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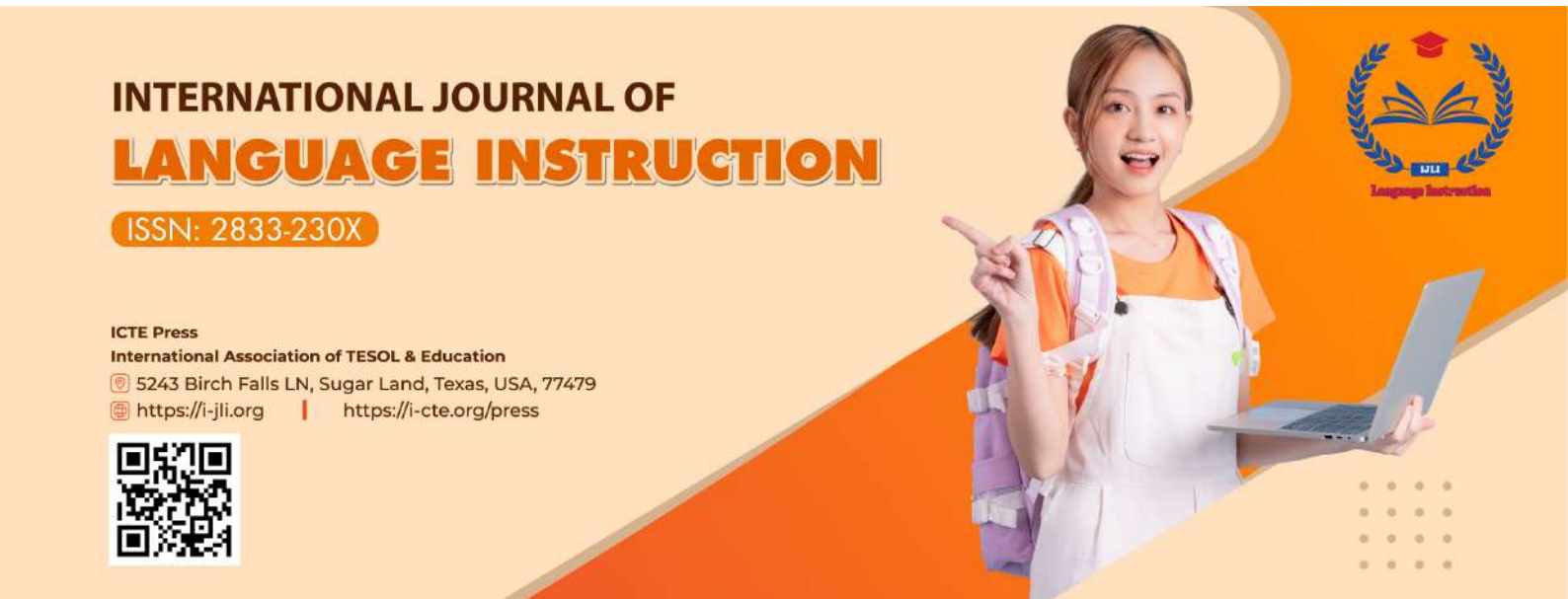

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# A Note from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Beloved Language Instructors,

The International Journal of Language Instruction (IJLI), Volume 4, Number 4 (2025), completed its mission, includes six research articles and one book review, all of which address important issues in language education today. These issues include: (a) how core skills, especially listening, develop when both learner and contextual factors are at play; (b) how affective barriers like anxiety can hold back even advanced language learners; (c) how intercultural competence can be defined and measured accurately in specific higher-education settings; and (d) how multilingual classroom practices like code-switching and code-mixing can be helpful but also make things more equal and harder to understand. The articles in this issue provide a consistent set of ideas for teacher training, curriculum development, classroom language policy, and applied linguistic research, especially in Vietnam, the USA, and Bangladesh.

The issue starts with a study by Nguyen Thi Nhu Ngoc and Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc about how non-English majors at an English center in Vietnam learn to listen better. The authors' professional affiliations illustrate the issue's relevance to both academic and practical contexts: Nguyen Thi Nhu Ngoc is associated with the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City, part of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, while Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc is connected to Asian International School, Ho Chi Minh City. The study employs a quantitative cross-sectional design with 264 survey respondents to investigate the relationships between various intrinsic and extrinsic variables and the acquisition of listening skills. These variables include motivation, cognitive ability, language proficiency, learning strategies, teacher practices, classroom resources, and out-of-class exposure. The results underscore the notably robust predictive influences of motivation, language proficiency, and extracurricular exposure, highlighting a pragmatic conclusion: listening instruction is enhanced when formal classroom engagement is complemented by organized opportunities and practices for significant listening outside of class hours.

The second article puts forward a different but equally important goal: fair testing for intercultural outcomes. Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc (Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam) and Nguyen Nhat Tuan (Hanoi University, Vietnam) present the development and validation of a questionnaire to assess intercultural competence among English majors in a Vietnamese higher education context. The study, which used EFA (n = 274) and CFA (n = 212) to narrow down an initial pool of 38 items, produced a validated 20-item scale divided into four categories: knowledge of one's own culture; knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication; attitudes (such as openness and respect); and skills (such as interpreting/relating and analyzing/evaluating). The article provides a context-sensitive instrument with reported model fit indices, serving as a valuable tool for program evaluation and research on intercultural learning within Vietnam's higher education sector.

The third contribution expands the issue's scope from classrooms to cultural discourse by analyzing the pragmatic manifestation of criticism. Pham Huong Ngoc Uyen, associated with the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City) and the Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance, examines the portrayal of criticism by working-class speakers in Vietnamese cinema and web dramas. Employing discourse analysis and quantitative methodologies, the study reveals a prevalent use of direct criticism, particularly negative assessments, alongside indirect techniques such as sarcasm and rhetorical questions. The paper is pedagogically significant as it elucidates how socially contextual variables, such as relational distance and age, can influence pragmatic decisions, thereby informing pragmatics-oriented pedagogy and resources.

The focus now shifts to the role of affect in language acquisition. Bellarina-Dung Nguyen (Temple University Japan) and Anh Ngoc Trinh (University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi) examine the factors contributing to English language learning anxiety among senior English majors in Vietnam. Utilizing questionnaire and interview data, the study delineates several significant factors, including vocabulary-related challenges, misconceptions regarding English language acquisition, test anxiety, and inadequate preparation. The contribution is significant as it contests the presumption that English majors inherently experience low anxiety, and it promotes a supportive pedagogy that considers both academic requirements and students' emotional experiences.

Two studies in the latter part of the issue focus on communication in multilingual classrooms. Srejon Datta, affiliated with North South University in Bangladesh, investigates code-mixing in higher-education settings at private universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Using a mix of methods, the study, which included a survey of 100 students and interviews with both domestic and international students, demonstrates that code-mixing can facilitate communication for many learners while simultaneously hindering comprehension—particularly among international students—thereby prompting significant inquiries regarding inclusion and clarity in linguistically diverse classrooms. Tran Thi Ngoc Quyen, who works at Tra Vinh University in Vietnam, also examines how students and teachers feel about code-switching in EFL classrooms in the Mekong Delta. The results show that most people have positive attitudes and that there are many functions (for example, keeping the conversation going and stopping misunderstandings). However, some teachers may feel tense, ashamed, or unprofessional. These articles collectively advocate for a more nuanced perspective on classroom language policy—one that acknowledges translanguaging practices as functional resources while also prioritizing equity and comprehension.

Finally, Amar Bahadur Sherma, who works at The University of Texas at Arlington in the U.S.A., wrote a book review for the issue. The book is called Literary Theory for Robots: How Computers Learned to Write. The review links language teaching to current discussions about writing, authorship, and working with AI, giving readers a way to think about how applied linguistics and new technologies are coming together.
In general, IJLI Vol. 4, No. 4 (2025) is a collection of articles that, together, improve our understanding of learning predictors and affective barriers, enhance our ability to measure intercultural outcomes, and provide a better understanding of multilingual and pragmatic communication across different educational and cultural settings.

We are very grateful to our reviewers and members of the editorial board for their very helpful work on this issue. They have helped improve the quality, clarity, and scholarly rigor of every manuscript published in the International Journal of Language Instruction by carefully reading them, giving constructive feedback, and being professional. We also want to thank the editorial board for their constant help, ethical oversight, and support in upholding high publication standards and ensuring that the peer-review process is fair and open.

We invite researchers, teacher educators, and practitioners to send us papers for our next issue. IJLI accepts original research articles, review papers, theoretical and pedagogical discussions, and book reviews that help people learn more about language teaching and learning, applied linguistics, teacher education, curriculum and assessment, multilingualism, educational technology, and AI in language education. Authors are encouraged to submit new, well-researched work that clearly demonstrates the effects on how languages are taught in different settings. For submission guidelines and the most up-to-date information on deadlines and publication schedules, please visit the journal's website.

On behalf of the editorial board and staff, I wish you insightful reading.
Thanks God for everything!
With warm regards,


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

# Intrinsic and Extrinsic Factors Affecting Non-English Majors' Listening Skill Acquisition at an English Centre in Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

Listening is a fundamental skill and also the most challenging one for EFL learners. This study explores intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect English listening skill acquisition among non-English majors at an English centre in Vietnam. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, the study conducted a five-point Likert questionnaire with 264 survey respondents, using correlational and regression analyses to examine and predict the relationships between learner-related factors and listening skill acquisition among learners. The analysis focused on seven variables, namely motivation, cognitive ability, language proficiency, learning strategies, teacher practices, classroom resources, and out-of-class exposure. The results showed that motivation, language proficiency, and out-of-class exposure were the strongest predictors of listening skill acquisition. The paper concludes with actionable suggestions for improving EFL listening instruction and learner engagement.

**Keywords**: listening skill acquisition, non-English majors, intrinsic factors, extrinsic factors, correlation

## Introduction

In the context of rapid international integration, English has become a critical tool for accessing knowledge, conducting research, and participating in global communication (Crystal, 2003). Proficiency in English is increasingly recognised as a key determinant of academic and professional success, particularly in countries where English functions as a foreign language (EFL). Among the four core language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - the first is often considered the most fundamental, as it provides the foundation for developing the other communicative competencies (Rost, 2011). Effective listening comprehension enables learners to decode spoken input, interpret meaning in real time, and engage meaningfully in oral interactions (Field, 2008).

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Despite its importance, listening is frequently reported as the most challenging skill for EFL learners to acquire (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). In EFL contexts, such as those in Vietnam, learners have limited access to authentic spoken English in their daily communication. The classroom often serves as the primary, and sometimes the only, environment for practising listening skills. Consequently, students face numerous difficulties when dealing with real-life speech (Trang, 2020). Many Vietnamese students found listening to be an important skill but a very difficult one (Ngo, 2022). Moreover, listening is typically underemphasized in instructional materials and teaching practices, which often prioritise grammar and vocabulary over communicative competence (Kweon & Spolsky, 2018).

These concerns are especially prominent at several English centres in Vietnam, including the English Centre where the research was conducted, with regard to non-English majors. i.e., undergraduate learners of English from local universities. In fact, in Vietnam, most non-English majors attend English classes provided by language centres to get English certificates, such as VSTEP (Vietnamese Standardised Test of English Proficiency), TOEIC, IELTS, or TOEFL, as required by Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training for graduation. Listening assessments for this group of learners often lead to low confidence and very low performance relative to English proficiency benchmarks. It is also a significant concern for many teachers at the English Center under research. Research has shown that Vietnamese university students are not sufficiently prepared for their own English listening and require greater teacher guidance and autonomy (Vu & Shah, 2016). Their challenges can be mapped onto categorisation of *intrinsic factors* (e.g., lack of motivation, insufficient vocabulary, and poor learning strategies) and *extrinsic factors* (e.g., inadequate exposure to English outside the classroom, lack of authentic materials, and overly didactic teaching methods) (Tran & Duong, 2020). These factors contribute to determining Vietnamese learners' English proficiency (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Thus, it is essential to explore factors affecting EFL learners' listening learning, especially those at English centres in Vietnam. This study is conducted in such a centre, i.e. the IKUN English Centre, where hundreds of non-English majors are enrolled throughout the year. It then aims to investigate and analyse intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence the listening performance of non-English majors. The research findings are helpful for enhancing teaching methodologies and curriculum construction for the centre itself and those in similar EFL contexts.

## Literature Review

### *Listening skill acquisition*

*Listening skill*, *listening comprehension*, and *listening skill acquisition* are interrelated but somewhat different concepts. The term "listening skill" refers to the learner's ability to decode and understand spoken language using various sub-skills, such as identifying the main idea, recognising specific details, understanding tone and intonation, and making inferences (Rost, 2011). The term "listening comprehension" refers to the level of understanding that results when the learner effectively applies listening skills to a specific task or input (Field, 2008). Thus, it is usually task-dependent and depends on the listener's linguistic proficiency,

background knowledge, and listening-topic familiarity. However, the term "listening skill acquisition" mentions the long-term developmental process where the learner, step by step, internalises and improves listening abilities, and this process is concerned with cognitive, linguistic, and affective changes and is impacted by internal and external factors (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Thus, we can easily observe learners' listening skills through their performance on tasks, but their listening skill acquisition requires deeper reflection on processing efficiency and comprehension ability over time.

It is significant for non-English majors with limited exposure to English outside the classroom to find ways to enhance their listening skill acquisition as part of the language acquisition process. One of the commonly used theories of language acquisition is Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982). This theory affirms that we can learn a new language effectively once we are exposed to inputs beyond our current understanding levels, and we manage to comprehend them based on clues like context or prior knowledge. In this model, learners find that listening is not only a skill to practice but also an important means to acquire language. Supporting this view, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) highlights the role of interaction and guided learning. In his theory, the Zone of Proximal Development indicates that learners' progress results when they work with more experienced and supportive others. The two theories offer valuable insights for Vietnamese learners of English. That means teachers should provide learners with more practical and collaborative listening activities so that they can enhance their listening skill acquisition.

In terms of the stages of listening skill acquisition, Anderson (1983) outlines three major ones, namely *perception, parsing,* and *utilisation*. These stages refer to learners' receiving, organising, and interpreting auditory inputs. This three-stage operation also emphasises the role of mental processes, including attention control and working memory. Additionally, some constructivist theorists raise the significance of personal experience and active engagement in listening comprehension (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1950). Based on these foundational theories, recent studies have put great emphasis on meaningful listening content, learners' autonomy, and learners' involvement in shaping effective instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Schunk, 2020). Obviously, all of their perspectives support recognising learners' experiences and integrating them into teaching and learning activities in listening classrooms.

In brief, Krashen (1982) and Anderson (1983) emphasise linguistic inputs and cognitive processes. Vygotsky (1978) and constructivists provide an understanding of the social dynamics and learner-centred elements of language acquisition. The combination of their views is useful and effective for exploring the impact of internal and external factors on the listening performance of non-English majors in Vietnam's EFL contexts.

### *Factors affecting learners' listening skill acquisition*

Several studies have been conducted on listening skill acquisition, revealing that learners' listening development is affected by both internal and external factors.

Some evidence found in real-world classroom contexts indicates that internal factors have played a significant role in developing learners' listening skills. *Motivation* comes out as a key factor. Students' motivation refers to a combination of their desire to learn a language, efforts

to learn it, and positive attitudes toward it (Gardner, 1985). Learners with good motivation tend to exhibit more active participation and greater perseverance throughout the language learning process (Gardner, 1985); they are often more engaged in independent listening activities and have better improvement (Nguyen, 2023). The next key influence is *cognitive ability*. Cognitive ability involves language analytic ability and working memory in language learning (Li et al., 2019). Learners who can maintain good attention and working memory find it easier to follow and interpret spoken language (Vandergrift, 2007). The cognitive ability thus supports learners to focus on key information and grasp the main points of listening tasks. The third factor is *language proficiency*. In language learning, it refers to learners' general ability to use a language accurately and fluently across four language skills, reflecting their knowledge of language forms and their practical communicative competence (Hulstijn, 2015). With a good knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, learners can achieve better listening performance, as evidenced by the link between a learner's word knowledge and their ability to comprehend listening texts (Nation & Newton, 2009). Thus, learners often struggle with authentic listening materials if they lack sufficient vocabulary (Phuangsua & Chusanachoti, 2019). Pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar are influential factors in learners' listening comprehension (Bui, 2024). One vital factor is the use of *learning strategies*. Students' learning strategies are the thoughts and actions they use to achieve a learning goal (Chamot, 2004). For example, effective employment of predicting upcoming content, drawing inferences, and self-monitoring comprehension helps learners to process spoken language (Oxford, 1990). Learners prefer some strategies over others and face challenges in applying them flexibly (Ngo, 2015).

Some external influences also outline learners' listening performance. Above all are *teacher practices*. This factor refers to how teachers instruct students, evaluate them, design lesson plans, and implement the curriculum (Anderman & Anderman, 2020). When a teacher clearly instructs learners in metacognitive strategies, learners will effectively plan, control, and assess their listening (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Learners' listening performance improves through teachers' instruction on integrating metacognitive listening strategies (Nguyen & Dinh, 2023). Another factor is access to quality *learning materials*. It is essential for learners to develop their listening skills with authentic and diverse audio inputs (Field, 2008). At schools with inadequate facilities, such as outdated audio equipment and unstable internet lines, learners' listening practice is certainly hindered (Ngo & Ha, 2022). Developing listening skills is also greatly supported by *out-of-class exposure*, i.e. exposure to English beyond the classroom. When learners are engaged with English through movies, music, and real-life conversations, they can enhance their listening comprehension (Harmer, 2007). In comparison with those in urban areas with more English-listening exposure, learners in rural ones face limited chances to access such resources, leading to big gaps in their listening ability (Phuangsua & Chusanachoti, 2019)

In brief, learners' listening skill acquisition is impacted by various internal and external factors. The former ones refer to learners' individual elements, including motivation, cognitive ability, language proficiency, and learning strategies, and they all serve a crucial function. The latter ones, including teacher practices, classroom resources, and out-of-class exposure, also contribute significantly as a driving force. The cited studies are mainly based on empirical results or performance observations, lacking analysis of how learners self-perceive the factors that affect their listening learning. In addition, certain factors such as motivation or learning

strategies are found to influence listening outcomes; however, no research has specifically identified a quantitative correlation between each factor and listening skill acquisition. Thus, theoretical perspectives and empirical studies reviewed above support the idea that these aspects must be viewed as a whole for learners to achieve effective listening performance.

