternatives effectively, manipulate syntactic structures, and utilize figurative language. Findings support the enhancement of students' ability to create nuanced images and convey multiple meanings, as well as the use of a more economical and expressive style of writing in writing haiku. In addition, the study indicates that the concise style of haiku subjects the students to the appreciation of effective words, and they utilize more conscious choice of words and sentence structures. The use of implied meaning and simple style develops their ability to create nuanced phrases, whereas the use of sensory words and metaphorical thinking develops their creativity in processing the text. These factors attest to the role of writing haiku as a useful instructional method, and students are able to master linguistic precision and artistic subtlety in writing. In the activity of writing a haiku, students also developed observational and introspective skills, and they demonstrated more sensitivity towards the environment and emotional condition. This research witnesses that haiku, being a structured poem, is a vehicle of linguistic creativity and is effective in establishing the quality of expressive and analysis writing in general.

Conclusion

While undoubtedly this study makes a contribution to the knowledge of the linguistic creativity of the haiku writing of Japanese junior high school students, a few of its limitations are significant. A major limitation lies with the limited sample size and context, since the study concentrated solely on 52 haikus written by students from a single school within Japan. The limited data may not reflect the full range of linguistic creativity within different educational environments, cohorts, or cultural groups. The use of purposive sampling also brings with it the possibility for bias since students were selected based upon their participation in a writing lesson within the classroom instead of through random selection. The findings may therefore not be transferable to the wider student population and may require special consideration for students with varying amounts of exposure to haiku or different levels of linguistic proficiency.

A second limitation involves the lack of demographic and contextual data related to students' prior exposure to haiku, their English proficiency, or other individual factors likely impacting their writing proficiency. Without this data, it is problematic to determine the meaning of individual differences in language creativity. Furthermore, the subjectivity involved with thematic and linguistic judgments is compounded by the qualitative nature of the study since the ensuing judgments about creativity, lexical choice, and stylistic patterns are dependent upon the researcher. Despite the use of systematic coding to enhance the strength of the analyses, the possibility for different interpretations and categorizations arising from different researchers remains likely. In addition, the study focused solely on written outputs, not including students' comments about their creative approaches. The inclusion of students' opinions through interviews or questionnaires would have allowed for deeper exploration into their thinking and the rationale behind their haiku composition.

Despite these limitations, the study remains valuable as it highlights the potential for haiku as an educational tool for developing language creativity. Future studies could rectify these deficiencies through widening the sample population, including students' opinions, and comparing analyses across different cultural and language groups to increase the validity and scope of the results. Similarly, future research may explore the long-term effects of haiku writing on students' broader language acquisition and its impact on different learner groups. Future studies may also examine the application of haiku in non-English languages, specifically

among young learners, to evaluate its contribution to linguistic acquisition across different linguistic contexts and age groups. Future studies may also examine the application of haiku in other languages, such as Spanish or French, to evaluate its contribution to linguistic creativity in various linguistic settings and various age brackets.

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Biodata

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Exploring the Challenges of Learning English as a Second Language in Somaliland

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ABSTRACT

English language learning remains a significant challenge in Somaliland despite years of formal instruction across various educational settings. This study investigates the persistent difficulties experienced by English learners, focusing on students at Moon College, one of the well-known English institutions in Hargeisa. It aims to explore why students continue to struggle with English proficiency even after extended exposure. Using a qualitative research design, the study involved key informant interviews with eight English teachers and four focus group discussions with 24 students. Data were gathered through open-ended questions and analyzed thematically. The findings revealed three main categories of challenges: instructional barriers (such as outdated teaching methods and lack of qualified instructors), environmental factors (including limited English exposure beyond the classroom and weak support at home), and psychological obstacles (low confidence, poor motivation, and cultural reluctance to use English). Students reported difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, listening, and academic writing. Despite these challenges, some learners used platforms like Duolingo, YouTube, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to improve skills. The study recommends curriculum reform, enhanced teacher development, and integration of technology in instruction. It highlights the importance of early English exposure and supportive learning environments, offering guidance for educators and policymakers aiming to improve English language acquisition in Somaliland.

Keywords: Language Learning, Language Barriers, Teaching Methods, Learner Motivation

Introduction

Learning English as a second/third language presents unique challenges across various regions of the world. Globally, studies have shown that the key factors affecting English language acquisition include teaching methods, student motivation, and available resources. For example, research in Iraq reveals that learners require sufficient time and proper management

to successfully learn English as a foreign language. Additionally, the role of teachers and the use of authentic materials play an essential role in enhancing linguistic and communicative competence (Mohammed, 2018).