### *Research questions*

This study aims to provide a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of how these factors affect listening skill acquisition among non-English majors at a language centre in Vietnam, i.e., the IKUN English Centre. To fulfil this aim, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do non-English majors perceive factors affecting their English listening skill acquisition?
2. What is the correlation between these factors and non-English majors' listening skill acquisition?

## Methods

### *Pedagogical setting and participants*

This research was conducted at a private English Centre in Vietnam. It serves learners from various universities with various academic backgrounds. The centre's goal is to support non-English majors from local universities in achieving standardised English certifications, including TOEIC and IELTS, to meet the graduation requirements set by Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training. Learners at this centre typically enter with low-intermediate English proficiency, generally scoring between 250 and 300 on the TOEIC test or 3.0-3.5 on the IELTS test. They join courses here to reach at least 550 on the TOEIC and/or 5.0 on the IELTS, benchmarks often required for university graduation and job readiness. As observed and reviewed by the centre's teachers, one of their most challenging classes is English listening. In addition, like any other language centre in Vietnam, most teachers at this centre work part-time alongside their tenure jobs at schools or universities, and classroom resources are highly dependent on the language centre's financial and professional resources. Thus, this centre provides a representative and relevant context for examining the factors that influence the acquisition of English listening skills in the Vietnamese EFL context.

The participants were 264 non-English majors at the centre. The researchers chose convenience sampling because of the diverse learners enrolled at the centre, as mentioned above. The fact that they participated in different academic programs at their own universities and attended English courses with varying language levels and personal backgrounds would provide a holistic view of the research population. Also, this sample size meets the criteria for a correlation analysis with multiple predictors and helps detect medium effects (Field, 2018). Employing such a sampling strategy, the study captured multifaceted trends through the survey and gathered deeper insights through correlation analysis.

### *Design of the study*

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, using correlational and regression analyses to examine and predict relationships among seven learner-related factors and listening skill acquisition. This research was to test and predict the relationships between specific learner-related variables and listening acquisition using statistical techniques. This approach led to objective, generalizable results for correlational and regression analyses, whereas mixed methods in this case might have added unnecessary complexity and subjectivity, hindering the study's predictive goals. The primary research instrument was a student survey.

In detail, for data collection, the researchers conducted a structured survey to measure the seven key factors identified in the literature review. Using a five-point Likert scale, the survey comprised 35 items covering seven key internal and external areas affecting learners' acquisition of listening skills. The items were adapted from previous studies (Gardner, 1985; Nation & Newton, 2009; Oxford, 1990; Trang, 2020; Vandergrift, 2007) to ensure that the questions were both reliable and valid. The sample was 264 non-English majors at the aforementioned language centre. The variables included seven independent variables (key affective factors) and one dependent variable (listening skill acquisition). The analysis techniques employed were Pearson correlation (for relationship analysis) and multiple regression (for predictive outcomes).

### *Data collection and analysis*

The survey was conducted in early 2025 with 264 students via an online Google Form. The quantitative data were then processed with SPSS version 27. The descriptive statistics provided an overview of trends from the seven key variables. The researchers then employed Pearson's correlation to examine the relationships among these factors and listening skill acquisition, identifying their strengths and directions. After that, a multiple regression analysis further clarified how specific variables affect learners' acquisition of listening skills. Therefore, all the data analysis helped identify patterns, find correlations, and see which factors were most predictive of strong listening skill acquisition. The data is available upon reasonable request.

## Results

### *Research question 1: How do non-English majors perceive factors affecting their English listening skill acquisition?*

For items 1-5 in Table 1, the mean values ranged from 3.14 to 3.21, which shows that the learners are moderately motivated. They generally recognised the importance of listening skills for academic or career benefits (M=3.21), but there is a slight lack in active goal-setting and emotional engagement (e.g., item 3: M=3.14). The SD was 0.974-1.021, which also shows moderate variability, indicating diverse levels of personal motivation.

For items 6-10, the mean range was 3.30-3.42. The learners reported slightly above average cognitive competence in handling English audio. Maintaining focus despite distractions (M=3.42) got the highest score, while memory and speed of comprehension were lower. The SD range was 0.968-1.098. This moderate variability also suggests differences in their working

memory, focus, and inferencing abilities.

**Table 1**

Statistics of the internal factors perceived by non-English majors (N=264)

| Internal factors | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| *Motivation* | | |
| 1. I am highly motivated to improve my English listening skills. | 3.20 | 0.974 |
| 2. I enjoy listening to English because I find the topics and content interesting. | 3.19 | 1.021 |
| 3. I set personal goals to track my progress in English listening. | 3.14 | 1.019 |
| 4. I believe that improving my listening skills will benefit my future studies or career. | 3.21 | 1.002 |
| 5. When I feel unmotivated, it becomes harder for me to complete listening tasks. | 3.19 | 1.002 |
| *Cognitive ability* | | |
| 6. I can stay focused during English listening tasks, even when there are distractions. | 3.42 | 0.968 |
| 7. I can remember key points after listening to English audio. | 3.30 | 1.098 |
| 8. I can quickly understand the main idea of what I hear in English. | 3.33 | 1.054 |
| 9. I struggle to follow when people speak too fast in English. | 3.36 | 1.098 |
| 10. When I miss a word or phrase, I can guess its meaning from the context. | 3.34 | 1.078 |
| *Language proficiency* | | |
| 11. I don't understand many of the words used in English listening activities. | 3.57 | 0.969 |
| 12. I struggle to understand long English sentences with difficult grammar. | 3.55 | 1.042 |
| 13. I find it hard to understand spoken English because the pronunciation sounds different from what I expect. | 3.72 | 1.056 |
| 14. I cannot follow fast English conversations because I don't know enough expressions or slang. | 3.73 | 1.043 |
| 15. I find it hard to understand English because I haven't mastered the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. | 3.72 | 1.119 |
| *Learning strategies* | | |
| 16. I use listening strategies such as predicting, inferencing, or note-taking to improve my understanding. | 3.77 | 0.929 |
| 17. I have been taught how to use specific strategies to improve English listening. | 4.03 | 0.869 |
| 18. When I use listening strategies, I understand and remember information better. | 3.94 | 0.861 |
| 19. I find listening tasks difficult because I'm unsure which strategies to use. | 4.05 | 0.837 |
| 20. I plan my listening by thinking about the topic or predicting what I will hear. | 4.10 | 0.866 |

For items 11-15, the mean values were from 3.55 to 3.73. The learners generally perceived low proficiency in listening as a challenge. Their highest concerns were unfamiliar expressions or slang (M=3.73) and pronunciation mismatches (M=3.72), which reveals their listening

comprehension was significantly hindered by poor pronunciation and informal language. The SD ranged from 0.969 to 1.119. A greater standard deviation here indicates that some students face more difficulties than those with core language knowledge.

For items 16-20, the mean range was 3.77-4.10, indicating that language strategies are the strongest internal factor. The learners used strategies and recognised their effectiveness. For example, item 20 (planning/predicting) got the highest score, 4.10. However, the high score on item 19 (4.05) also reveals some confusion about *which* strategy to apply, revealing a certain gap in their learning. The SD was 0.837-0.929, indicating the learners' consistency in their responses, which reflects their shared understanding or instruction in strategy use.

**Table 2**

Statistics of the external factors perceived by non-English majors (N=264)

| External factor | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| *Teacher's practices* | | |
| 21. My teacher provides clear guidance on how to improve my listening skills. | 3.24 | 0.972 |
| 22. My teacher teaches me specific strategies to understand spoken English better. | 3.28 | 1.067 |
| 23. I feel more confident during listening activities when my teacher provides structured support. | 3.21 | 1.089 |
| 24. My teacher gives useful feedback that helps me recognise and fix my listening weaknesses. | 3.33 | 1.140 |
| 25. My teacher uses a variety of listening activities that keep me engaged in class. | 3.21 | 1.124 |
| *Classroom resources* | | |
| 26. My class has access to high-quality listening materials (e.g., recordings, videos, podcasts). | 3.48 | 1.079 |
| 27. The audio materials used in my class reflect real-life conversations. | 3.34 | 1.142 |
| 28. Limited access to listening materials makes it harder for me to improve my listening skills. | 3.56 | 1.162 |
| 29. Using a variety of listening materials helps me understand different accents and speech patterns. | 3.48 | 1.176 |
| 30. My classroom includes both printed and digital resources for developing listening skills. | 3.54 | 1.198 |
| *Out-of-class exposure* | | |
| 31. I regularly listen to English through TV shows, movies, music, or online videos. | 3.33 | 0.832 |
| 32. I interact with native or fluent English speakers outside of class. | 3.34 | 0.957 |
| 33. I believe that exposure to English outside of school has improved my listening skills. | 3.45 | 1.016 |
| 34. I do not have enough opportunities to practice listening outside of school. | 3.58 | 0.987 |
| 35. I try to use English in real-life situations such as shopping, travelling, or chatting online. | 3.44 | 0.941 |

For items 21-25 in Table 2, the learners considered their teachers moderately supportive in enhancing their listening development. The highest-rated factor is receiving useful feedback

(item 24: M = 3.33), and the teacher's structured support and engagement strategies score slightly lower (items 23 and 25: M = 3.21). The high SD range (0.972-1.140) indicates moderate to high variability, suggesting inconsistent teaching practices or perceptions across classes.

For items 26-30, the mean values ranged from 3.34 to 3.56, indicating learners' general awareness of the usefulness and availability of classroom resources. Among them, limited access is perceived as a challenge (item 28: M = 3.56). It showcases disparities in material availability across classrooms. The use of both printed and digital tools also scored high (item 30: M = 3.54). However, the SD values (1.079-1.198) revealed high variability, indicating that learners in some classes are better resourced than those in others.

For items 31-35, the mean range was 3.33 to 3.58. It specified the learners' moderate engagement with English outside the classroom. Limited opportunities (item 34: M = 3.58) got the highest score, showing a barrier. The learners reported their effort to use English in real-life contexts (item 35: M = 3.44), and believed in the helpfulness of media exposure (item 33: M = 3.45). The SD range was 0.832-1.016, which suggests more consistent experiences compared to those in the learners' classrooms.

**Table 3**

Statistical summary of internal and external factors perceived by non-English majors

| Factor | Avg. Mean | Avg. SD |
|---|---|---|
| Motivation | 3.19 | 1.004 |
| Cognitive ability | 3.35 | 1.059 |
| Language proficiency | 3.66 | 1.046 |
| Learning strategies | 3.98 | 0.872 |
| Teacher's practices | 3.25 | 1.0784 |
| Classroom resources | 3.48 | 1.1514 |
| Out-of-class exposure | 3.43 | 0.9466 |

Table 3 summarizes the factors students perceive as influential in their acquisition of listening skills. The factor of *learning strategies* was the most impactful (M=3.98), which suggests non-English majors value listening techniques. *Language proficiency* also scored high (M=3.66), revealing that vocabulary knowledge, grammar, and pronunciation are essential for effective listening. Whereas *motivation* received the lowest score (M=3.19), indicating a certain level of concern about learner engagement and drive. It means that though they understand it is important to improve their listening skills, they may not always feel motivated to do so. This is evident in Table 1 above, with moderate variability and diverse levels of personal motivation.

To maintain consistency in participants' responses, standard deviations provide insights into variability. The lowest (SD=0.872) was associated with *learning strategies*, showing strong agreement across them. Similarly, *out-of-class exposure* had relatively low variability (SD=0.9466), suggesting most students reported similar levels of interaction with English outside the classroom. However, *classroom resources* had the highest (SD=1.1514), revealing large differences in students' experiences of available and qualified listening materials due to different levels of support or access from different teachers.

In short, the variability leads to an important finding that the most impactful and consistent factor is the use of *learning strategies*, while the most unequal factor is access to *classroom resources*. It reveals that non-English majors can use listening strategies, but not all of them benefit equally from classroom environments. This is supported by the fact related to *teacher practices*. Although this factor was rated moderately (M=3.25, SD=1.0784), it indicated inconsistent instructional quality, possibly affecting learners' listening development. In addition, these results provide a quantitative foundation for exploring how seven factors as dependent variables interact to influence actual listening skill acquisition, as investigated in the subsequent correlation and regression analyses in the next section.

*Research Question 2: What is the correlation between these factors and non-English majors' listening skill acquisition?*

**Table 4**

Pearson correlation matrix

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Motivation | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 2. Cognitive ability | 0.665** | 1 | | | | | | |
| 3. Language proficiency | 0.510** | 0.363** | 1 | | | | | |
| 4. Learning strategies | 0.516** | 0.726** | 0.347** | 1 | | | | |
| 5. Teacher's practices | 0.266** | 0.734** | 0.673** | 0.620** | 1 | | | |
| 6. Classroom resources | 0.283** | 0.412** | 0.252** | 0.486** | 0.306** | 1 | | |
| 7. Out-of-class exposure | 0.381** | 0.310** | 0.578** | 0.614** | 0.687** | 0.561** | 1 | |
| 8. Listening skill acquisition | 0.486** | 0.313** | 0.323** | 0.348** | 0.448** | 0.437** | 0.725** | 1 |

The Pearson correlation matrix in Table 4 illustrates the strength and direction of relationships among seven independent variables and the dependent variable - *listening skill acquisition*. All correlations marked with a double asterisk (**) are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, indicating strong and reliable associations in this learning context for non-English majors. The analysis of key correlations with *listening skill acquisition* reveals that several internal and external factors play moderate roles in affecting learners' abilities. The strongest positive correlation is found in *motivation* ($r = 0.486$), indicating that those who are more driven and goal-oriented tend to perform better in listening. The next is *teacher practices* ($r = 0.449$), showing that teachers' structured support, strategy instruction, and constructive feedback greatly benefit learners' listening development. Additionally, the factor of *learning strategies* ($r = 0.349$) points out a meaningful correlation, emphasising the importance of using metacognitive tools such as prediction and note-taking. Although *cognitive ability* ($r = 0.314$) and *language proficiency* ($r = 0.323$) demonstrate slightly lower correlations, they still make positive contributions, highlighting that combining attentional focus and linguistic competence supports learners' listening development.

Furthermore, the relationships among the independent variables indicate their interaction and support learners' acquisition of listening skills. The correlation between *cognitive ability* and *learning strategies* (r = 0.73) is strong, indicating that those with strong mental focus and good distraction control are more likely to use learning strategies effectively. The correlation between *language proficiency* and *teacher practices* (r = 0.67) is also high, indicating that competent instruction by teachers helps enhance learners' vocabulary and understanding of grammar. Additionally, *teacher practices* and *out-of-class exposure* (r = 0.69) correlate highly, indicating that supportive teachers help learners engage with English in real-world settings. There is also a moderate relationship between *learning strategies* and *out-of-class exposure* (r = 0.61), suggesting that learners with effective learning behaviours are more likely to have practice beyond the classroom. These interconnections reveal that it is important for non-English majors to have a holistic learning environment that develops their internal capability and external engagement.

Some variables showcased strong bivariate correlations with listening proficiency. However, they were not significant in the multivariate regression model due to multicollinearity. In fact, when predictor variables are highly interrelated, this can lead to shared variance, reducing each variable's contribution to the model.

**Table 5**

Multiple regression analysis predicting listening performance

| Predictor | B (Coef.) | t-value | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Motivation | 0.164 | 4.75 | 0.000 |
| Cognitive ability | 0.179 | 5.86 | 0.000 |
| Language proficiency | 0.182 | 6.67 | 0.000 |
| Learning strategies | 0.181 | 4.51 | 0.000 |
| Teacher practices | 0.168 | 6.09 | 0.000 |
| Classroom resources | 0.145 | 4.97 | 0.000 |
| Out-of-class exposure | 0.112 | 3.72 | 0.000 |

*$R^2$= 0.676, Adjusted $R^2$ = 0.652, F-statistic = 27.45, p < 0.001*

The multiple regression analysis presented in Table 5 examines the extent to which seven predictor variables contribute to the variance in listening performance among non-English majors. It revealed a statistically significant model ($R2=0.676, p<0.001$)($R^2 = 0.676$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the seven predictors together explain approximately 67.6% of the variance in learners' listening skill acquisition, suggesting strong explanatory power for a behavioural outcome and indicating that these seven internal and external factors are highly relevant to understanding non-English majors' listening development. Also, the adjusted $R^2$ of 0.652 affirms that the model retains its strength even after the number of predictors is adjusted.