In Malaysia, free online resources were found to be valuable tools for English learning, particularly in improving reading, conversation, and vocabulary skills. These resources help foster a motivating learning environment and encourage critical thinking, social interaction, and collaborative learning (Nosirova, 2023). Similarly, a study in Iran highlights that despite extensive efforts to promote English in schools, the outcomes have not met expectations. Several factors, such as under-qualified teachers, poor teaching methods, and inadequate resources, have hindered the process of effective English language learning (Akbari, 2015).

In Australia, research among Vietnamese, Thai, and Indonesian students identified significant challenges in adapting to English-speaking environments. The study emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive, learner-centered approach to English as a Second Language (ESL) education (Nosirova, 2023). Another study focusing on Saudi Arabian learners in the UK showed that negative intercultural experiences and fears significantly impacted students' confidence in second language acquisition. The intervention workshop that followed was successful in improving their self-confidence and cultural adaptation (Obaid & Abdullah, 2023).

Regionally, in Africa, various studies have shed light on the challenges faced by learners in different countries. In Sudan, research revealed that issues such as interlingual and intralingual errors and the lack of qualified teachers are significant obstacles in learning English as a third language (Ali Adrob, 2021). Moreover, studies in Sudan have shown that psychological factors and unsuitable teaching methods hinder student motivation and language proficiency (Elbashir, 2022). In Namibia, ESL teachers face challenges like overcrowded classes, absenteeism, and lack of parental involvement, which hinder effective English learning (Haufiku, Mashebe, & Abah, 2022). Similar challenges are present in Kenya, where difficulties in listening and speaking have a strong correlation with poor academic performance (Kithinji & OHirsi, 2022).

In Ethiopia, students struggle with academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking, often due to curricula that do not adequately address their learning needs (Chemir & Kitila, 2022a). Another study indicated that students' motivation to learn English is primarily instrumental, as they view English as a tool for academic and career advancement (Chemir & Kitila, 2022b).

In Somalia, the language of instruction is a major barrier to learning, with Somali and Arabic predominating inside and outside the classroom. The lack of a unified language policy further complicates the teaching of English (OHirsi, Mwirichia, & Kanyi, 2022). In Somaliland, the absence of a national language instructional policy remains a critical issue when the students explained the subjects in English while they cannot understand well (Melesse & Obsiye, 2022).

These studies indicate that while the challenges of learning English are universal, they vary across different contexts and regions. In Somaliland, these challenges are compounded by the lack of formal policies, under-resourced educational institutions, and insufficient teacher training. The need for a more tailored and effective approach to English education in Somaliland is evident.

Despite the extensive research on English learning in various contexts, there is a clear gap in studies that specifically address the challenges of learning English as a second language in Somaliland. While existing research has identified general barriers such as lack of resources, inadequate teaching methods, and low motivation, little attention has been given to the unique socio-cultural and educational context of Somaliland.

This study aimed to explore the experiences of learners in Somaliland and the challenges they face in learning English as a second language. It seeks to examine the influence of socio-cultural and educational factors on learners' perceptions and experiences of learning English. Additionally, the study endeavors to understand the role of teachers, teaching methods, and resources from the perspective of learners in enhancing or hindering English language learning. Insights were gathered from students and teachers to identify ways to improve English language education in Somaliland.

Research objectives:

1. To explore the experiences of learners in Somaliland and the challenges they face in learning English as a second language.
2. To examine the influence of socio-cultural and educational factors on learners' perceptions and experiences of learning English.
3. To understand the role of teachers, teaching methods, and resources from the perspective of learners in enhancing or hindering English language learning.
4. To gather insights from students and teachers on how English language education can be improved in Somaliland.

Research Questions:

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the personal experiences and challenges faced by students learning English as a second language in Somaliland?
2. How do socio-cultural factors (e.g., family, community, traditions) influence learners' attitudes and experiences toward learning English in Somaliland?
3. In what ways do teachers, teaching methods, and classroom resources affect the learning of English from the learners' point of view?
4. What suggestions do students and teachers provide for improving English language education in Somaliland?

Literature review

Methodologies and Digital Tools

Globally, language acquisition is shaped by diverse methodologies and socio-cultural conditions. (Rustamov & Mirza ogli, 2023) highlight the distinction between intensive listening, which emphasizes linguistic accuracy in structured contexts, and extensive listening, which prioritizes immersion and broad comprehension. Building on this methodological perspective, (Prabawati, St Asriati, & St Asmayanti, 2021) demonstrate how digital platforms such as Google Classroom and WhatsApp, widely adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, enhanced learner motivation and engagement. More recent studies extend this line of inquiry by showing that gamification and social media improve outcomes across reading, writing, listening, and grammar, while also assisting with vocabulary and speech-related challenges (Dehghanzadeh, Fardanesh, Hatami, Talae, & Noroozi, 2021) and (Muftah, 2024). Emerging technologies such as ChatGPT have likewise been noted for their pedagogical potential, although concerns remain regarding accuracy and critical evaluation (Madden et al., 2025).

These findings suggest that while technology can enrich the learning process, its effectiveness depends on careful integration.

English Medium Instruction and Language Policy

Another major strand of scholarship addresses English Medium Instruction (EMI) and language policy. In Hong Kong, EMI has been associated with improved proficiency through institutional support and effective learner strategies (Tai & Zhao, 2024). By contrast, studies in Ethiopia and Tanzania caution that EMI can impede subject learning where resources and exposure are limited, making mother-tongue instruction more effective in certain contexts (Opare-Kumi, 2024; Roemer, 2024). Similar concerns are echoed in Sudan and Saudi Arabia, where rigid curricula and insufficient emphasis on oral communication reduce learners' motivation and performance (Alawfi, 2022; Alseed, 2022). These findings underscore that the success of EMI depends heavily on contextual, institutional, and pedagogical factors.

The Interplay Between First and Second Language Acquisition

The relationship between first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition has also been widely examined. In Pakistan, bilingualism was found to support L2 development by leveraging L1 cognition and identity (Kanwal, Hussain, & Farid, 2022). Studies from Uganda further show that students may transfer decoding and comprehension skills from their mother tongue to English, although the success of such transfer depends on classroom (de Galbert, 2023). At the same time, research in Ethiopia identifies persistent difficulties in pronunciation, writing, and speaking, often linked to motivation, native language interference, and insufficient feedback (Hoque, Oli, Thamarai Selvi, Chowdhury, & Reza, 2024) and (Taye & Mengesha, 2024). These findings suggest that while L1 can serve as a resource for language learning, it may also create challenges if not pedagogically supported.

Sociolinguistic and Socio-Political Dimensions of Language

Beyond classroom practice, sociolinguistic research highlights how language intersects with identity, power, and social inclusion. (Castillo, 2023), for example, illustrates how the elevation of Lingala as a language of power in Zaire under Mobutu contributed to social fragmentation, while (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1993) argue that English and Kiswahili carry trans-ethnic influence across East Africa in ways that reflect underlying political and cultural dynamics. (Wolff & Wolff, 2016) caution that although language can facilitate social transformation, linguistic imperialism continues to reinforce inequities. Ethnographic approaches have further revealed how multilingual practices in rural African contexts are shaped by spirituality and local culture (Di Carlo, 2018), while narrative analysis has been shown to strengthen cohesion and advocacy among diverse communities (Lumala & Mullany, 2020). Together, these studies underline the inseparability of language learning from wider socio-political realities.

Pedagogical and Learner-Based Challenges

From a pedagogical perspective, challenges are also evident in teacher preparation and classroom conditions. Research in Ugandan classrooms shows that competence-based English curricula often falter due to limited resources, time constraints, and cultural mismatches (Atuhura & Nambi, 2024). Learner factors, such as personality, also influence outcomes, with extroverted students tending to advance more quickly in spoken skills (Thach, 2025). At a broader level, (Hillman, Selvi, & Yazan, 2020) emphasize the importance of synthesizing regional English language research, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, to identify persistent gaps and inform policy. Such findings suggest that both systemic conditions and learner characteristics play crucial roles in shaping acquisition outcomes.

Regional and Local Perspectives (Somalia and Somaliland)

At the regional level, research in Somalia shows that English is typically acquired as a second language after Somali. (Mohamed, 2024) found that the use of short stories improved vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension among students in Mogadishu, although limited exposure outside the classroom remained a major barrier. These patterns resonate in Somaliland, where challenges such as inadequate exposure, weak teaching methodologies, and socio-cultural barriers continue to impede learner proficiency. While some studies highlight the potential of digital tools, recognition of bilingual advantages, and immersive learning environments, little is known about how these approaches have been implemented in Somaliland's unique context.