In detail, *language proficiency* was the strongest contributor ($B=0.182, p<0.001$)($B = 0.182$, $p < 0.001$), once highlighting that those with a better command of English vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation are likely to have better listening performance. In addition, *learning strategies* (B = 0.181) and *cognitive ability* (B = 0.179) were statistically significant, indicating

that those who actively use listening techniques and maintain attentional focus tend to better understand spoken English. These findings emphasise the importance of both linguistic and cognitive readiness in the acquisition of listening skills. For *motivation* (B = 0.164) and *teacher practices* (B = 0.168), both significantly influence learners' listening development, indicating that those with strong motivation and structured support, feedback, and strategy instruction from teachers are more engaged and successful. In case of *classroom resources* (B = 0.145) and *out-of-class exposure* (B = 0.112), they, though slightly lower in influence, still have meaningful contributions to the overall model. Their inclusion clarifies the importance of learning environments possessing authentic materials and interactive opportunities outside the classroom.

In brief, both internal and external factors significantly predict the acquisition of listening skills. Among them, *language proficiency, learning strategies,* and *cognitive ability* show the greatest influence. The results affirm the need for a balanced teaching approach emphasising learners' internal characteristics. External support systems should also be enhanced so that learners can enjoy diverse classroom materials and motivation-boosting activities, as well as be encouraged by high instructional quality and real-world practice.

## Discussion

The triangulation of descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses provides a better understanding of the factors influencing listening skill acquisition. It highlights how individual learner factors, such as cognitive ability, language proficiency, and learning strategies, interact to predict listening skill development in EFL contexts. While traditional SLA theories emphasize input and interaction as found in Krashen (1982), the findings underscore the importance of internal learner variables in shaping outcomes, even when external conditions remain stable. These results suggest a more nuanced view of SLA in EFL settings, where constrained exposure to authentic input heightens the role of intrinsic and extrinsic factors in language acquisition. Also, in relation to prior research, the findings of this study are consistent with both international and Vietnamese studies on listening skill acquisition by

Although motivation's dominant role affirms its status as a foundational factor in language learning, influencing both strategy use and persistence (Dörnyei, 2001), the participants in this study showed a slight lack of active goal-setting and emotional engagement. Students' overall *language proficiency* was found to be a key factor in their success in listening tasks. This supports Krashen's (1982) argument that a strong foundation in vocabulary and grammar enables learners to benefit from listening practice. The role of language proficiency in aiding comprehension also confirms the findings of Nation and Newton (2009), who emphasised vocabulary and grammar knowledge as core components of successful listening. For *learning strategies*, the study echoes Vandergrift and Goh's (2012) argument that teaching metacognitive listening strategies enhances learners' awareness and control over their listening processes.

Similarly, *teacher practices and classroom resources* got lower scores, highlighting limitations in the unequal quality of teacher instruction and technological and material support for listening practice in some class settings, which is a common phenomenon in many language centres in Vietnam. This may be due to limited technological integration or overreliance on traditional teaching aids, as reported in other EFL contexts (Kweon & Spolsky, 2018). At the same time, how teachers approach listening instruction also makes a difference. The results show that students benefit when they are taught specific strategies, like predicting content or taking notes, alongside exposure to a variety of listening texts. This supports earlier work by Vandergrift (2007) and Goh (2000), who emphasised the need for teachers to guide learners through the process of understanding spoken English. Interestingly, the study found that just having access to *classroom resources* wasn't enough to boost listening performance. What really counts is how those resources are used - by both teachers and students - to create meaningful learning experiences. The relatively lower ratings for *classroom resources* also align with Ngo and Ha's (2022) findings that many Vietnamese schools still face challenges in providing adequate listening materials and technological tools, particularly in under-resourced areas. For *out-of-class exposure*, the finding supports Trang's study (2020). In Vietnam, this connection becomes even more meaningful, as many students supplement their classroom learning with independent activities, such as watching videos on YouTube, using mobile learning apps, or listening to English podcasts. These self-directed habits outside the classroom play a noticeable role in boosting listening skills, reflecting current shifts toward more flexible and informal ways of language learning.

The results from the Pearson correlation matrix revealed that all seven independent variables play significant roles in influencing the development of English listening skills among non-English majors. This perception was consistent across the sample. While the importance of motivation as a foundational element in successful language learning (Gardner, 1985), it got a moderate average with a high SD. This means non-English majors need motivation-boosting activities. However, this factor got the strongest correlation, showing that learners who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to seek out listening opportunities, overcome comprehension difficulties, and reflect on their progress. This result mirrors those in Nguyen (2023), who found that Vietnamese learners with strong motivation were more likely to engage in self-directed listening practice. The *out-of-class exposure* finding supports Rost (2011) and Field (2008), who argued that regular engagement with real-world listening materials, such as music, films, podcasts, and online content, enhances learners' comprehension and fluency. For *language proficiency*, the result matches Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982), which posits that input must be comprehensible and that learners with greater language knowledge are better positioned to benefit from listening exposure. The correlation of the two factors, *listening strategies* and *teacher practices*, is consistent with what researchers like Vandergrift and Goh (2012) have pointed out - the way teachers support metacognitive awareness and guide learners through listening challenges plays a significant role in developing strong comprehension skills. The factor of *classroom resources* aligns with the growing view that how resources are used - through guided interaction, learner autonomy, or multimodal engagement - is more critical than the resources themselves (Oxford, 1990; Trang, 2020).

The results of the multiple regression analysis predicting listening performance in Table 5 also highlight the importance of the seven factors. For *motivation*, the result reinforces theoretical perspectives such as Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model and Dörnyei's (2001) L2 motivation theory, both of which highlight motivation as a driving force in language skill development. Motivation not only encourages students to persist in the face of listening challenges but also increases their willingness to seek out and engage with English input, both in and out of the classroom. For *language proficiency*, the finding supports the views of Field (2008) and Rost (2011)**,** who advocate for extensive, authentic exposure as a means to enhance comprehension skills. For out-of-class exposure, the respondents' kind of self-directed, informal learning is becoming more common and effective, echoing insights from researchers like Rost (2011) and Trang (2020), who emphasise the value of extending language practice beyond traditional classroom walls. The prediction of *learning strategies* and *teacher practices* is consistent with Vandergrift and Goh's (2012) emphasis on the value of strategic competence in effective listening instruction. Whereas the findings from the two factors, *classroom resources* and *cognitive ability*, diverge somewhat from the emphasis on their roles in language processing as noted by Vandergrift (2007), they also indicate that students may compensate for cognitive or resource limitations through motivation or independent learning efforts.

In short, the correlational analysis showed statistically significant positive relationships between all independent variables and listening skill acquisition, with *motivation*, *language proficiency*, and *out-of-class exposure* demonstrating particularly strong correlations ($p < .01$, two-tailed). Furthermore, multiple regression analysis revealed that these three variables were also significant predictors of students' listening performance, underscoring their combined influence on learner outcomes. The results suggest that both internal factors (such as learners' mindset and linguistic competence) and external conditions (such as access to authentic input outside the classroom) are crucial in shaping learners' ability to understand spoken English effectively. All of the findings above can be interpreted within the aforementioned second-language acquisition theories. The significant role of *motivation* supports Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, which asserts that motivated learners invest more effort and time in language learning tasks. Similarly, the importance of *language proficiency* and *cognitive ability* aligns with Anderson's (1983) cognitive theory, which emphasises the role of vocabulary knowledge, attention, and working memory in processing and understanding spoken input. The strong prediction of *out-of-class exposure* also reinforces Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, highlighting the need for ongoing access to comprehensible English input in authentic, real-life contexts. Furthermore, the moderately high scores for *teacher practices* and *learning strategies* suggest that classroom-based support and strategy training are instrumental, though potentially underutilised or inconsistently implemented.

## Conclusion

This study set out to understand the different factors that shape how non-English-majored university students at an English centre in Vietnam develop their English listening skills. Using a survey with 264 learners, the research explored seven main areas: motivation, cognitive ability, language proficiency, learning strategies, teacher practices, classroom resources, and

out-of-class exposure. The findings showed that each of these plays an important role and highlighted the need for a more learner-focused English education in settings such as those in private English centers in Vietnam with similar learner profiles.

Overall, this study contributes to the existing body of research by confirming the multifactorial nature of listening skill development and emphasising the need to support learners both in and out of the classroom. It reinforces the importance of adopting a holistic pedagogical approach - one that not only strengthens students' linguistic and cognitive skills but also provides motivating, resource-rich, and strategy-informed learning environments. These insights are particularly relevant in the Vietnamese EFL context, where disparities in educational infrastructure and student exposure to authentic English input continue to affect learning outcomes.

The research also had a few limitations when conducted at a single language centre. The findings might not fully reflect the full picture of what learners in other institutions or regions have experienced, especially those in rural areas or public universities with fewer resources. Also, the study was conducted over a limited period using a student questionnaire as the primary research instrument; thus, it could not track changes in students' listening skills or learning habits over time. Despite these limitations, the study offers practical insights into key factors that support or hinder learners' listening skill acquisition and points to useful strategies for both teachers and learners.

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# The Development and Validation of a Questionnaire for Measuring English-majored Students' Intercultural Competence in a Vietnamese Higher Education Context

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop an instrument to measure the intercultural competence (IC) of English majors in a formal, interculturally embedded English-language program in Vietnam. To do this, we implemented measures to prepare the item pool and validate the IC instrument. Using a self-report approach, the initial 38-item instrument was verified through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with sample sizes of 274 and 212, respectively, in each phase. The result was a finalized 20-item IC scale with four factors: knowledge of one's own culture; knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication; attitudes (openness, respect, willingness to talk to people from other cultures); and skills (interpreting/relating, analyzing/evaluating). The measurement model exhibited good fit indices (Chi-square/df = 1.62, CFI = 0.96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = 0.05, PCLOSE = 0.26) and acceptable reliability and validity. Hence, the recently developed scale is deemed legitimate and dependable for implementation in the given Vietnamese higher education contexts.

**Keywords**: Intercultural competence, instrument validation, cultural education, English-majored students, language and culture integration

## Introduction

The increasing speed of globalization has made interactions of people from diverse cultural backgrounds more frequent than ever before (Deardorff, 2009). As a result of this global trend, the need for intercultural competence (IC), the ability to communicate effectively with culturally diverse individuals, has emerged in professional contexts (Brislin, 2010; Ilie, 2019). This is the competence to ensure the success of international cooperation, global business, and study abroad (Cushner & Chang, 2015; Kealey et al., 2004; Matveev, 2017; Nero, 2018; Zhang & Zhou, 2019) and harmonized intercultural relationships within domestic settings (Deardorff, 2009; Jackson, 2012).

In preparing the labor force to meet the demands of the contemporary world, educational

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institutions, especially tertiary institutions, should strongly consider innovating their curricula to be more internationalized and intercultural. Among the various solutions to integrate IC into training programs, foreign language (FL) education has long been considered a significant location for IC cultivation due to the widely acknowledged inseparability between language and culture (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999). Since the late 20th century, the "cultural turn" in FL education has greatly affected learning goals, teacher training, and teaching methodologies (Byrnes, 2012). As a result, IC has shifted its status from a supplement to a central objective in language programs (Alptekin, 2002). In English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, there have been frequent arguments for integrating intercultural components, which position IC as one of the main goals of EFL education (Baker, 2012; Dervin & Gross, 2016; Sercu, 2006). The pedagogical focus, therefore, has shifted from building linguistically proficient users to developing "intercultural speakers" (Byram, 1997; Young & Sachdev, 2011) who can successfully navigate cultural boundaries.

In Vietnam, several innovative policies have been issued in response to global transformations in EFL education. Since the Doi Moi reforms in the late 1980s, intercultural elements have gradually received greater attention in the Vietnamese educational system. Since the early 2000s, the rapid development of Vietnam's national economy and its international cooperation with other countries have brought intercultural communication to the forefront of educational discussions (Le, 2014; D. M. H. Nguyen, 2015; Trinh, 2016). The initiation of the National Foreign Language Project (Government of Vietnam, 2008) and the application of the Vietnamese 6-level framework of references for foreign language learning (the VNFR) (MOET of Vietnam, 2014) have officially recognized the roles of FL education towards international communication with its primary aim of equipping learners with abilities to work and cooperate in multilingual and multicultural settings. The focus of FL instructions, therefore, has shifted from pure linguistic competence to intercultural (communicative) competence (L. Nguyen et al., 2016). The importance of IC was also highlighted in the 2018 National School Curriculum, which aligns closely with the VNFR and encourages FL education to achieve communicative competence in a globalized world (Hoang, 2022; MOET of Vietnam, 2018).

Those policies have sparked extensive discussion about integrating culture and IC into FL education at all levels in Vietnam. They have also prompted research on cultural/ intercultural related issues, such as the representation of cultural content in English textbooks (T. T. M. Nguyen et al., 2021; Tran & Huynh, 2025), teachers' perceptions of IC-related pedagogy and classroom practices (Chau & Truong, 2019; Ho, 2011; L. Nguyen, 2014; T. T. N. Nguyen, 2023; Trinh, 2016). In addition, many English major programs in Vietnam have formally integrated IC-related courses into their curricula, such as Country Studies or Cross-cultural Communication courses. Although the existing literature has provided insights into the implementation of intercultural education in Vietnam, it focuses more strongly on policy issues, teachers and administrators' perspectives, and intercultural contents in teaching materials, while minimally addressing the assessment of learners' IC as an educational learning outcome (Ho, 2011, 2014; Pham & Pham, 2022; Vo, 2017). In addition, many existing studies have focused on general EFL learners (Chau, 2020; Vu & Dinh, 2022), while formal IC instruction embedded in programs for English majors has received little discussion.

There are some critical implications raised from such an imbalance in research focus. The lack of empirical data on students' levels of exposure to IC risk policies remains a national aspiration rather than effective practice. In addition, the current IC evaluation instruments were mostly developed and validated in European contexts (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 2000; Hammer & Bennett, 1998) or other Asian settings than Vietnam (T. Y. Chen, 2022; Huang, 2021). These tools may be unable to accurately depict dimensions relevant to the context of Vietnamese EFL learners,

thereby challenging the precision of IC assessment and the diagnosis of program effectiveness. The only attempt, i.e., Vu and Dinh's (2022) tool, aimed to create a context-relevant measure, but its participants were limited to non-English majors, and the validation did not include a CFA phase. The lack of valid and reliable IC assessment tools that are culturally relevant and context-specific presents a critical gap in the Vietnamese EFL education setting. It prevents educators from recognizing learners' needs in IC growth, tracking their developmental progress, and evaluating the effectiveness of IC-embedded programs. Addressing this gap is both empirically and practically essential to ensuring alignment between Vietnamese FL education outcomes and the nation's goals for global integration.

This study addresses this gap by developing and validating an IC assessment tool to measure the perceived levels of English-majored students in the context of Vietnamese FL education. The tool presented explicit attention to the Vietnamese higher education setting, drawing from existing global IC models while integrating context-specific considerations. The development and validation procedures were conducted through structured processes of item generation and two phases of validation, utilizing rigorous statistical techniques, specifically exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). By offering a valid, reliable, and context-relevant IC assessment tool, the study contributes to the IC literature by advancing theoretical understanding of IC evaluation and by advancing the practical application of developing learners' IC in the Vietnamese higher education context.

## Literature review

### *Intercultural Competence*

Intercultural competence (IC) is a multifaceted construct that has been conceptualized in various ways across different disciplines (Arasaratnam, 2015; Deardorff, 2015; Guilherme, 2015). In the field of foreign language (FL) education, Byram (1997) described intercultural communicative competence as the capacity to use a second language to communicate in a meaningful way in intercultural situations; meanwhile, Fantini (2006) defines IC as a set of complex abilities necessary for effective and appropriate interactions with people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Deardorff (2006), utilizing the Delphi method, conceptualized IC as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural settings, drawing upon one's intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

Grounded in these views, IC in this study is defined as a set of abilities (i.e., knowledge, skills, attitudes) required for appropriate and effective communication in intercultural settings, which one can acquire progressively through education or personal experiences. This definition retains the most prominent features of IC (i.e., appropriateness and effectiveness) (Arasaratnam, 2017) while acknowledging the role of education as agreed by many scholars (Berardor et al., 2012; Borghetti, 2013; Hammer & Bennett, 1998).

While a number of IC models exist (e.g., M. J. Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997, 2021; Deardorff, 2006; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005), this study was framed by Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models since they provide sufficient ground for IC conceptualization and operationalization. These two models complement each other and are relevant to the context and purpose of this study. Byram's (1997) model suggests the five *savoirs* of IC: knowledge (of own culture, other culture, and interaction process) (*savoirs*), attitudes (*savoir être*), critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*), interpreting/relating skills (*savoir comprendre*), discovery/interaction skills (*savoir apprendre/faire*). The model has been commonly used in the field of FL education with IC-related aims and shaped the initiation of the Common

European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). Dearfford's (2006) model posits that *attitudes* (i.e., openness, respect, curiosity) form the foundation of IC. These attitudes were reinforced by a deep understanding of cultural *knowledge* and *skills* (e.g., observation, interpretation, analysis). Thus, IC is viewed as a process involving the active interaction of IC components, resulting in *internal outcomes* (a shift in frame of reference) and *external outcomes* (effective and appropriate intercultural communication).

This study adopted IC components from both models and operationalized IC as consisting of (1) knowledge (of one's own culture, of other culture and of intercultural communication processes), (2) attitudes (positive attitudes towards other cultures, e.g. openness, respect, willingness to communicate), and (3) skills (interpreting/ relating, analyzing/ evaluating). Interaction skills (Byram, 1997) or external outcomes (Deardorff, 2006) were not included in this study's measurement model, as Deardorff (2009) noted that these skills can only be evaluated by the direct interlocutor and are not feasible for self-report instruments. This study, which aims to develop a validated self-report tool tailored to Vietnamese higher education EFL students, could provide a valuable instrument for educators to assess IC instruction outcomes and inform both the development of the EFL curriculum and current IC teaching practices.