Methods

Study Design

This qualitative study explores the challenges of learning English as a second language among teachers and students at Moon College in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Data were gathered through eight key informant interviews and four focus group discussions, each consisting of six members, offering rich insights into learners' and educators' experiences. This design was chosen to capture participants' lived experiences and perceptions of English language learning. Data were collected between January 6th to February 2st 2025, with the research team recruiting 8 English teachers and 24 students through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was conducted in Somali to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, preserving the nuances of participants' responses. Thematic analysis is a suitable approach for examining patterns in experiences, thoughts, or behaviors within a dataset (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). After completing 8 key informant interviews and 4 FGDs, the research team determined that saturation had been reached, with sufficient data gathered to address the study's objectives. For the 8 fluent teachers, whose primary or secondary language was English, analysis incorporated their responses directly in English to maintain accuracy.

Study Setting

The research was conducted at Moon College, recognized for its unique approach to teaching exclusively in English. Its environment provides a rich context for understanding the dynamics of English acquisition in Somaliland. All interviews were held in a quiet setting at a convenient place to all teachers and students after obtaining their approval.

Sampling and Participants

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants with direct and substantial involvement in English language learning at Moon College. The sample consisted of eight teachers, who served as key informants and provided insights into instructional methods, classroom challenges, and strategies for improving English acquisition. Additionally, four focus group discussions were conducted with students, each group comprising six participants, totaling 24 students. These discussions explored students' lived experiences, learning difficulties, and perceptions of English as a second language through in-depth, open-ended dialogue. In total, 34 respondents participated in the study: 12 males and 22 females.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with teachers and focus group discussions (FGDs) with students. Eight purposively selected teachers participated

in the KIIs, which explored their teaching strategies, challenges observed in English language learning, and suggestions for improvement. The eight interviews lasted a total of 86 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

Four focus group discussions were conducted with students using an open-ended discussion guide. Each session explored students' experiences, perceptions of the learning environment, and the challenges they face in acquiring English as a second language. The aim was to uncover collective insights and shared perspectives. Comprehension probes were used when necessary to clarify responses. The discussions lasted 25, 30, 33, and 40 minutes, respectively, across the four groups, and were audio-recorded for accuracy.

Data Analysis

The study used thematic analysis in three steps: transcription, coding, and theme development. All interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim, with responses collected in the participants' native language and later translated into English to preserve meaning (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). A digital recorder ensured high-quality audio for accurate transcription.

Data were coded using Dedoose software, combining deductive and inductive approaches. Four themes: Challenges in Learning English, Socio-Cultural Influences, Teaching Methods and Resources, and Suggestions for Improvement were developed deductively from the study objectives. One theme, Learner Motivation and Attitude, was developed through both inductive and deductive approaches. *Motivation* emerged from the data, while *attitude* was explored through pre-set questions. Grouping and refining codes enabled a clear synthesis of patterns and supported meaningful conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Discipline Committee of Beder International University (Ref: BIU/AC&AS/382/2025). Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, objectives, and procedures, and were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. All interviews were conducted in quiet, comfortable settings with the participants' prior consent. To ensure privacy, all data were anonymized, and identities were protected, with only aggregated findings reported. Participation was entirely voluntary, with no incentives provided, ensuring informed and free consent.

Findings

Demographic profile of the respondents

The study interviewed 34 respondents, comprising 12 males and 22 females. Most participants were aged 18-25 (8 males, 16 females), followed by the 26-33 age group (2 males, 3 females). The majority were single (9 males, 19 females), while 6 were married (3 males, 3 females). Regarding education, the largest group had university-level education (7 males, 8 females), followed by those with secondary education (4 males, 10 females). In terms of occupation, students made up the largest group (4 males, 15 females), while 10 were employed (6 males, 4 females) and 5 were jobless (2 males, 3 females). (See Table 1).

Table 1.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Gender (n = 34)

Category:	Sub-category:	Male (n=12)	Female (n=22)	Total:
Age group	1 8–25	8	16	24
	26–33	2	3	5
	34–41	1	2	3
	42–49	0	1	1
	50–57	1	0	1
Marital status	Married	3	3	6
	Single	9	19	28
	Divorced	0	0	0
	Separated	0	0	0
	Widowed	0	0	0
Education level	Primary	1	4	5
	Secondary	4	10	14
	University	7	8	15
Occupation	Employed	6	4	10
	Jobless	2	3	5
	Student	4	15	19

Theme 1. Challenges in Learning English

Learning English in Somaliland presents multiple and interrelated barriers, as consistently emphasized by the respondents. A central challenge is that students often lack awareness of how to learn a language effectively. As Interviewee 1 noted,

The biggest challenge students face is that they have not understood how to learn a language.

This was supported by Interviewees 3 and 6, who observed that many learners rely on memorization without practical application, which leads to rapid forgetting. These accounts suggest that ineffective learning strategies remain a significant obstacle, limiting students' ability to develop long-term proficiency.

Environmental constraints were also repeatedly highlighted. According to Interviewee 2,

The environment avoids them from learning. They do not attack the language on a day-to-day basis.

Similarly, Interviewee 6 stressed that without consistent use, knowledge is easily lost:

If you teach them vocabulary or grammar and they do not use it, eventually they would lose that language. It becomes wasted time and effort.

This indicates that the lack of an English-speaking environment outside the classroom creates a gap between instruction and practice, preventing learners from reinforcing what they study.

In addition, several respondents pointed to specific linguistic difficulties, such as pronunciation and understanding idiomatic expressions. As Interviewee 3 explained,

Students do not know how to pronounce words properly. They don't understand the difference between phrasal verbs, idioms, and collocations this is actually a challenge.

Another recurring issue is the tendency to depend on literal, word-by-word translation from Somali to English, which learners find both exhausting and ineffective Interviewee 3. These findings reveal that technical linguistic barriers are compounded by unproductive strategies, reinforcing the challenges students face in mastering spoken and written English.

Speaking emerged as the most difficult skill for many learners. Interviewee 20 stated:

The problem we face is speaking barriers. For example, when teachers speak English, we do not understand, and we cannot translate fast enough.

The difficulty of speaking and listening reflects a deeper issue of limited real-time processing skills, which are rarely developed in a context where English exposure is minimal. Respondents nevertheless emphasized the benefits of informal exposure through listening and watching English media. For example, Interviewee 23 recommended:

Listen, try to speak, write it down, and watch people speaking English. That makes it easier to learn.

Similarly, Interviewee 17 observed:

Children who watch cartoons can speak English better even if they don't know the meaning of the words in Somali.

These reflections suggest that informal learning opportunities outside the classroom, especially through media, play a valuable compensatory role in language acquisition.

Time commitment and historical factors were also cited as critical barriers. Interviewee 12 admitted,

The biggest problem is that we do not give it time. We do not immerse ourselves in the language.

Meanwhile, Interviewee 10 highlighted the long-term effects of disrupted education systems since the 1980s:

Students now start learning English at an older age, often taught by instructors who lack proficiency.

Interviewee 9 further summarized these systemic issues:

Many learners do not have clear goals. They follow friends. There are few trained teachers, and there is no English-speaking environment.

Together, these perspectives demonstrate that both individual and systemic factors such as lack of practice, insufficiently trained teachers, and the legacy of weak institutional structures continue to shape learners' struggles.

Finally, respondents pointed to psychological barriers that make the learning process more daunting. As Interviewees 1 and 3 expressed,

Learning a new language feels like being deaf you hear but do not understand. Growing up speaking Somali makes it harder to learn English.

These accounts highlight the emotional weight of learning a foreign language in an environment where opportunities for reinforcement are scarce.

Theme 2. Socio-Cultural Influences

Socio-cultural factors play a significant role in either supporting or hindering students' efforts to learn English. Several respondents highlighted that family and community dynamics can discourage language learning. Interviewee 1 noted that many families resist the use of English at home: *"Parents urge their children to speak Somali. They say, 'Do not pretend to be someone you are not, you are not a foreigner.' This affects students seriously."* Similarly, Interviewees 5 and 18 emphasized that when students return home, there is no one to practice English with. As Interviewee 18 shared:

At home, people speak Somali. Even if I listen to English for 20 or 40 minutes, I cannot respond because no one speaks the language with me.

Interviewee 16 added:

You cannot apply what you learn. Wherever you go home, the market everyone speaks Somali. It is only when you leave the country that you can practice.

Many learners reported being teased by family members or others for speaking English. Interviewee 10 explained:

If you try to read or listen to something, someone might ask, 'What are you listening to?' That makes you stop. Encouragement would help us do much better.

This sentiment was echoed by multiple students (Interviewees 25, 27, 29, and 30), who described how speaking English is sometimes seen as showing off or even as something "against religion." Interviewee 25 stated:

When I try to speak English, people say, 'Why is not he speaking Somali? Is he showing off?' They cannot respond because they do not understand English.

Interviewee 24 summarized this challenge clearly:

When I speak English, people think I am mocking them or trying to avoid my culture. That is the biggest problem I face.

On the other hand, some students reported positive family support. Interviewee 27 shared:

We get encouragement. Learning is for ourselves, our family, and our community.

Similarly, Interviewee 28 explained:

Our parents support us. There are no challenges from their side.