### *Intercultural Competence Instruments*

IC can be measured directly with performance-based instruments or indirectly with self-report tools (Fantini, 2009; Sinicrope et al., 2007). While interculturalists suggested a combination of tools (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009), survey tools are more commonly used in large-scale educational studies due to their practicality and their ability to benchmark.

To identify commonly used instruments in the field, we conducted a literature search in reliable peer-reviewed journals using the key words "intercultural competence measurement/ scale/ instrument." The results revealed some well-established and internationally used instruments: (1) The *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* (ISS) developed by Chen and Starosta (2000), which gauges aspects of interaction, e.g., confidence, engagement, and respect; (2) The *Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)* proposed by Hammer et al. (2003), which measures the development stages of IC along a continuum; (3) The *Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI),* suggested by Kelley and Meyers (1995), which assesses aspects such as autonomy, emotional resilience, perceptual acuity, and flexibility. Those instruments, although highly impactful in their original settings, contain features that do not align well with the IC development targets through classroom-based practices inherent in this study (see Table 1).

Regarding the instruments developed for Asian or Vietnamese contexts, some were identified. For example, based on Byram's (1997) model, Huang (2021) developed a 25-item scale for EFL students in Taiwan but did not report its validity. Chen (2022) developed a 28-item survey instrument for Chinese students in a Spanish as a foreign language class. The instrument was validated through factor analysis, but the items were rather context sensitive. In the Vietnamese higher education setting, the validated tool was very limited, with only one found within the timeframe from 2000 to 2024. This existing scale was developed by Vu and Dinh (2022) with 21 items grounded in Byram's (1997) model and validated through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using a sample of 310 EFL students from various disciplines in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The scale, although developed for the Vietnamese context, has been validated using a sample from a more affluent area of Vietnam (i.e., Ho Chi Minh City), with students from other disciplines rather than English majors. In addition, although the tool was claimed to be a reliable and construct-valid instrument, its structural validity has not been confirmed due to the lack of a CFA phase.

**Table 1**

Common IC Self-reported Instruments and Their Misalignment with the Context of English Majors in IC-embedded Curricula

| Tool | Dimensions/ Focus | Validation proofing | Misalignment with the context of English majors in Vietnamese tertiary education |
|---|---|---|---|
| CCAI (Kelley & Meyers, 1995) | Traits for adaptability (flexibility, autonomy, perceptual sharpness, emotional resilience) | Reliable in training for emigrants | More suitable for training emigrant contexts; assessing traits instead of developmental features |
| ISS (Chen & Starosta, 2000) | IS (intercultural sensitivity: respect, enjoyment, engagement, confidence, attentiveness) | Broadly applied, acceptable reliability (Mighani & Moghadam, 2019; Tamam, 2010; Tuncel & Paker, 2018; Wu, 2015) | Built in the US setting, it centers on attitudinal aspects rather than the knowledge and skill components of IC. |
| IDI (Hammer et al., 2003) | Stages of development (i.e., denial, defense, and minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration) | Extensive cross-cultural validation (Duisembekova, 2021; Hammer, 2012, 2015) | More relevant for direct intercultural contact/ immersion contexts; protective tool with high cost |
| Huang (2021) | IC components (i.e., knowledge, attitudes, skills) in the Taiwanese EFL context | No validity evidence reported; context-specific | No reported psychometric validation; Taiwanese educational/ cultural context |
| Chen (2022) | IC knowledge and skills, attitudes, and Spanish as a foreign language for Chinese students | Reported good reliability via EFA | Not for English language learners; validated for Chinese students |
| Vu & Dinh (2022) | IC components (knowledge, attitudes, skills, critical awareness) in an EFL Vietnamese setting | Validated through EFA in a sample from universities in Ho Chi Minh City | No reported CFA; validated among non-English majors |

As shown in Table 1, none of the existing global instruments adequately meet the specific needs of Vietnamese EFL classrooms, particularly in terms of reflecting diversity and inclusiveness. While some focus on educational emersion experiences or professional contexts (IDI, CCAI), others are not feasible for Vietnamese teachers due to high cost (IDI); still others focus on a particular aspect of IC, i.e., sensitivity (ISS) instead of the three IC components (knowledge, skills, attitudes). In addition, the specific items in those scales are relevant to the validated samples and target population in a specific context, such as Spanish as an FL (Chen, 2022), Taiwanese EFL students (Huang, 2021), or non-English majors (Vu & Dinh, 2022), instead of the Vietnamese English majors at the university as targeted in this study. Some instruments were not reported with complete psychometric validation procedures (Huang, 2021; Vu & Dinh, 2022). Theoretically, since the construct of *knowledge of one's own culture* in Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models requires measurement items to address a specific culture

(e.g., Vietnamese), any IC instrument targeting Vietnamese settings could not borrow its items from existing scales developed for other cultural contexts.

The lack of culturally relevant and psychologically strict IC tools for English-majored students in Vietnamese tertiary contexts hinders the capability to (1) evaluate their IC levels, (2) identify areas for program improvements, and (3) assess the effectiveness of IC-embedded curricula towards IC development. Without such an instrument, the national IC-related objectives risk remaining ambitions rather than measurable outcomes. This study fills these gaps by developing and validating a new IC tool grounded in the theories of Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006), explicitly customized for the Vietnamese higher education context. This new self-reported tool was tested using both Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to ensure empirical validity and theoretical coherence.

### *Research Aims*

This study aims to develop and validate a new self-report instrument for measuring IC among English-major students at Vietnamese universities where IC instruction is formally integrated into the curriculum. The factor structure was first determined through EFA, and model fit was evaluated using empirical data to confirm the instrument's reliability and validity.

## Methods

### *Pedagogical Setting and Participants*

The surveys were administered at a public university in Vietnam that specializes in foreign language education. The survey participants were recruited via convenience sampling and divided into two phases. In the first phase, which aims to discover the factor structures of the initial 38-item scale (the EFA phase), 312 students were selected following Hair et al.'s (2019) guidelines for sample sizes (i.e., at least 5 observations per variable). The survey received 280 responses, and after data screening, 274 were included in the analysis. In the CFA phase, which aims to test the fitness of the measurement model as well as the scale's validity and reliability, the analysis was done on a different dataset from that of the EFA phase to avoid bias and overfitting, which is commonly advised by researchers (Brown, 2015; Hair et al., 2019; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Therefore, an independent sample of 259 participants was selected; 217 provided responses, and 212 remained for analysis after data screening. This sample size meets the requirement for CFA, as suggested by Kline (2023) and Hair et al. (2019).

The two groups of participants share similar characteristics: they are English-major students in their third year of university (aged 20-22) aiming to achieve the B2 level of English proficiency. The participants underwent similar university entrance screening processes with identical selection criteria. Due to career preferences in Vietnam, most were female (80% and 83% respectively for the two phrases). The participants completed the Vietnamese version of the online questionnaire, which took 15-20 minutes. Before answering the questionnaire, they were all well-informed about the purpose of the study and the ethical issues, such as the confidentiality of personal information during the survey.

### *Design of the Study*

The study employed a survey model to develop a reliable and valid self-report instrument for Vietnamese English majors. The study followed the steps for scale development suggested by McCoach et al. (2013), including specifying the scale's purposes and defining the constructs, generating items, obtaining expert review, piloting, and validating the scale.

### *Data Collection & Analysis*

The data was collected in two phases. Phase 1 commenced in the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, and Phase 2 was completed a year later with participants of similar characteristics. The surveys were delivered online via Google Forms after the researcher obtained agreement from both university administrators and the students themselves to conduct the study ethically. The data were then processed using IBM SPSS Statistics software version 27 and Amos Graphics version 20. Reliability and validity statistics were calculated using an Excel stats tool with inputs from Amos outputs.

## Results/Findings

### *Phase 1*

### *Initial Development of the Scale*

After defining the construct (i.e., IC for English majors in formal IC embedded curricula), which includes three major components (i.e., knowledge, skills, attitudes), an item pool was generated combining both inductive and deductive approaches (Boateng et al., 2018). Deductively, an extensive literature review was conducted of previously developed scales to identify similar constructs and to prepare items. Three existing instruments were selected for item generation, which include Huang (2021), Vu and Dinh (2021), and Chen (2022), due to some commonalities with the current study (e.g., foreign language education, Asian contexts, tertiary level) and their coverage of the three IC components defined in this study (i.e. knowledge, skills, attitudes). Inductively, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 students on aspects that they believed students should possess for effective and appropriate intercultural communication. The combination of the two approaches resulted in a scale of 38 items, with some adaptations and additions to the original items and to student interview responses. The adaptations involved some changes in wording, such as replacing "in Taiwanese culture" with "in Vietnamese culture" (from Huang's (2021) scale) and "my classmate cultures" with "other cultures" to better reflect the local cultural setting (from Vu and Dinh's (2021). Adding items was based on relevant constructs in Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models, which were reflected in students' interviews.

The initial scale was then reviewed by two experts specializing in language education, both senior lecturers and PhD holders with over ten years of experience in applied linguistics and intercultural research. The experts independently assessed the clarity, cultural appropriateness, and construct relevance of the items. Their feedback was incorporated, and items were refined based on the consensus reached through iterative discussions. Following expert reviews, a pilot study was conducted with 10 students to assess additional face validity. The students were drawn from the population and were independent from the actual participants of the study. They read the questionnaire items and gave feedback on the clarity of the instructions and items. Feedback was then collected for consideration of revision. Ultimately, the items were refined, finalized, and rated on a Likert scale of 7 points, ranging from strongly agree (7) to strongly disagree (1), distributed as follows: knowledge (15 items), attitudes (15 items), skills (8 items) (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

IC Scale Item Distribution

| **IC facets** | | **Codes** |
|---|---|---|
| Knowledge | own culture | kw1 - kw4 |
| | other cultures | kw5 - kw8 |
| | intercultural communication processes | kw9 - kw15 |
| Attitudes | open | opeatt1 - opeatt5 |
| | respect | resatt1 - resatt3 |
| | willing to communicate | wilatt1 - wilatt7 |
| Skills | Interpreting/relating | intrelkill1 - intrelskill3 |
| | Analyzing/ evaluating | anaevaskill1 - anaevaskill5 |

### *Exploration of Factor Structure*

After the initial scale was constructed, its factor structure was explored using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Prior to EFA, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was tested utilizing the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure for sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO value of 0.828 and the significant Bartlett's test ($p < 0.001$) indicated a suitable sample size and adequate correlation among variables, allowing for proceeding with factor analysis.

**Table 3**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Barlett's Tests

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | .828 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi-Square | 8819.035 |
| | df | 903 |
| | Sig. | .000 |

Principal axis factoring (PAF) with oblique rotation (Promax) was used for factor extraction. Decisions on factor retention were based on the eigenvalues (exceeding 1), scree plot (break points), parallel analysis (Williams et al., 2010), and theoretical interpretability. Items were removed from the scale if they had factor loadings below 0.50 or exhibited substantial cross-loadings. Principal axis factoring (PAF) identified 9 factors (eigenvalues > 1), accounting for 65.2% of the total variance. The Scree plot showed two breaks (at the 5$^{th}$ and the 7th factor), indicating two potential solutions (Figure 1), while parallel analysis revealed only six accepted factors (Table 4).

**Figure 1**

Exploratory Factor Analysis: Scree Plot

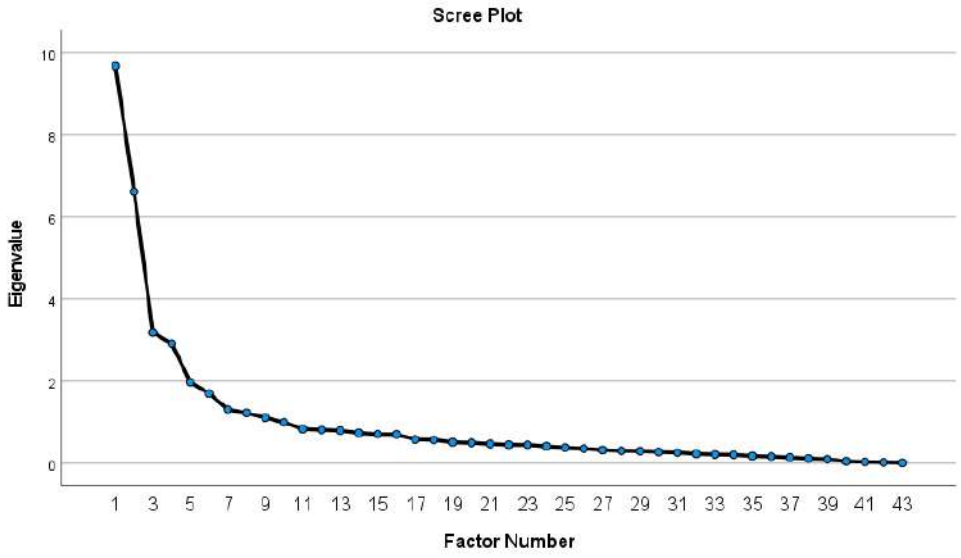



**Table 4**

Parallel Analysis Results

| Component | PAF actual eigenvalue | Generated Mean Eigenvalue | Status |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 9.681 | 1.787953 | Accepted |
| 2 | 6.621 | 1.691295 | Accepted |
| 3 | 3.189 | 1.617485 | Accepted |
| 4 | 2.916 | 1.556746 | Accepted |
| 5 | 1.978 | 1.500121 | Accepted |
| 6 | 1.703 | 1.449591 | Accepted |
| 7 | 1.312 | 1.402893 | Rejected |
| 8 | 1.229 | 1.358651 | Rejected |
| 9 | 1.110 | 1.316491 | Rejected |

The first PAF indicated some free-standing, low-loading, or significant cross-loading items. These items were removed, and the analysis was rerun after each removal to ensure the factor structure's stability. After six iterations, a stable solution was achieved with five factors. A 28-item scale with all remaining items loading above .50 on their corresponding factors and showing no cross-loadings was finalized after the EFA phase (see Table 5).

The result of the first phase was a 28-item scale with five factors: knowledge of own culture (3 items), knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication (7 items), skills (7 items), attitudes (8 items), and interaction confidence (3 items). The subscales' alpha coefficients were from .744 to .905, suggesting acceptable to excellent internal consistency or reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

**Table 5**

Results from EFA after Restructuring Factors

| Items | Factor | | | | | Number of items | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| **#1: Attitudes** | | | | | | **8** | **.891** |
| resatt1 | .810 | | | | | | |
| wilatt1 | .782 | | | | | | |
| opeatt4 | .754 | | | | | | |
| resatt2 | .749 | | | | | | |
| opeatt1 | .697 | | | | | | |
| wilatt2 | .675 | | | | | | |
| resatt3 | .624 | | | | | | |
| opeatt5 | .623 | | | | | | |
| **# 2: Skills** | | | | | | **7** | **.905** |
| intreskill3 | | .821 | | | | | |
| anaevaskill4 | | .787 | | | | | |
| anaevaskill5 | | .781 | | | | | |
| anaevaskill1 | | .777 | | | | | |
| intreskill2 | | .773 | | | | | |
| anaevaskill3 | | .719 | | | | | |
| intreskill1 | | .670 | | | | | |
| **# 3: Knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication** | | | | | | **7** | **.875** |
| kw13 | | | .896 | | | | |
| kw12 | | | .845 | | | | |
| kw10 | | | .711 | | | | |
| kw11 | | | .646 | | | | |
| kw9 | | | .609 | | | | |
| kw8 | | | .540 | | | | |
| kw7 | | | .535 | | | | |
| **# 4: Knowledge of one's own culture** | | | | | | **3** | **.842** |
| kw2 | | | | .846 | | | |
| kw3 | | | | .777 | | | |
| kw1 | | | | .660 | | | |
| **# 5: Interaction confidence** | | | | | | **3** | **.744** |
| wilatt5R | | | | | .826 | | |
| wilatt6R | | | | | .680 | | |
| wilatt4R | | | | | .646 | | |
| **Overall** | | | | | | **28** | **.853** |

*Phase 2*

The second phase involved 212 participants and aimed to assess whether the factor structure model derived from EFA fits the empirical data, thereby providing stronger evidence of the scale's reliability and validity and confirming the factors. The commonly suggested practice is to perform EFA and CFA on separate datasets to prevent overfitting and improve generalizability (Brown, 2015). As a result, a CFA was conducted on the new dataset to confirm the five-factor model's fit.

Several indices were used to evaluate the model fit, i.e., Chi-square/degrees of freedom ($\chi^2$/df), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and test of close fit (PCLOSE). The accepted model fit indices were decided following Hu and Bentler's (1999) guidelines.

**Table 6**

Common Model Fit Indices (Hu & Bentler, 1999)

| Fit Index | Acceptable | Good | Very Good | Current model |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| $\chi^2$/df (CMIN/df) | ≤ 5 | ≤ 3 | – | 1.61 |
| CFI (Comparative Fit Index) | ≥ .80 | ≥ .90 | ≥ .95 | .95 |
| GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) | ≥ .80[1] | ≥ .90 | ≥ .95 | .88 |
| TLI (Tucker–Lewis Index) | – | ≥ .90 | – | .94 |
| RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) | ≤ .08 | ≤ .06 | – | .05 |
| PCLOSE (p of Close Fit) | ≥ .01 | ≥ .05 | – | .24 |

[1] In cases where GFI is limited due to model complexity or sample size, a threshold of .80 is reasonable (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Doll et al., 1994).