However, even in supportive families, older members may not understand what their children are learning. Interviewee 21 stated:

If I ask for something in English, my mom may not understand. That is why we must teach our younger siblings.

Religious and cultural misunderstandings also add to the burden. Interviewee 5 addressed a common misconception:

Some think English is a Christian language. But all languages are created by Allah. Language is just a tool for communication.

Theme 3. Teaching Methods and Resources

Teaching methods and access to resources were consistently highlighted as major influences on English language acquisition. While technology offers valuable tools, poor teaching practices and lack of structured instruction remain significant barriers. Interviewee 8 acknowledged the benefits of online resources:

We have good internet service. Students can listen to English online, which, though not part of the culture, is a great opportunity to learn.

However, the lack of trained English teachers continues to hinder learning. Interviewee 7 explained:

Teachers are hired based on their ability to speak the language, not to teach it. Students often do not get proper instruction because the teachers have not been trained to teach languages.

Interviewee 6 emphasized the importance of student-centered teaching:

Teachers need to observe students' strengths and weaknesses and track their progress. That is how real improvement happens.

Similarly, Interviewee 3 highlighted the value of visual and auditory materials:

If students get access to listening, videos, pictures, and reading materials, they can make progress especially with pronunciation and comprehension.

Interviewee 5 added:

Watching is the best method. Students should also focus on reading books.

Technological innovations such as artificial intelligence were also praised. Interviewee 4 remarked:

There are applications that chat with you like a real person. You can ask for meanings and get help with vocabulary. Most people do not know this exists.

Interviewee 25 added: *“Online learning is useful. You can find native speakers to learn from.”* Interviewee 21 reflected on her personal improvement: *“I could not understand spoken English before. But after listening and watching more, I improved.”*

Students noted differences in institutional approaches. Interviewee 11 praised her college:

I studied in many colleges, but when I came to ..., the teaching method was different especially the focus on listening. I felt the change.”

In contrast, Interviewee 27 criticized inconsistency:

Teachers' methods are poor. A teacher should not move on to a new topic before checking that students understood the previous one.

Motivation was also highlighted by Interviewee 33: *“When a teacher persuades a student, they might stop their old behavior and make more effort.”* Independent learning strategies were emphasized by Interviewee 2:

What teachers give is just a little. Students should expand it themselves, listen to motivational speakers with subtitles, watch conversations and films. These improve fluency and pronunciation.

Many students reported using tools like Duolingo, YouTube, and Google. Interviewee 11 said: *“Duolingo is good. I tried it, and it helps.”* Interviewee 31 added: *“We need to do dictation and practice daily.”* Interviewee 6 emphasized vocabulary:

We should learn daily vocabulary and phrases. Words have different meanings, so we must explore extra information.

Interviewee 10 reinforced these points:

With social media and YouTube, you can learn anytime even offline. The internet is full of materials. Use your time wisely.

Interviewee 18 suggested more formal structures:

Teachers should give quizzes every two weeks and have one day a week for writing. Many students can read, but they struggle to write.

Interviewees 3 and 9 noted the use of Telegram, Google Translate, and Daris for language support. Interviewee 10 praised AI tools:

ChatGPT helps a lot. It can translate any language with 90% accuracy, though it may have some errors.

Additional recommendations included full English immersion and foundational mastery. Interviewee 8 advocated: *“Students should speak only English in class. That is the way to improve.”* Interviewee 3 emphasized basics: *“Without a strong foundation, students will struggle with upper-level concepts. Teachers must ensure full understanding before moving on.”* Interviewee 2 recommended regular assessments: *“Teachers should evaluate students regularly. Weekly quizzes help identify issues early and track progress.”*

Theme 4. Learner Motivation and Attitudes

Learner motivation and mindset emerged as critical factors in English language acquisition. A recurring theme among respondents was the feeling of discouragement and disbelief in their ability to learn English, often intensified by cultural and social pressures. Interviewee 2 observed that students often approach English with a negative mindset: *“Students believe English is difficult or even impossible to learn. That belief becomes a barrier in itself.”* He also emphasized how teasing and cultural attitudes in Somaliland discourage learners:

There is a culture of making fun of others who try to speak English. It causes shyness and makes students afraid to practice.

Interviewees 3 and 4 added that repeated challenges lead to frustration and dropout: *“Students procrastinate and eventually say, ‘No, English is hard we cannot learn it.’”* and *“When students realize they cannot speak well, they lose motivation and often give up entirely.”* Interviewee 5 described how fear of being laughed at prevents many students from speaking: *“Most students are shy. They think they speak broken English, so they are afraid others will laugh. That fear holds them back.”* Interviewee 27 highlighted that even families can sometimes discourage learners:

Sometimes they tell you that the language is difficult. Those words are demotivating and make you want to quit.