Inspection of the p-values and standardized factor loadings revealed some items (intreskill3, opeatt1, kn10, kn13) that do not explain the factor well ($p > 0.05$ or standardized regression weights < 0.50), and the model was re-estimated after each removal. Besides statistical criteria, the items' relatively low loadings may be attributed to their semantic overlap with other indicators within the same factor, thereby reducing their unique contribution to the latent construct. After item removal and mode l re-estimation, the result showed an item model with improved fit (Chi-square/df = 1.61, CFI = 0.95, TLI = .94, RMSEA = 0.05, PCLOSE = 0.24) (Table 6). All the items that remained had substantial loadings ($p < .001$) on their corresponding factors, with standardized regression weights from .615 to .902, providing strong confirmation of the multidimensional nature of IC (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

Estimates Statistic for IC Scale Measurement Model

**Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)**

| | | | Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| anaevaskill3 | <--- | SKL | 1.000 | | | |
| anaevaskill1 | <--- | SKL | .914 | .057 | 16.158 | *** |
| anaevaskill4 | <--- | SKL | 1.143 | .069 | 16.542 | *** |
| intreskill1 | <--- | SKL | .760 | .063 | 12.119 | *** |
| intreskill2 | <--- | SKL | .836 | .082 | 10.249 | *** |
| anaevaskill5 | <--- | SKL | 1.130 | .077 | 14.606 | *** |
| resatt2 | <--- | ATT | 1.000 | | | |
| resatt1 | <--- | ATT | .999 | .057 | 17.467 | *** |
| wilatt1 | <--- | ATT | 1.424 | .124 | 11.469 | *** |
| resatt3 | <--- | ATT | 1.485 | .125 | 11.918 | *** |
| wilatt2 | <--- | ATT | 1.517 | .135 | 11.239 | *** |
| openatt5 | <--- | ATT | 1.264 | .128 | 9.865 | *** |
| openatt4 | <--- | ATT | 1.469 | .145 | 10.109 | *** |
| kw12 | <--- | KNW1 | 1.000 | | | |
| kw11 | <--- | KNW1 | .939 | .112 | 8.397 | *** |
| kw9 | <--- | KNW1 | .831 | .091 | 9.100 | *** |
| kw2 | <--- | KNW2 | 1.000 | | | |
| kw1 | <--- | KNW2 | .719 | .057 | 12.524 | *** |
| kw3 | <--- | KNW2 | .941 | .081 | 11.631 | *** |
| wilatt5R | <--- | INCF | 1.000 | | | |
| wilatt6R | <--- | INCF | .797 | .085 | 9.349 | *** |
| wilatt4R | <--- | INCF | .766 | .082 | 9.338 | *** |
| kw7 | <--- | KNW1 | .936 | .122 | 7.683 | *** |
| kw8 | <--- | KNW1 | .733 | .086 | 8.497 | *** |

**Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 -**

| | | | Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|
| anaevaskill3 | <--- | SKL | .902 |
| anaevaskill1 | <--- | SKL | .827 |
| anaevaskill4 | <--- | SKL | .837 |
| intreskill1 | <--- | SKL | .699 |
| intreskill2 | <--- | SKL | .623 |
| anaevaskill5 | <--- | SKL | .782 |
| resatt2 | <--- | ATT | .781 |
| resatt1 | <--- | ATT | .757 |
| wilatt1 | <--- | ATT | .777 |
| resatt3 | <--- | ATT | .797 |
| wilatt2 | <--- | ATT | .764 |
| openatt5 | <--- | ATT | .675 |
| openatt4 | <--- | ATT | .689 |
| kw12 | <--- | KNW1 | .667 |
| kw11 | <--- | KNW1 | .684 |
| kw9 | <--- | KNW1 | .759 |
| kw2 | <--- | KNW2 | .853 |
| kw1 | <--- | KNW2 | .812 |
| kw3 | <--- | KNW2 | .754 |
| wilatt5R | <--- | INCF | .836 |
| wilatt6R | <--- | INCF | .724 |
| wilatt4R | <--- | INCF | .722 |
| kw7 | <--- | KNW1 | .615 |
| kw8 | <--- | KNW1 | .694 |

*Note.* SKL = skills, ATT = attitudes, KNW1 = knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication, KNW2 = knowledge of one's own culture, INCF = interaction confidence.

In order to examine how well first-level constructs representing IC components (i.e., KNW1, KNW2, SKL, ATT, INCF) explain the broader latent construct of intercultural competence (IC), a second-order CFA was conducted. Paths were drawn from the second-order construct (i.e., IC) to each first-order latent variable. The findings from this stage revealed one latent variable, i.e., interaction confidence (INCF), which explained only a small portion of IC (INCF←IC: p = 0.42), indicating that the component was not necessary in the measurement model (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

Second-order CFA Estimate Statistics

**Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)**

| | | | Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SKL | <--- | IC | 1.000 | | | |
| ATT | <--- | IC | .618 | .107 | 5.795 | *** |
| KNW1 | <--- | IC | 1.396 | .226 | 6.181 | *** |
| KNW2 | <--- | IC | .947 | .145 | 6.534 | *** |
| INCF | <--- | IC | -.152 | .188 | -.808 | .419 |

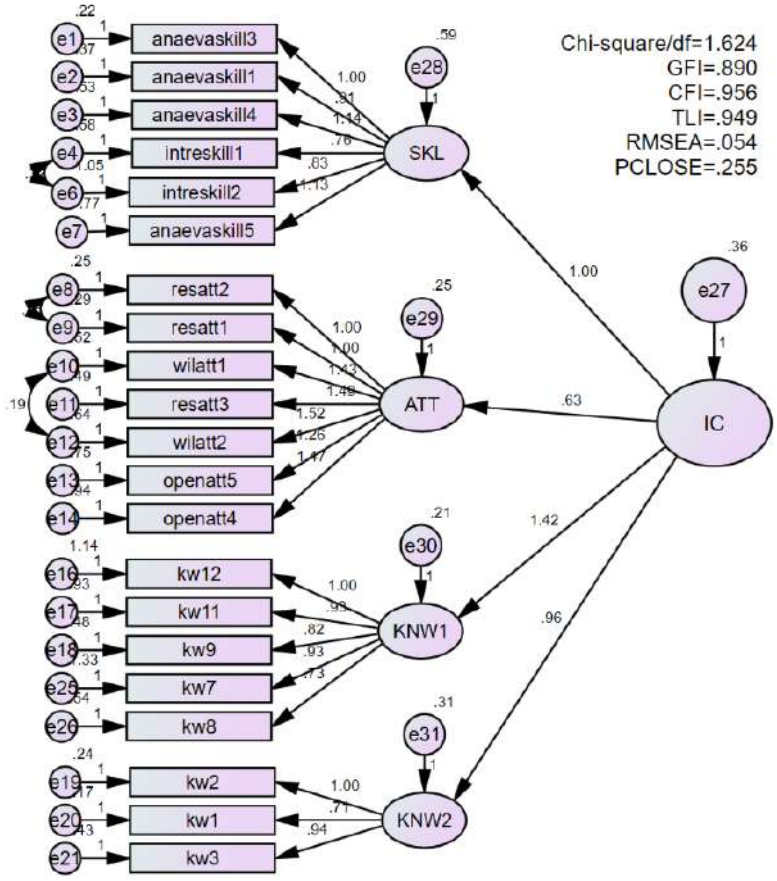
**Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1**

| | | | Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|
| SKL | <--- | IC | .624 |
| ATT | <--- | IC | .603 |
| KNW1 | <--- | IC | .874 |
| KNW2 | <--- | IC | .717 |
| INCF | <--- | IC | -.070 |

Beyond the statistics, the construct was carefully considered from theoretical grounds. It is noted that interaction confidence (INCF) is not among the major components of IC in either Byram's (1997) or Deardorff's (2006) models. Instead, in some existing scales, it is treated as an element of intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta, 2000) or blended into other latent constructs, such as *Interaction Involvement* (Arasaratnam's ICCI scale; Arasaratnam, 2009). Therefore, the CFA result that INCF was weak in explaining IC is reasonable from a theoretical standpoint, and eliminating the factor does not affect the theoretical conceptualization of IC. Informing by both statistical and theoretical perspectives, the INCF element was removed from the scale. The re-estimation of the new model after variable deletion yielded good fit indices for the model to the data (Chi-square/df = 1.62, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.05, PCLOSE = 0.26) (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

Second-order CFA Models for IC Scale




As presented in Figure 5, the significant p value ($p<.01$) and all standardized regression weights above .60 indicated that IC as a second-order latent variable can be explained well by its components (i.e., KNW1, KNW2, SKL, ATT), and the construct validity of the measurement was ensured. The final IC measurement model consisted of 20 items, grouped into four factors: attitudes, skills, knowledge of one's own culture, and knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication.

**Figure 5**

Second-order CFA Estimate Statistics for the IC Scale

**Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)**

| | | | Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SKL | <--- | IC | 1.000 | | | |
| ATT | <--- | IC | .627 | .109 | 5.772 | *** |
| KNW1 | <--- | IC | 1.417 | .231 | 6.135 | *** |
| KNW2 | <--- | IC | .959 | .148 | 6.493 | *** |
| anaevaskill3 | <--- | SKL | 1.000 | | | |
| anaevaskill1 | <--- | SKL | .912 | .057 | 16.120 | *** |
| anaevaskill4 | <--- | SKL | 1.141 | .069 | 16.535 | *** |
| intreskill1 | <--- | SKL | .758 | .063 | 12.083 | *** |
| intreskill2 | <--- | SKL | .834 | .082 | 10.226 | *** |
| anaevaskill5 | <--- | SKL | 1.129 | .077 | 14.612 | *** |
| resatt2 | <--- | ATT | 1.000 | | | |
| resatt1 | <--- | ATT | .999 | .057 | 17.439 | *** |
| wilatt1 | <--- | ATT | 1.428 | .125 | 11.455 | *** |
| resatt3 | <--- | ATT | 1.490 | .125 | 11.914 | *** |
| wilatt2 | <--- | ATT | 1.521 | .135 | 11.228 | *** |
| openatt5 | <--- | ATT | 1.265 | .129 | 9.842 | *** |
| openatt4 | <--- | ATT | 1.471 | .146 | 10.088 | *** |
| kw12 | <--- | KNW1 | 1.000 | | | |
| kw11 | <--- | KNW1 | .934 | .110 | 8.470 | *** |
| kw9 | <--- | KNW1 | .817 | .090 | 9.105 | *** |
| kw2 | <--- | KNW2 | 1.000 | | | |
| kw1 | <--- | KNW2 | .715 | .057 | 12.511 | *** |
| kw3 | <--- | KNW2 | .938 | .081 | 11.635 | *** |
| kw7 | <--- | KNW1 | .934 | .120 | 7.759 | *** |
| kw8 | <--- | KNW1 | .726 | .085 | 8.539 | *** |

**Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1**

| | | | Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|
| SKL | <--- | IC | .616 |
| ATT | <--- | IC | .604 |
| KNW1 | <--- | IC | .879 |
| KNW2 | <--- | IC | .718 |
| anaevaskill3 | <--- | SKL | .903 |
| anaevaskill1 | <--- | SKL | .826 |
| anaevaskill4 | <--- | SKL | .837 |
| intreskill1 | <--- | SKL | .697 |
| intreskill2 | <--- | SKL | .623 |
| anaevaskill5 | <--- | SKL | .783 |
| resatt2 | <--- | ATT | .780 |
| resatt1 | <--- | ATT | .756 |
| wilatt1 | <--- | ATT | .777 |
| resatt3 | <--- | ATT | .798 |
| wilatt2 | <--- | ATT | .764 |
| openatt5 | <--- | ATT | .674 |
| openatt4 | <--- | ATT | .689 |
| kw12 | <--- | KNW1 | .673 |
| kw11 | <--- | KNW1 | .686 |
| kw9 | <--- | KNW1 | .752 |
| kw2 | <--- | KNW2 | .856 |
| kw1 | <--- | KNW2 | .810 |
| kw3 | <--- | KNW2 | .754 |
| kw7 | <--- | KNW1 | .619 |
| kw8 | <--- | KNW1 | .693 |

The next step is to evaluate the scale's reliability and its convergent and discriminant validity. Table 7 below illustrates the results regarding these qualities.

As illustrated in the table, the five-factor measurement model showed satisfactory reliability and validity. The composite reliability (CR) values (ranging from .816 to .904) were all higher than the suggested threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2019), ensuring the internal consistency. Average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the suggested level of .50 for three latent constructs (KNW2, ATT, SKL), confirming convergence validity, while one value (KNW1) fell slightly below (AVE = .470). Despite this, the construct was kept for both its theoretical soundness and empirical value. From a theoretical perspective, the construct characterizes a multidimensional domain that encompasses both knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication processes. Such conceptual breadth typically yields modest inter-item correlations, which in turn yield slightly lower AVEs without necessarily weakening construct validity. From an empirical standpoint, all items demonstrated significant factor loadings and strong reliability (CR = .816), indicating that they jointly represent the underlying theoretical dimension. Eliminating items solely to improve AVE would narrow the construct's conceptual coverage and weaken the scale's theoretical coherence. In addition, as guided by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the construct was kept due to its satisfactory reliability and theoretical soundness in capturing the complexity of intercultural competence.

Lastly, the discriminant validity was evaluated and confirmed following the Fornell-Larcker criterion; specifically, the MSV values were constantly lower than AVE, and the AVE square roots for all constructs were greater than the corresponding correlations between them. Brought together, the findings indicated that the IC measurement model is robust, exhibiting strong

internal consistency, construct, and discriminant validity, while only a modest restriction existed for the latent variable of KNW1 (knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication) regarding the convergence of its items. However, this restriction could be justified both theoretically and practically, and the overall scale was valid and reliable for measuring the intercultural competence of Vietnamese learners of English majors.

**Table 7**

Scale Reliability, Convergent and Discriminant Validity

| | CR | AVE | MSV | MaxR(H) | KNW1 | SKL | ATT | KNW2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KNW1 | 0.816 | 0.470 | 0.396 | 0.820 | **0.686** | | | |
| SKL | 0.904 | 0.614 | 0.296 | 0.923 | 0.544 | **0.784** | | |
| ATT | 0.900 | 0.562 | 0.282 | 0.903 | 0.531 | 0.367 | **0.750** | |
| KNW2 | 0.849 | 0.652 | 0.396 | 0.856 | 0.629 | 0.442 | 0.438 | **0.807** |

## Discussion

The study's findings revealed a 20-item, validated instrument with four factors (i.e., knowledge of one's own culture, knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication, attitudes, and skills) to measure the intercultural competence of Vietnamese English majors. These constructs confirm the multidimensional nature of IC, as broadly accepted in intercultural studies, consisting of three major interacting domains: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Borghetti, 2013; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). The findings also reinforced the idea that IC cannot be reduced to a single construct; instead, it should be viewed as a complex attribute that combines knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

The results emphasize the importance of both self-awareness and awareness of others, highlighting the significance of *recognizing one's own culture* as an independent factor. This highlights the need to consistently reflect on one's home culture while interacting with others. The component of *knowledge of one's own culture* strongly corroborates Byram's (1997) concept of *knowledge of social groups in one's own culture* and Deardorff's idea of *cultural self-awareness*. Likewise, the importance of *knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication* underscores the necessity of understanding both cultural/ sociolinguistic factors, as well as communication conventions, in intercultural interactions, as noted by Canale and Swain (1980) and Byram (1997). The results confirmed the presence of positive *attitudes*, including openness, respect, and willingness to communicate as the foundation of IC (Bennett, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 2000; Deardorff, 2006). Lastly, the skills of analyzing and evaluating, as well as interpreting and relating, reflect students' abilities to mediate perspectives and engage critically with differences, affirming Byram's (1997) *savoir s'engager* and savoir *comprendre*.

In relation to previous studies, this study affirms the current conceptualization of IC while presenting empirical validation in a Vietnamese tertiary education setting. The emergence of one's own cultural knowledge as a separate factor differed from previous research by emphasizing a component that has been theoretically acknowledged but has received little empirical attention. Although Huang's (2021) study on Taiwanese learners and Chen's (2022) research on Chinese students treated IC as fragmented into knowledge, attitudes, and skills, neither study included *knowledge of one's own culture* as a distinct factor. Similarly, the scale developed in the Vietnamese context by Vu and Dinh (2022), although operationalized on the basis of Byram's (1997) framework, did not treat knowledge of one's own culture as an isolated

domain. Therefore, this study expands on previous research by providing empirical validation of the importance of understanding home culture in contributing to IC in the context of EFL education in Vietnam. The study's contribution was to confirm, through CFA, the presence of learners' own culture as a distinct factor in the Vietnamese EFL context, providing evidence to support the argument that IC requires a balanced understanding of both home and foreign cultures, and that IC measurement tools should reflect this.

Several theoretical and pedagogical implications arose from this study's findings. From theoretical perspectives, it supports the claim that IC requires learners to reflect on their own culture while interacting with others (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). From a pedagogical standpoint, IC education should be more than just immersing learners in new cultures; it should include reflective, systematic practices for integrating new cultural inputs into one's own. This aligns with Borghetti's (2013) and Deardorff's (2012) affirmation that awareness of one's own culture enhances students' capacity to engage more effectively with cultural differences.

In addition, the emergence of interpreting/relating and analyzing/evaluating skills highlights the view that IC includes not only the recognition of diversity but also the ability to analyze critically and ethically evaluate such differences. This is consistent with Deardorff's (2006) set of IC skills and Byram's (1997) concept of critical cultural awareness. In this way, the validated instrument aligns well with international IC frameworks while meeting the needs of local education. The study, therefore, has provided a reliable and valid tool for assessing IC for English majors in a Vietnamese higher education context.