Shyness and social anxiety were repeatedly mentioned by multiple respondents, including Interviewees 23 and 11: *“We cannot stand and speak in front of others. Speaking is hard, and shyness is our biggest challenge.”* Religious and cultural misconceptions also limit students’

confidence. Interviewee 5 stated: *“Some think learning English is linked to Christians or foreign values. But language is from Allah, it is just a tool. All languages are equal.”*

Theme 5. Suggestions for Improvement

Respondents offered numerous thoughtful suggestions to enhance English language learning in Somaliland. The most common recommendations focused on curriculum reform, early intervention, increased practice, and supportive policies. Interviewee 2 called for a revision of the English curriculum:

The curriculum is poorly developed. It is not comprehensive or well-designed. Each grade level should have a unique focus. Teachers need to use student-centered methods to help students practice and engage with the language.

Interviewee 5 highlighted the need for government-level intervention: *“There should be a national plan to enhance English learning. This could include rigorous language assessments to motivate students and improve standards.”* Interviewee 3 described the mismatch between study duration and student outcomes: *“Students spend eight years in primary, four years in secondary, and additional years in college yet they still struggle to speak or write. That shows the system is not working.”* Interviewee 4 suggested a more interactive and practical approach:

We should teach practically. For example, when saying ‘sit down’ or ‘close the door,’ we should use gestures. This helps students learn in context.

Several students emphasized the importance of patience, early exposure, and group learning. One student noted: *“Learning English takes time. Students should be patient and keep practicing even when it is hard.”* Interviewees 10 and 8 stressed early exposure: *“Students should start learning English at a young age. There should be an intensive English course before university to prepare students better.”* Interviewee 1 emphasized group learning and daily practice:

Study groups help a lot. Set aside time daily to listen, watch, and speak English. Call groups and daily exposure improve fluency.

Respondents also highlighted the connection between English proficiency and empowerment. Interviewee 9 stated: *“Knowledge is power. Most things like the internet and medicine are in English. Without it, people can mislead you. Learning the language protects and empowers you.”* Interviewee 23 proposed regular speaking practice to overcome barriers: *“Students can read, but writing is hard. And we often skip letters when speaking. That is why regular speaking practice is so important.”*

Discussions

Instructional Barriers

One of the most persistent obstacles in Somaliland's English education system is the prevalence of outdated teaching methods and underqualified instructors. As Interviewee 7 noted, *“Teachers are hired based on their ability to speak the language, not to teach it,”* highlighting a systemic issue where language proficiency is mistaken for pedagogical competence. This mirrors (Ghaffar, Abdellatif, Almusharraf, & Imran, 2024) findings, which underscore the need for teacher training, innovative methods, and technology integration to enhance teaching quality in under-resourced contexts.

Other respondents noted the lack of structured instructional methods. Interviewee 27 stated, *"Teachers' methods are poor. A teacher should not move on to a new topic before checking that students understood the previous one."* This aligns with (Azim, 2025), who emphasized that teacher training and curriculum development are key in overcoming instructional challenges like large class sizes and multi-level classrooms.

Moreover, many students pointed out the lack of visual, auditory, and interactive materials. Interviewee 3 mentioned, *"If students get access to listening, videos, pictures, and reading materials, they can make progress."* (Sultana & Imran, 2024) identified similar barriers in Pakistan, where inadequate materials and poor administrative support limited learning outcomes.

Instructors also rarely tailor instruction to student needs. Interviewee 6 emphasized, *"Teachers need to observe students' strengths and weaknesses and track their progress. That is how real improvement happens."* These challenges persist largely due to systemic neglect of teacher preparation and curricular reform, confirming (Khoerani, Wahyuningsih, Afandi, & Kasriyati, 2023) conclusion that non-native English teachers require substantial support in training and resources.

Psychological Barriers

Psychological barriers such as low confidence, anxiety, and poor motivation were repeatedly mentioned by both teachers and learners. Interviewee 5 remarked, *"Most students are shy. They think they speak broken English, so they are afraid others will laugh. That fear holds them back."* This aligns with (Gobena, 2025), who identified shyness, low motivation, and fear of mistakes as major deterrents to speaking performance.

Anxiety and self-doubt were also common. Interviewee 2 stated, *"Students believe English is difficult or even impossible to learn. That belief becomes a barrier in itself."* Similar observations are noted by (Jelokbuso, 2025; Rosita, 2024), who found that anxiety and fear of making mistakes significantly undermine classroom participation and long-term engagement.