## Conclusion

The study's findings revealed a validated 20-item scale measuring the IC of Vietnamese English majors, including four factors: attitudes, skills, knowledge of one's own culture, and knowledge of other cultures and intercultural communication processes. The study affirms that IC is best represented as a multidimensional concept covering cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. The findings confirm the theoretical foundations of existing models (e.g., Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). The emergence of *knowledge of one's own culture* as a separate factor in this study presents an important contribution to the field since it emphasizes the central role of self-cultural knowledge in IC learning, an element frequently stated in theory but seldom validated in empirical literature. Moreover, the positive attitudes (i.e., openness, respect, and willingness to communicate) and the set of skills (interpreting/relating, analyzing/evaluating) widely recognized in international frameworks were also found to fit the tertiary setting in Vietnam. With the validation of items customized for Vietnamese learners in a formal IC-embedded EFL program at the university, the instrument is eligible for use to evaluate IC development in similar Vietnamese higher education contexts.

In addition to these contributions, the study was subject to several limitations. First, as with most factor-analytic studies, the findings are sample-dependent, suggesting the use of larger, more diverse samples to stabilize the four-factor measurement model in future research. Second, since this scale is a self-reported instrument, its reliance on learners' perceptions is undeniable, which may lead to response bias and the possibility of failing to capture the actual IC in real communication. This shortcoming aligns with broader concerns in the field that IC assessment requires triangulation using both direct and indirect tools (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Finally, since the instrument was validated in the context of Vietnamese higher education, its generalizability to other educational and cultural contexts cannot be assumed without additional adaptation and testing.

Based on the findings and acknowledgement of limitations, the study suggests several practical implications and directions for future research. First, the validated scale provides practical value for teachers and curriculum designers in Vietnamese and similar EFL contexts. It can be used as an instrument for diagnosing and reflecting on students' IC across the four aspects (i.e., knowledge of own culture, knowledge of other cultures, and intercultural communication, attitudes, and skills). Educators may use the instrument at different points in a course to diagnose learners' IC, monitor their development, and plan relevant teaching and learning activities. The findings also inform curriculum and materials design, supporting teachers in incorporating more focused intercultural content and tasks that target underdeveloped areas of IC.

Regarding directions for future research, we suggest cross-validating the instrument with other populations, such as school students or learners from other regions, to enhance its generalizability. Next, in evaluating learners' IC in educational settings, it is recommended that complementary tools be incorporated with this self-reported instrument, e.g., performance-based tasks, teachers' observations, and intercultural scenarios, to provide a more complete view of learners' IC. In addition, longitudinal research could examine how the four IC components develop over time, particularly under educational interventions, thereby offering insights into the effectiveness of intercultural learning.

In short, the current study has contributed to both theory and practice by providing a psychometrically tested, context-relevant tool for measuring IC. Apart from its research applications, the instrument offers a feasible tool for teachers to plan, implement, and assess classroom IC-related objectives, thereby supporting broader educational goals of equipping learners with effective and appropriate intercultural communication in the globalized, interconnected world.

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# Working-Class Voices on Screen: Pragmatic Realization of Criticism in Vietnamese Cinema

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## ABSTRACT

Criticism, as a pivotal speech act, often threatens the addressee's face and engages complex politeness norms. While previous research has extensively examined criticism, few studies have focused on how working-class speakers navigate these interactions, particularly within authentic, everyday contexts. This study examines the criticism strategies employed by Vietnamese working-class individuals as depicted in contemporary cinema, aiming to bridge a significant research gap and bring implications to how language is educated. From conversations in popular Vietnamese web dramas, this study employs discourse analysis and quantitative methods to uncover how criticism speech acts are performed by the working class. Findings reveal that direct criticism, predominantly in the form of negative evaluation, is the most frequent strategy among working-class characters. However, indirect strategies such as sarcasm and rhetorical questioning are also commonly utilized, adding emotional nuance and providing face-saving mechanisms. Importantly, both age and social distance are shown to influence criticism: peer interactions favor directness, whereas mixed-age exchanges balance direct and indirect approaches; moreover, as familiarity increases, speakers employ less direct criticism. These findings not only illuminate class-based communication in Vietnamese culture but also have practical implications for developing culturally relevant language teaching materials and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

**Keywords**: Criticism, Working-class, social equality, Inclusivity

## Introduction

People engage in daily conversations for various purposes and goals (Ngo, 2022). Like other speech acts, criticism goes beyond simply expressing disagreement—it is a powerful,

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emotionally charged act of communication that shapes how people relate to one another and how cultural norms are reinforced (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Because it is a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987), criticism requires delicate handling. Speakers must navigate politeness, impoliteness, and the careful management of face to express their intent without damaging relationships (Goffman, 1967; Culpeper, 2011). In Vietnam, this process is especially challenging for working-class speakers, who constantly negotiate long-standing social hierarchies and unequal power dynamics in their daily interactions. Although such encounters are part of everyday life for the majority, they have received little scholarly attention. Much of the existing work has centered on middle-class or elite communication, leaving the voices and strategies of working-class communities largely absent from the academic conversation (Hoang, 2007; Nguyen, 2015; Al Kayed et al., 2019; Ho & Tran, 2022).

The growth of Vietnamese cinema and web dramas offers unprecedented access to naturalistic depictions of working-class life, often set in street markets, close-knit neighborhoods, and multi-generational homes. These portrayals provide valuable insight into criticism as a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987), revealing how politeness, impoliteness, and facework are negotiated in real social contexts (Goffman, 1967; Culpeper, 2011). Understanding such pragmatic strategies is vital for linguistics, language teaching, and cross-cultural communication. When curricula privilege standardized, middle-class norms, they risk marginalizing working-class voices and communicative strengths. Documenting authentic discourse thus contributes to inclusive, culturally relevant education.

Aligned with UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals on equity and inclusivity, this study highlights how class, age, and social distance shape criticism, challenging deficit views of working-class language and promoting pedagogies that embrace linguistic diversity. Through a sociolinguistic analysis of cinematic dialogues, it reveals the distinctive performance of criticism by Vietnamese working-class speakers. The findings have broad implications for language learning, intercultural understanding, and advancing linguistic and educational equity.

## Literature review

### *Speech Act theory*

Speech Act Theory, by Austin (1962), changed how we think about language—not just as a way to share information, but as a way to perform an act, such as making promises, offering apologies, or giving criticism. He divided these acts into three dimensions: the locutionary act (what is said), the perlocutionary act (how it affects the listener), and the illocutionary act, which reveals what the speaker is trying to achieve—such as persuading, warning, or expressing disapproval.

Searle (1969) built on this by introducing rules that explain how speech acts work and when they are appropriate. He also developed a classification that remains influential: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Criticism fits into the "expressives" category because it reveals how the speaker feels—typically dissatisfaction or disapproval (Searle, 1969; Yule, 1996).

But criticism is not just about saying something negative—it is a purposeful act shaped by culture, relationships, and the situation. As Chaika and Tannen (1985) pointed out, these acts reflect the underlying social structure and cannot be fully understood without considering the wider context. To truly grasp the meaning and effect of criticism, we need to look beyond the words and pay attention to the social cues and norms that give them weight.

### *Working-class communication: directness and politeness*

Working-class communication is often direct and emotionally expressive, featuring swearing, elevated volume, and unhedged acts such as blunt commands or criticisms. What might look impolite or even confrontational from a middle-class perspective often carries very different meanings in working-class communities. Here, traits like bluntness or directness signal authenticity, emotional honesty, and solidarity rather than rudeness. Speaking plainly is less about giving offense and more about creating a sense of equality and immediacy in conversation. By contrast, middle-class preferences for hedging or softening requests can come across to working-class speakers as unnecessarily formal or even emotionally distant (Mills, 2004).

This communicative style resonates with Bernstein's (1971) notion of *restricted code*—a context-bound linguistic system typically found in working-class settings. Restricted code relies heavily on shared knowledge and close relationships, privileging relational meaning and group cohesion over syntactic elaboration or explicitness (Bernstein, 1971; Mills, 2004).

Politeness norms also differ. Working-class speakers tend to favor positive politeness, which prioritizes camaraderie and inclusion, rather than negative politeness, which emphasizes distance and non-imposition. Phrases like "Could you possibly…?" may be interpreted as insincere. Mills (2004) critiques dominant politeness theories, such as Brown and Levinson's, for reflecting middle-class, white, Western norms that marginalize working-class speech as deficient or impolite, arguing that politeness is socially constructed and class-specific. Mill's research further shows that working-class speakers often perform speech acts directly, especially requests and criticisms. Minimal mitigation of face-threatening acts is pragmatically appropriate within their cultural logic, reflecting Bernstein's notion of horizontal discourse, where communication is grounded in local, relational knowledge rather than abstract or hierarchical forms.

### *Previous studies on the speech act of criticism*

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2003) defines "criticism" as the act of expressing disapproval or dislike toward someone or something, or suggesting that something is incorrect or inadequate. In academic terms, Tracy, Van Dusen, and Robinson (1987, p. 87) describe it as "finding fault" and giving a "negative evaluation of a person or an act for which he or she is deemed responsible." Nguyen (2005, p. 7) adds more detail, calling it an "illocutionary act" aimed at judging the hearer's actions, words, or choices—especially when the hearer is seen as responsible for them. Drawing on Wierzbicka (1987), Nguyen also points out that criticism often aims to improve the hearer's future behavior, suggesting it can be beneficial to both parties.

### *Criticism across settings*

Criticism is a powerful communicative act that allows individuals to express disapproval, offer constructive feedback, or make a change. Therefore, many studies have examined it in different settings. In academic contexts, Nguyen (2005) found that hierarchical classroom norms and a general emphasis on politeness shaped criticism. More proficient learners were inclined to soften their critiques with praise or suggestions. In the digital political setting, Alshakhanbeh and Alghazo (2022) explored criticism in social media posts directed at the Jordanian government. They observed that users frequently used emotionally charged strategies, such as sarcasm, indirect complaints, or appeals to religious sentiment, to express political resistance. In the media domain, Ho and Tran (2022) examined judges' feedback on *The Voice of America* and found that their critiques balanced honesty with entertainment. Judges used a range of strategies—from direct comments (with the highest frequency of using "identification of the problem" sub-strategy) to more indirect ones (with change-related sub-strategies). This reflects the low-context nature of American culture. As for data collected from movies, Haristiani et al. (2023) analyzed the criticism used by characters in some Japanese and Minangkabau films, finding a tendency to use indirect strategies such as asking/presupposing and offering advice for change. She also used Brown and Levinson's model (1987) to examine the politeness strategies when characters criticized.

### *Criticism from culture to culture*

Culture plays a central role in shaping how criticism is conveyed and received. Nguyen (2005, 2013), in comparative studies of native (L1) and non-native (L2) English speakers in Australia and New Zealand, found that L1 native speakers employed a broader range of strategies, including indirectness and suggestion. In contrast, L2 speakers from collectivist cultures tended to be more direct, potentially due to limited pragmatic fluency in English or differing cultural expectations. Haristiani and Afiana (2022) investigated Japanese discourse from manga and anime dialogues and highlighted the influence of the cultural concept of *Uchi–Soto* (insiders vs. outsiders). Among insiders, criticism was more direct and supportive with "request for change" strategies, whereas in interactions with outsiders, speakers favored indirectness and mitigated language to preserve harmony. The concepts of "Uchi-Soto" are similar to the levels of familiarity in other studies, which are proven to be influential factors in Japanese criticism.

Hoang (2007) compared American and Vietnamese styles of criticism. Americans generally offered direct feedback regardless of status, while Vietnamese speakers used more subtle, suggestion-based strategies, reflecting the country's hierarchical and collectivist values.

Cultural variation was also evident in social media use. British users often framed criticism as problem identification or questioning, while Jordanian users employed more emotional and religiously infused expressions—revealing the intersection of language, culture, and sociopolitical norms. (Al Kayed et al., 2019).

### *Criticism in the Vietnamese context*

Vietnamese communication style aligns closely with the concept of a high-context culture, as described by Hall (1976). Muir (2018) highlights that the language and interactional norms in Vietnam emphasize social hierarchy and the maintenance of interpersonal harmony. In such

contexts, communication tends to be indirect and nuanced, particularly to avoid causing "face loss." As a result, face-threatening acts like criticism are often delivered with strategies that preserve politeness and mitigate offense. While some research focuses on the correlation between gender and politeness strategies in Vietnamese context (Hoang, 2023), Nguyen (2020) pays attention to how frequently Vietnamese speakers use positive politeness techniques—such as indirectness and relationship-building language—to create social cohesion and avoid direct confrontation when performing criticizing acts.

Vietnamese communication tends to be highly context-sensitive, placing strong value on shared social understanding. Hoang (2007) describes Vietnamese society as both hierarchical and socially attuned, with deep roots in Confucian traditions that emphasize respect for age, seniority, and social position. This means that age and social distance strongly influence how criticism is expressed. For instance, younger people or those in subordinate roles are expected to use careful, formal language when speaking to superiors, particularly when criticism is involved. Le (2021) expands on this by highlighting the role of family and social structures, noting that Vietnamese communication follows a strict age-based hierarchy. When interacting with elders or authority figures, speakers typically adopt deferential, restrained speech to show respect. As a result, Vietnamese communication is often characterized by low assertiveness and a tendency to avoid direct personal criticism. At the same time, individuals with higher social status are granted greater flexibility in how they voice criticism. They may shift between "authoritative," "neutral," or even "friendly" tones, depending on the situation (Le, 2021). This uneven distribution of communicative freedom reflects broader cultural values that place harmony and structured interpersonal roles above direct confrontation.

As for the criticism of speech acts, Vietnamese scholars have also contributed important insights into how criticism functions culturally. Hoang (2007) compared Vietnamese and American English speakers and found that Vietnamese participants modulated their tone based on the listener's age or the purpose of the criticism, while familiarity, gender, and setting had less influence. However, the study's focus on middle-class professionals left out working-class perspectives. Do (2012) conducted a detailed comparison of compliments and criticisms in Vietnamese and English using both real conversations and survey data. Her work highlighted the common use of indirectness in Vietnamese to maintain social harmony, drawing on politeness frameworks by Lakoff, Leech, Brown, and Levinson. While comprehensive, the study is now dated and does not fully address the impact of digital communication or global cultural shifts. A more recent study by Truong (2015) examined politeness in Vietnamese and American criticism. His findings revealed that Vietnamese speakers leaned toward "positive politeness" (building rapport), while Americans used "negative politeness" (respecting individual autonomy). However, his study relied on simulated scenarios rather than natural daily conversations, limiting its real-world applicability.

In short, criticism—as a type of speech act—is influenced by a range of social and cultural factors, including age, familiarity, gender, social status, and broader cultural norms (Hoang, 2007; Nguyen Quang,2019). Many researchers have explored how these elements shape both the delivery and reception of criticism. However, most of these studies tend to focus on middle-class or highly educated speakers (Al-Jdayeh, 2023; El-Dakhs et al., 2019; Mulac et al., 2000;

Nguyen, 2008; Ho and Tran, 2022; Yang, 2013), leaving the communication styles of working-class groups largely unexplored. This gap is important because language use often varies by class, and these differences can have a big impact on how people interact and understand one another. Moreover, although films have been acknowledged as valuable sources of pragmatic data—providing access to socially embedded, naturally occurring dialogue (Do Nascimento, 2019; Moura & Bispo, 2020; Rizki & Golubovic, 2020)—Vietnamese research has yet to fully utilize this medium. Existing studies predominantly rely on written texts or formal interviews, often missing the rich, contextually grounded conversations found in contemporary cinema and web dramas. This study addresses both gaps by analyzing working-class speech in Vietnamese filmic discourse. It seeks to illuminate how criticism is performed among working-class characters, with particular attention to the roles of age hierarchy and familiarity—factors that have produced varied findings in previous literature. In doing so, the research aims to offer fresh insights into class-based communication and the nuanced performance of criticism across different social relationships.

### *Research Questions*

The central research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How does Vietnamese working-class interlocutors' age influence the way they deliver criticism?
2. How does Vietnamese working-class interlocutors' social distance influence the way they deliver criticism?
3. What strategies do Vietnamese working class frequently employ when performing acts of criticism?

## Methods

### *Study Setting*

In this study, the data were drawn from ten episodes of two Vietnamese web dramas, namely *Bố Già* (*Old Father*) and *Hẻm Cụt* (*The Blind Alley*). The movies were released in 2020 and 2022 on YouTube. They both portray the intricate interpersonal dynamics within a lower-class family and their relationships with neighbors. The residents in the movies were of the lower working class. All characters communicated in Vietnamese. These two web dramas were selected based on two criteria. Firstly, both garnered significant public attention for their realistic portrayals of working-class communities. At the time of their release, both movies were welcomed by audiences for their authentic use of everyday language and sincere portrayal of the natural conversations of the southern Vietnamese working class. Secondly, the movies included many scenes with various speech acts of criticism. Movie' scripts were selected as the data for analysis because movies are considered to be a rich source of pragmatic data where contexts, situations, life-like conversations, interlocutors, and their relationships are available to be interpreted (Do Nascimento, 2019; Moura & Bispo, 2020; Rizki & Golubovic, 2020). Characters' age ranges from late adolescence and young adults (17-35 years old), middle-aged (36-59 years old), and old-aged (60 or above). The data sources are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

The Duration of Movies Used as Data Source.

| Episodes | Duration | Episodes | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Bố già (Old Father) - 2020** | | **Hẻm Cụt (The Blind Alley) - 2022** | |
| 1 | 46 minutes | 1 | 44 minutes |
| 2 | 47 minutes | 2 | 42 minutes |
| 3 | 36 minutes | 3 | 40 minutes |
| 4 | 32 minutes | 4 | 40 minutes |
| 5 | 25 minutes | 5 | 43 minutes |
| **Total duration** | | **395 minutes (approx. 6.5 hours)** | |

### *Data collection & analysis*

Ten episodes of two web dramas were observed and transcribed in Vietnamese. A corpus of 131 verbal criticisms was chosen and analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The speech acts of criticism were selected based on the notion of criticism by Wierzbicka (1987) and Nguyen (2005). A quantitative approach was used to investigate the frequency of criticism strategies by age and social distance. The qualitative approach was used to describe and analyze the verbal strategies of criticism in their specific contexts.

The analytical framework for this study is grounded in Nguyen's (2005) model of criticism, which was originally adapted from Hiraga and Turner's (1996) framework. Nguyen's model was chosen as the theoretical framework for analysis due to its robust empirical foundation and its extensive application in research examining criticism across a diverse range of cultural contexts, including intercultural, cross-cultural, and intracultural settings (Al-Kayed et al., 2019; Haristiani et al., 2021,2022; Ho & Tran,2022). Although non-verbal expressions can function as speech acts, the current study focuses solely on the verbal perspective that contributes to the meaning of criticism performances. During data coding, minor modifications were made to the adapted model to ensure it accurately reflected the features observed in the web drama episodes. Due to its frequent occurrence, "Sarcasm" was mentioned as a distinct strategy instead of being a part of "Other hints" in the original framework.

The analysis procedure included various steps, such as recording data, transcribing data, and observing dialogues with note-taking. Tokens of criticism were selected and coded by age group and social distance. Based on descriptions of the web dramas and character relationships, speakers of criticism were classified into Young (below 35), Middle-aged (35-55), and Old (above 55). Speakers were also categorized according to social distance, namely familiar relationship (family members, nearby neighbours), unfamiliar relationship (strangers, first-time communicators), and acquaintance (relationships that are not close). The data classification was validated through an expert judgement process.

## Results/Findings

### Quantitative findings

#### *The use of criticizing strategies across age groups*

In terms of age, there are five types of interactions found in the movies: Middle-aged to Middle-aged (Mid-Mid), Middle-aged to Young-aged (Mid-Y), Young-aged to Middle-aged (Y-Mid),

Young-aged to Young-aged (Y-Y), and Old-aged to Middle-aged (O-Mid).

Table 2 shows that in same-age dyads (Mid-Mid, Y-Y), direct criticism dominates. Mid-Mid pairs use it in 67.7% of cases, with negative evaluation (57.4%) as the most frequent sub-strategy. Y-Y pairs favor direct criticism even more (80%), almost exclusively through negative evaluation (80%), reflecting a direct yet narrowly focused approach. Indirect strategies appear minimally, 32.4% in Mid-Mid and 20% in Y-Y interactions.

In mixed-age dyads (Mid-Y, Y-Mid), the distribution is more balanced. Mid-Y interactions show 45.4% direct versus 54.5% indirect criticism, while Y-Mid shows 55.5% direct versus 44.4% indirect. Compared to same-age interactions, these groups employ more indirect strategies, likely as politeness or deference. Sarcasm and asking/presupposing are more frequent in mixed-age talk—Mid-Y uses sarcasm (18.2%) and asking (20.5%), while Y-Mid uses sarcasm (22.2%) and asking (22.2%). This suggests heightened sensitivity to social distance or power differences. In contrast, old-to-middle-aged (O-Mid) interactions resemble same-age patterns, with 80% direct criticism, solely negative evaluation, and only one instance (20%) of indirect criticism ("indicating standard").

Strategy diversity also varies. Middle-aged-related interactions display the broadest range, using nearly all sub-types in both direct and indirect categories—from negative evaluation and consequence statements to sarcasm and asking/presupposing. By contrast, Y-Y and O-Mid groups rely almost entirely on negative evaluation under direct criticism, with minimal to no indirect forms. This indicates middle-aged characters adopt a wider repertoire of criticism strategies, while young and old characters tend to favor a straightforward negative evaluation approach, rarely employing sarcasm or other indirect forms.

*The use of criticizing strategies according to social distance*

The data from Table 3 provide clear evidence that speakers adjust their critical strategies according to the degree of social distance between themselves and their interlocutors. When analyzed across the three relational categories — unfamiliar, acquaintance, and familiar — the findings highlight meaningful patterns in the use of directness, sub-strategy preferences, and strategic diversity.

In interactions marked by greater social distance, such as those among unfamiliar and acquaintance groups, speakers predominantly employ direct-criticism strategies. Unfamiliar pairs use direct criticism in 65.6% of cases, while acquaintances do so even more frequently at 71.4%. In both groups, the sub-strategy of negative evaluation dominates—65.6% in unfamiliar and 53.5% in acquaintance interactions—while other sub-strategies are either absent or occur only marginally. This strong reliance on blunt, evaluative criticism suggests that speakers in socially distant relationships are less concerned with preserving the hearer's face. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, such behavior reflects minimal use of negative politeness strategies in contexts where relational risk is perceived as low. The scarcity of indirect forms also indicates limited strategic variation, consistent with the transactional or impersonal nature of distant communication.

**Table 2**

The Percentages of Criticizing Strategies according to Age Groups

| Strategy | Mid-Mid | | Mid-Y | | Y-Mid | | Y-Y | | O-Mid | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq. | Per | Freq. | Per | Freq. | Per | Freq. | Per | Freq. | Per |
| **Direct criticism** | **46** | **67.7** | **20** | **45.4** | **5** | **55.5** | **4** | **80** | **4** | **80** |
| Negative evaluation | 39 | 57.4 | 13 | 29.5 | 4 | 44.4 | 4 | 80 | 3 | 60 |
| Disapproval | 3 | 4.4 | 1 | 2.3 | 1 | 11.1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Expression of disagreement | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4.5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Statement of the problem | 1 | 1.5 | 3 | 6.8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Statement of difficulty | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Consequences | 3 | 4.4 | 1 | 2.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 20 |
| **Indirect criticism** | **22** | **32.4** | **24** | **54.5** | **4** | **44.4** | **1** | **20** | **1** | **20** |
| Correction | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Indicating standard | 4 | 5.9 | 2 | 4.5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 20 |
| Demand for change | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Request for change | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4.5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Advice about change | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4.5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Suggestion for change | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Expression of uncertainty | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Asking/presupposing | 4 | 5.9 | 9 | 20.5 | 2 | 22.2 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| Sacarism | 14 | 20.6 | 8 | 18.2 | 2 | 22.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **68** | **100** | **44** | **100** | **9** | **100** | **5** | **100** | **5** | **100** |

By contrast, speakers in familiar relationships take a more balanced approach: 52.8% direct versus 47.3% indirect criticism. While negative evaluation remains the most frequent sub-strategy (37.8%), this group employs a broader range of tactics, including sarcasm (21.6%), asking/presupposing (13.5%), indicating standard (5.4%), and consequence statements (6.8%). This diversity suggests greater attention to relational maintenance, using linguistic strategies to temper criticism and manage interpersonal rapport. The higher proportion of indirect strategies signals greater pragmatic competence and alignment with Leech's (1983) Maxims of Politeness, particularly Tact and Agreement, as criticism is mitigated to preserve solidarity and reduce face threat.

Across all groups, negative evaluation, sarcasm, and asking/presupposing are the most common sub-strategies. Other forms—such as demand for change, suggestion for change, and advice about change—are rare or absent, pointing to a cultural preference for either clear, evaluative feedback or more oblique expressions of dissatisfaction rather than overtly corrective or prescriptive criticism.

A clear correlation emerges between social distance and the use of negative evaluation: 37.8% in familiar, 53.5% in acquaintance, and 65.6% in unfamiliar interactions. This progression

indicates a greater likelihood of blunt, evaluative criticism when emotional or social ties are weaker.

**Table 3**

The Percentages of Criticizing Strategies according to social distance

| Strategy | Unfamiliar | | Acquaintance | | Familiar | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq. | Per | Freq. | Per | Freq. | Per |
| **Direct criticism** | **19** | **65.6** | **20** | **71.4** | **39** | **52.8** |
| Negative evaluation | 19 | 65.6 | 15 | 53.5 | 28 | 37.8 |
| Disapproval | 0 | 0 | 4 | 14.3 | 1 | 1.4 |
| Expression of disagreement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2.7 |
| Statement of the problem | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3.6 | 3 | 4.1 |
| Statement of difficulty | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Consequences | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 6.8 |
| **Indirect criticism** | **10** | **34.4** | **8** | **28.6** | **35** | **47.3** |
| Correction | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3.6 | 0 | 0 |
| Indicating standard | 1 | 3.5 | 1 | 3.6 | 4 | 5.4 |
| Demand for change | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1.4 |
| Request for change | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2.7 |
| Advice about change | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2.7 |
| Suggestion for change | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Expression of uncertainty | 1 | 3.5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Asking/presupposing | 3 | 10.2 | 3 | 10.7 | 10 | 13.5 |
| Sarcasm | 5 | 17.2 | 3 | 10.7 | 16 | 21.6 |
| **Total** | **29** | **100** | **28** | **100** | **74** | **100** |

### *Qualitative analysis of strategies*

#### *Direct speech acts of criticism*

**Negative Evaluation**: This strategy involves utterances that convey critical judgments about the hearer's behavior, appearance, attitude, or actions. Such evaluations are typically expressed through the use of negative adjectives or words carrying unfavorable connotations (Nguyen, 2005). In many situations, negative adjectives often go with modifiers describing levels of intensity.

- *Example 1*: Chú cũng có hơi kỳ với quá khích một chút. (Bố già/E1) (Young-Mid; Unfamiliar relationship)

  *Translation 1*: You are a bit odd and somewhat overreactive too.

- *Example 2*: Nhưng mà cái tay hơi gân nha. Trời gân xanh quá luôn đó, nhỏ. (Hèm cụt/E3) (Mid-Young; Accquaintance)

  Translation 2: But your arm's kinda veiny, you know. Gosh, those veins stand out so much,

girl!

- *Exampe 3*: Xời, mày thiệt cà khịa quá mày ơi! (Bố già/E2) (O-Mid; Familiar)

  *Translation 3*: "Pff, you're so annoying, seriously!"

- *Example 4*: Xài điện thoại cùi bắp mà bày đặt! (Bố già/E2) (Mid-Mid; Familiar)

  *Translation 4*: "Look at you, using that crappy phone and still acting all fancy!"

- *Example 5:* Nhìn cái mặt mày tao mới thấy lo đó. Mặt mày nhìn thấy gian lắm (Mid-Y; Familiar) (Bố Già/E2)

  *Translation 5*: "Just looking at your face makes me worried. You look so shady."

In Example 1, the situation occurs in a police station where the younger speaker critiques a middle-aged, unfamiliar man after a fight between the middle-aged man and the young speaker's mother on the street. The young speaker used the adjectives *"kỳ"* (odd) and *"quá khích"*(overreactive), both of which signal disapproval. However, this utterance has been softened by modifiers "*hơi"* (a bit) and *"một chút"* (somewhat), implying the speaker's acknowledgement of the social distance and hierarchical age gap. It can be seen that the speaker employed direct negative evaluation, yet used softeners to lower the intensity of the speech act. In the second example, the middle-aged speaker (the landlord) negatively evaluates the younger acquaintance (the tenant)'s physical appearance, describing their arms as *"gân"* (veiny) and emphasizing the unattractiveness with the vivid expression *"xanh quá luôn"* ("veins stand out so much"). Interestingly, the speaker used both softening modifier "hơi" (kinda), and amplifying modifier "quá" (so much) to directly evaluate the hearer's appearance in a way that is not overtly rude. In examples 3,4, and 5, the relationships are all familiar (neighbours), and the utilizing of strongly negative adjectives in combination with amplifying modifiers, such as "quá" (so much), "thiệt" (seriously) (in example 3), "cùi bắp" (crappy) (in example 4), "lắm" (so) (in example 5). Despite this, the neighboring hearers show no sign of being offended.

**Disapproval**: Disapproval refers to the personal expression of unfavorable opinions or feelings of aversion toward the hearer's actions. This type of criticism is commonly realized through negation phrases such as "I don't like," "I hate," or "I can't stand."

- *Example 6*: Tôi bực mình mấy người lắm rồi đó nha! Gì chị thấy thì chị hãy nói. Còn chị không thấy thì chị đừng nói. (Hẻm cụt/E4) (Mid-Mid; Accquaintance)

  *Translation 6*: I'm really fed up with you! Say only what you actually saw. If you didn't see it, then don't say anything.

- *Example 7*: Anh là một thằng đàn ông không ra gì à. Tôi không nể anh. Đó là lời thật lòng. (Hẻm cụt/E3) (Mid-Mid; Familiar)

  *Translation 7*: You're a poor excuse for a man. I have no respect for you. That's the honest truth.

- *Example 8*: Cái chuyện tao không có đáng cái gì mà mày nói um sùm trời đất à. Tao ghét ai nhiều chuyện mà gặp có toàn người nhiều chuyện không. (Hẻm cụt/E4) (Mid-Y; Familiar)

*Translation 8*: It is not a big deal, but you told everybody about it! I hate talkative people, but keep pumping into them.

In Example 6, the middle-aged speaker directly conveys emotional discomfort through the phrase *"bực mình"* ("fed up with"), clearly signaling dissatisfaction with the hearer's behavior. Similarly, in Example 7, the speaker explicitly criticizes the hearer's character by stating *"tôi không nể"* ("I have no respect"), which expresses strong personal disapproval. In Example 8, the use of *"Tao ghét"* ("I hate") also signals direct disapproval. These examples demonstrate that the speakers express their attitudes bluntly, regardless of age hierarchy or the degree of familiarity in the relationship. However, the choice of personal pronouns reflects underlying social dynamics: pronouns such as *"tôi"* (I), *"chị"* (you), and *"anh"* (you) indicate politeness and equality in age, signaling relative social distance, while *"tao"* (I) and *"mày"* (you) mark a hierarchical, unequal relationship, typically signaling greater familiarity or superiority.

**Reference to Consequences**: This strategy involves highlighting the negative outcomes or effects resulting from the hearer's behavior. It is often realized through causal structures such as "so," "therefore," or their equivalents.

- *Example 9*: Bà làm cái gì hả? Bà làm cái gì? Bà hỏi người ta trong bao thư có nhiêu tiền làm chi cho người ta quánh giá bà vậy? (Bố già/E3) (Mid-Mid; Familiar)

  *Translation 9*: What the hell are you doing? You really asked how much was in the envelope, just so they could have something to judge your wit.

- *Example 10*: Tao nói mày cứng đầu Làm cha mẹ, cái gì cũng từ từ. Nói mày không được. Cái nào mày cứ ào ào à. Rủi ra nó có cái chuyện gì thì tính sao. (Bố già/E3) (O-Mid; Familiar)

  *Translation 10*: You're so stubborn. Being a parent means thinking things through, not just charging ahead like you always do. What if something goes wrong to him as a result?

In one example, a husband criticizes his wife's actions by pointing out the negative consequence, using the structure *"làm làm chi cho..."* (roughly, *"just so…"*), which implies an unfavoured action. Example 6 illustrates a layered structure: the speaker (a hearer's senior neighbour) begins with a direct negative evaluation, offers unsolicited advice, and concludes with a warning about potential consequences if the criticized behavior continues — particularly directed toward the hearer's son.

### *Indirect speech acts of criticism*

After data has been analyzed, the following sub-strategies were the most commonly found:

**Sarcasm:** Sarcasm refers to the use of ironic or exaggerated praise to indirectly criticize the hearer's actions or behavior. It typically conveys a meaning opposite to the literal interpretation, thereby highlighting the inappropriateness or absurdity of the hearer's conduct in a subtle yet potent manner.

- *Example 13*: Nhìn nó hiền lành quá! Nào giờ coi trong phim không biết là ngoài đời có một đứa diễn hay như vậy! (Mid-Mid, unfamiliar) (Bố già/ E2)

  *Translation 13:* Looks all nice and innocent, huh? Who knew real-life acting could beat

the movies!

- *Example 14*: Thông minh quá, giờ này mà cũng còn nghe lời người ta! (Mid-Mid, Familiar) (Bố già/E3)

  *Translation 14:* Wow, so smart — still taking people's words for it at this age!

- *Example 15:* Còn con này, đi học thay đồ nhanh quá ha! (Mid-Young, familiar) (Bố già/ E1)

  *Translation 15:* Look at you, girl—changing your clothes for school so fast, huh!

- *Example 16:* Khi mà em kết hợp trong cái bộ đồ áo dài của chị đó. Chị mặc bước vô cái bữa tiệc. Chị lộng lẫy như một con lân! (Young-Mid, Accquaintance) (Hẻm cụt/E3)

  *Translation 16:* When you wear it (a big tie) with the áo dài outfit I made for you and step into the party, you look as stunning as a lion dancer!

In Example 13, a middle-aged man sarcastically praises a woman for her "acting skills," implying she is pretending to be an innocent victim — not in a performance, but in real life. The use of praise here is not genuine but serves to call out perceived hypocrisy. Similarly, in Example 14, the husband uses the phrase "*so smart*" to imply the opposite — that his wife is naive or gullible for trusting someone too easily. In both scenarios, sarcasm operates as an indirect but pointed form of criticism, carrying emotional weight. In Example 15, the father appears to commend his daughter for how quickly she changes clothes and goes to school with her male classmate. However, the underlying message is one of disapproval, as he actually objects to her eagerness to leave with the boy. Likewise, in example 16, the young tailor's use of the word "stunning" ("lộng lẫy") to describe a middle-aged woman's appearance is undercut by the comparison to a "lion dancer." Since lion dancers are known for their flamboyant and colorful costumes—elements seen as unsuitable for both the occasion and the woman's age—the intended effect is subtly critical rather than flattering. In each of these instances, sarcasm is constructed through positive adjectives or praise that, within the context, are clearly meant to convey a negative assessment of the hearer's actions or choices.