Cultural attitudes further compound psychological reluctance. Interviewee 27 reported, *"Sometimes they tell you that the language is difficult. Those words are demotivating and make you want to quit."* According to (Wisrance & Kristanti, 2024), cultural reluctance and fear of peer judgment can severely impair language performance, particularly in communities where English is viewed as foreign or pretentious.

Environmental Constraints

Limited exposure to English outside the classroom and weak home support were consistent findings in the study. Interviewee 2 highlighted, *"The environment avoids them from learning. They do not attack the language on a day-to-day basis."* This reflects (Cohen & Quirk, 2025), work, which showed that cumulative language exposure at home strongly correlates with higher grammatical accuracy and fluency.

Most learners reported that no one at home spoke English. Interviewee 16 noted, *"Wherever you go home, the market everyone speaks Somali. It is only when you leave the country that you can practice."* (Mandal, 2024) similarly found that unsupportive home environments, low parental involvement, and socioeconomic hardship directly reduce students' English proficiency.

Even when family members supported education, many could not engage with English content. Interviewee 21 shared, *"If I ask for something in English, my mom may not understand. That is why we must teach our younger siblings."* These patterns confirm (Zhang, Lau, & Su, 2021),

who argued that family language practices and parental attitudes are among the strongest predictors of children's English literacy and engagement.

Moreover, some students face active discouragement from using English due to cultural misinterpretations. Interviewee 5 stated, "*Some think English is a Christian language. But all languages are created by Allah. Language is just a tool for communication.*" Cultural misconceptions such as these, as (Garaeva, 2024), explains, can cause learners to internalize resistance and limit their own progress.

The study reveals that English language learners in Somaliland face a combination of instructional, psychological, and environmental barriers. These challenges persist due to outdated teaching methods, low teacher qualifications, social stigma, anxiety, and a lack of exposure outside the classroom. The findings are consistent with international studies conducted in similar contexts, reaffirming the global nature of these challenges. Addressing them requires multi-level interventions, including teacher training, curricular reform, community sensitization, and the creation of English-speaking environments inside and outside schools.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study explored the challenges English language learners face in Somaliland, revealing key barriers such as outdated teaching methods, limited English exposure, socio-cultural resistance, and psychological obstacles like low confidence and motivation. Despite these challenges, students demonstrated strong motivation by adopting digital tools and self-directed strategies. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions, including upgrading teacher training, leveraging digital tools, creating English-friendly school environments, reforming the curriculum, promoting early English exposure, and launching community awareness campaigns, all directly addressing the barriers identified in this investigation. While rooted in Somaliland, the insights carry broader relevance for similar multilingual, post-colonial societies facing comparable educational challenges, offering practical implications for policymakers, educators, and community leaders seeking to strengthen English language acquisition and expand learners' academic and professional opportunities.

To improve English language learning in Somaliland, this study recommends a targeted set of short and long-term interventions, directly aligned with the challenges identified through interviews and focus group discussions.

Short-term interventions

Upgrade teacher training and pedagogy: To address outdated teaching methods, teachers should receive training in communicative, student-centered approaches that emphasize speaking, listening, and real-life interaction. *Stakeholders: Ministry of Education, universities, language training institutes.*

Leverage digital tools and platforms: In response to students' limited classroom exposure and high motivation, integrating language-learning apps, online resources, and AI tools like ChatGPT can enhance learner autonomy. *Stakeholders: School administrators, education NGOs, tech partners*

Create English-friendly school environments: Schools should introduce clubs, debate groups, and speaking corners to provide regular practice and combat socio-cultural resistance. *Stakeholders: Schools, local education offices, student associations*

Long-term interventions

Reform the national curriculum: Curricula should prioritize practical language use over rote learning by embedding listening, speaking, and writing skills into early and secondary education.

Stakeholders: Ministry of Education, curriculum developers, teacher colleges

Promote early English exposure: Introducing English from preschool will build a stronger foundation, improve motivation, and reduce psychological barriers over time.

Stakeholders: Early childhood centers, parents, education ministries

Launch community awareness campaigns: To shift cultural attitudes and reduce the stigma around English use, nationwide campaigns should highlight the value of English for education and employment. *Stakeholders: Local government, media outlets, civil society organizations.*

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Biodata

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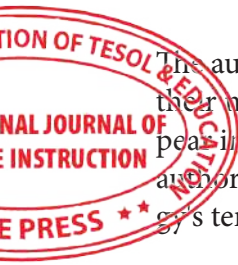
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