**Asking/Presupposing***:* This strategy involves the use of rhetorical questions not to elicit information but to subtly draw attention to the hearer's inappropriate behavior or attitudes (Nguyen, 2005). Rather than expecting a reply, such questions are used to provoke reflection or guilt, often implying criticism through what is left unsaid.

- *Example 17*: Nè mày coi mày ăn bận nè. Nút trước nút sau vậy đó hả? (Mid-Young, familiar) (Bố già/E1)

  *Translation 17*: Hey, look at what you're wearing. Did you really button your shirt like that—front and back all mixed up?

- *Example 18:* Thiệt tình. Kiếp trước bà lái xe tải hả? Ở đâu đâm ngang vậy? (Mid-Mid, Unfamiliar) (Hẻm cụt/E2)

  *Translation 18*: Honestly, were you a truck driver in your past life or something? Where did you even come from, cutting in line?

- *Example 19*: Đính hôn hay giật dây chuyền mà gấp dữ vậy chị? (Young-Mid, Accquaintance) (Hẻm cụt/E3)

  *Translation 19*: Are you getting engaged or just snatching a necklace, with such a rush, sis?

- *Example 20:* Chú Ngọt! Có bằng lái chưa mà chạy như vậy? (Young-Mid, Familiar) (Hẻm cụt/E4)

  *Translation 20*: Uncle Ngọt! Do you have a driver's license, driving that way?

In Examples 17–20, rhetorical questions are systematically utilized as indirect strategies to express disapproval. Example 17 features a yes/no interrogative within a father-son interaction, functioning as a negative evaluation of the son's attire in a context marked by familiarity and close relational ties. In Example 18, the exchange occurs between strangers, and a rhetorical question is used to criticize the inappropriate act of cutting in line. Here, the apparent irrelevance of the question underscores its pragmatic function as a criticism, rather than an information-seeking act.

Example 29 involves a familiar relationship, where the speaker uses a rhetorical question during an engagement ceremony to draw a humorous parallel between the urgency of the preparations and the act of snatching a necklace. This analogy implicitly critiques the woman's haste as excessive and socially inappropriate. Finally, in Example 20, the rhetorical question is directed at a familiar interlocutor, functioning as a mitigated criticism of the hearer's driving skills. By framing the criticism as a question rather than a direct statement, the speaker softens the potential face threat, thus maintaining interpersonal harmony.

**Indicating standard:** As described by Nguyen (2005), this strategy involves referencing commonly accepted rules, proverbs, or societal expectations to indirectly criticize the hearer for violating these norms. The speaker does not confront the hearer directly but invokes a shared cultural standard to frame the criticism.

- *Example 21*: Hông ai bận cái đầm này mà thắt dây nịt hết trơn. (Bố già/E2)

  *Translation 21*: No one wears this kind of dress with a belt at all.

- *Example 22*: Nè đàn ông con trai mà uống nước ngọt không! (Bố già/ E4)

  *Translation 22*: Look at you—supposed to be a man, yet you're drinking soda.

In Example 21, the speaker draws on a conventional fashion guideline — that one should not wear certain clothing items without a belt — to subtly highlight the hearer's poor sense of style. Likewise, in Example 22, the speaker invokes a stereotypical image of masculinity, suggesting that a "real man" would not drink soft drinks but alcohol. By referencing this social expectation, the speaker criticizes the hearer for failing to conform to traditional gender norms, thus questioning his masculinity in a socially coded way.

## Discussion

### *Criticism strategies in terms of age*

In peer interactions among members of the same age group (Mid-Mid, Young-Young), working-class speakers tend to employ direct criticism strategies with minimal mitigation. Among these, the negative evaluation sub-strategy is the most frequently utilized. This pattern aligns with the communication characteristics of the British and American working classes described by Mills (2004), who notes that individuals from these backgrounds often favor direct, blunt, and unambiguous language to express solidarity and honesty. In the Vietnamese context, the findings of this study diverge from those of Do (2012), underscoring that the working class exhibits a distinctive communication style compared to the general population and other social classes. This highlights the significant influence of social class on the realization of critical speech acts.

When looking at cross-generational communication among working-class speakers (Mid–Young, Young–Mid), we see a more negotiated mix of direct and indirect strategies. This pattern reflects the continuing influence of traditional Vietnamese norms, which tend to value indirectness to reduce face threats. At the same time, the strong presence of the Negative Evaluation sub-strategy—so characteristic of working-class discourse—shows that speakers are not simply following convention but adapting it in nuanced ways.

Interestingly, younger speakers appear less invested in broadening their repertoire of criticism strategies, leaning more heavily on direct approaches. By contrast, middle-aged adults—even within the same social class—draw from a wider range of strategies, showing greater flexibility and heightened awareness of the hearer's face needs, including when interacting with younger interlocutors. This generational difference signals a meaningful shift in Vietnamese communicative practices. Younger speakers are becoming noticeably more blunt and less likely to soften their criticisms, even when addressing older adults. Such a trend diverges from earlier observations by Hoang (2007), Do (2012), and Le (2021), who documented stronger norms of deference and mitigation across generations.

### *Criticism strategies in terms of social distance*

Notably, conversations between interlocutors who share an unfamiliar or only slightly acquainted relationship predominantly employ direct criticism strategies, characterized by straightforwardness and a primary reliance on the negative evaluation sub-strategy. In contrast, interactions among those with closer relationships (such as family members or close neighbors) display a more balanced use of both direct and indirect criticism strategies. This suggests that the closer the relationship, the more likely working-class speakers are to employ indirect strategies to maintain harmony, compared with more distant relationships. Such tendencies reflect an intersection between traditional Vietnamese communicative norms—which value emotional connections, respect for the interlocutor's face, and harmonious relationships across both distant and close ties—and the general working-class tendency to favor blunt, straightforward expressions with little mitigation, particularly in less familiar relationships. (Do, 2012; Hoang, 2007; Le, 2021; Mills, 2004)

This pattern stands in contrast to the Japanese concepts of Uchi (in-group) and Soto (out-group).

According to Haristiani and Afiana (2022), Japanese speakers tend to use more direct criticism and prioritize positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) with close in-group members as a marker of inclusion, whereas in interactions with out-group or unfamiliar individuals, they prefer indirect strategies and negative politeness, consistent with Brown and Levinson's theory.

A second noteworthy feature is that the Vietnamese lower class relies primarily on negative evaluation sub-strategies when engaging in direct criticism, and on asking/presupposition and sarcasm when opting for indirect criticism. Notably, there is an absence or rarity of sub-strategies that involve suggestions for change, and the greater the social distance, the less diverse the strategies used. This highlights distinctive class-based features in Vietnamese working-class communication, as described by Shi and Lei (2021), who observe that this group tends to explicitly express unpleasant attitudes and emotions using negative adjectives in daily interaction, especially in acts of criticism. As Shi and Lei (2021) further note, there is relatively little lexical and structural diversity in their utterances compared to those of other social classes, resulting in a narrower, less varied set of communicative strategies when performing criticism.

### *Direct and indirect criticizing strategies among Vietnamese working-class people*

The qualitative descriptive data yielded particularly nuanced insights. When employing direct criticism strategies, individuals from this social class frequently use strong adjectives, often intensified by adverbial modifiers, to emphasize their point. Notably, both upward and downward polarity modifiers serve to reinforce the force of the adjective, often converging on the same level of intensity—for instance, "hơi" (kinda) and "quá" (so much) can both convey the sense of "rất" (very). As a result, exaggeration is a common feature, manifested through the use of emphatic adjectives and high-intensity modifiers.

As previously discussed, working-class speakers primarily use rhetorical questions and sarcasm to express indirect criticism. In these cases, they tend to opt for positive adjectives and amplifying modifiers. Additionally, comparison plays a significant role, typically realized through similes and metaphors that draw on familiar, everyday references without introducing complex layers of meaning. For example, expressions such as "rạng rỡ như một con lân" ("as dazzling as a lion dancer") and "đính hôn hay giật dây chuyền" ("getting engaged or snatching a necklace") are rooted in relatable imagery. Consequently, even when indirect strategies are employed, the intended critical meaning is easily accessible and rarely leads to misinterpretation among listeners.

## Conclusion

This study shows that Vietnamese working-class speakers predominantly employ direct criticism strategies—especially "negative evaluation"—in everyday exchanges, reflecting both class-based and cultural influences on communication style (Nguyen, 2005; Mills, 2004). While previous research has characterized Vietnamese communication as largely indirect and face-saving, shaped by Confucian hierarchies and high-context norms (Hoang, 2007; Hall, 1976), the findings here reveal a distinctive working-class pragmatics: blunt, expressive, and marked by strong adjectives, yet adapted through softeners or intensifiers when context demands.

Strategy use broadens in familiar relationships or mixed-age interactions, where indirect forms such as sarcasm and rhetorical questioning become more common to maintain harmony (Nguyen, 2020; Do, 2012). Middle-aged speakers display the greatest strategy diversity, demonstrating sensitivity to age and social distance, while younger and older speakers tend to favor a narrower, more direct style.

Social distance emerges as a key factor: less intimate relationships prompt more direct, negative, and unmitigated criticism, whereas close relationships produce a balanced mix of direct and indirect strategies—consistent with cross-cultural politeness theory and Vietnamese sociolinguistic norms (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Le, 2021). Notably, working-class criticism in Vietnamese cinema rarely takes constructive forms (e.g., advice or suggestions) but excels in emotional authenticity and relational signaling, often drawing on sarcasm and culturally grounded rhetorical devices (Shi & Lei, 2021).

By analyzing naturalistic film dialogue, this study addresses a gap in prior research, which has largely overlooked the lower class in favor of educated or institutional contexts. The findings underscore the communicative competence of marginalized groups, challenging standardized norms and supporting calls for more inclusive language pedagogy and policy (Do Nascimento, 2019; Moura & Bispo, 2020). Theoretically, the study contributed to the landscape of pragmatic speech acts of criticism, in which little attention is paid to the working class. Practically, the study also aimed to raise awareness for language educators in the design of language materials, which currently focuses on standardized language mode. It is particularly meaningful to support language learners with communicative, especially pragmatic, competence.

Finally, despite its valuable insights, this study has some limitations to be acknowledged. The dataset comprises 131 instances of criticism drawn from only two popular web dramas. Although selected for their authenticity and cultural relevance, the modest sample size and limited cinematic scope may not capture the full range of working-class criticism strategies in real-life contexts. Future research should incorporate a wider variety of films and episodes to expand the analysis and enhance generalizability. The analysis of age-related dynamics was also constrained by the available characters and storylines. As a result, certain interactions—such as those between elderly and young individuals, or among the elderly—were absent. Additionally, both films are set in Ho Chi Minh City, reflecting southern Vietnamese working-class speech. Broader geographic representation would provide a more comprehensive perspective. Ultimately, this research lays important groundwork for future comparative studies, including cross-cultural analyses with English working-class pragmatics, to offer learners exposure to authentic, context-rich conversational strategies.

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## Biodata

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# Review of Literary Theory for Robots: How Computers Learned to Write

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## ABSTRACT

**Keywords**: Artificial Intelligence, Robots, computer, policies

This book review examines the idea of collaboration between AI and human intelligence. The book review explains that, for many years, these two entities have been working together, and their collaboration has led to numerous discoveries and innovations. This review shares key insights of the book in conversation with other prominent scholars.

**Tenen, D. Y. (2024). *Literary Theory for Robots: How Computers Learned to Write.* W. W. Norton & Company, pp. 158, ISBN: 9780393882186**

In every domain of human life, artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly prevalent, and people are discussing how they can benefit from it and mitigate its harmful impacts. As AI (Artificial Intelligence) integration into academia becomes a reality, scholars, students, parents, stakeholders, and concerned parties are expressing ambivalent feelings about it. Some want to know why AI intelligence or machine intellect is going to support humans. As a first-year writing instructor, I have found myself on the same page and have been researching AI issues. Fortunately, I recently picked Dennis Yi Tenen's *Literary Theory for Robots: How Computers Learned to Write* (published 2024) because the internet, electronic gadgets, and artificial intelligence profoundly influence modern education. This book attempts to use several rhetorics to convince a broad audience that the idea of separating human learning from machine intelligence is absurd. Artificial intelligence is one of my research interests, and I have written some papers about it. Tenen is an associate professor of English and Comparative Literature at New York's Columbia University. His research interest includes the intersection of humans, text, and technology. Sandhu (2024), in his review published in *The Guardian*, claims that the title of Tenen's book can be peculiarly rephrased as "do robots need literary theory? Are we the robots – that has little in common with the techno-theory of writers such as Friedrich Kittler, Dona Haraway and N Katherine Hayles?" (par. 2). Sandhu (2024) states that Tenen's arguments about emerging technologies somehow reflect the works of Kittler, Haraway and Hayles, but his theoretical framework is not on a par with theirs. In other words, Tenen adopts rhetoric more than theories.

Readers can be bewildered because AI has not suddenly entered human spheres. Machine intelligence has been collaborating with human brains for centuries. In the industrial age, Tenen, without specifying any particular application, argues that automation was born to work

alongside laborers. Today, machine intelligence, or AI, is working with students, teachers, writers, nurses, and engineers—with everyone. Despite our preferences, AI is on the way to becoming an indispensable part of our lives. Educators and scholars have been researching its significance and impacts on education. Regardless of research findings, we, as humans, must live with technology. Therefore, Tenen suggests that "we must also learn to become part software engineers and part" (p. 2). He goes on to claim that the idea of machine intelligence dates back to the time when Arab Philosopher Ibn Khaldun's 1377 Muqaddimah, which included "zairajah"—a kind of letter magic to make predictions.

However, Tenen does not deny that old and new AI algorithms, data, and computational power are still grappling with " external validation" (p. 21). A human brain must eventually validate AI output. For example, ChatGPT generates grammatically correct sentences; nonetheless, it sometimes fails to activate human faculties to understand the overall meaning, because not every ordinary person can master or become good at Aristotle's invention[1]. The author brings up Noam Chomsky's insightful statement, "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously." Despite acceptable syntax, here this sentence does not "make sense sense." (p. 21). Mere syntactical perfection does not bring words to life and meaning. The evidence that exhibits why human brains transcend machine intelligence is that "machine intelligence" entails coded programs but lacks lived experience, sensory input, and context. This issue has been troublesome, especially in academics.

The author highlights the intrinsic relationship between internal and external entities. He rather focuses on the collective goal to achieve "intelligence." Complying with Aristotle's notion of "intelligence" that "We don't have to concern ourselves with 'what's really going on, on the inside." (Berlin, 1984, p. 36). Tenen himself shares that he learns better by taking notes, reading books, chatting with friends, browsing different websites, and more. AI does not erode a student's talents but ignites them, serving as a "booster" or a "smart assistant." This idea closely resembles the theory of extended cognition—learning accelerates in response to the surrounding environment. Effective learning does not occur in isolation. He argues that gifted students rise to the top in the international arena, but those who are average or below may need support to be on par with their more talented peers. This is where AI steps in. Tenen (2024) opines, "Artificial intellect thrives in the gap between the average and the exceptional . . . AI was created specifically to make us smarter (mistakenly not lazier). Spell-checkers and sentence autocompletion tools make better (at least, more literate) writers" (p.59). Endorsing Tenen's argumentation, I would like to bring two questions to educators' and policymakers' attention outrightly: "What is the difference between getting ideas from writing center teachers or private home tutors and instructing an AI chatbot to produce a modal answer before adapting the answer and submitting it as if it were someone's sole creation? Is every human act not influenced by any other external entity, such as cultures, interactions, readings, and observations?

The answer is that learning or language cannot be pure. Learning happens in social contexts through interactions and dialogue between interlocutors and audiences (Bakhtin, 2010; Bruffee, 1984). Unlike in the past, students tend to interact more with non-human entities for various purposes. This clearly indicates that human creativity or original responses have always originated from collaboration and socialization. Given the changing dynamics of society, the definition of "originality or creativity" must be redefined in education. What I mean is new assessment rubrics that recognize, limit, and evaluate AI's contribution alongside students'

[1] In *Practical Elements of Rhetoric,* Genung and A.S. Hill mention that "invention is a natural gift that can be cultivated by habits of observation, thought, and reading" (Berlin, 1984, p. 65).

unsupported ideas, fostering ethics and transparency. Moreover, the collaboration between students' writing, Grammarly, and Microsoft Word's auto-correction relates to the notion of machine learning; however, it has hardly been perceived as a threat to academia. Some future studies can focus on this complex relationship.

In the final chapter, Tenen asks readers the most awaited and heavy question: "Should we embrace AI now?" Tenen presents nine compelling ideas for incorporating AI into human life. However, his overall messaging is "AI will neither destroy humanity nor solve all its problems" (121). Throughout the book, he makes his best effort to prove that humans and machine intelligence are compatible, especially as machines augment human intelligence. He also discovers that computer science has been "inextricably entwined with literary and linguistic concerns" (p. 121). His nine ideas are: AI is collective labor, intelligence is distributed, AI holds a metaphor, metaphors obscure responsibility, metaphors don't hurt, machines alone cannot become moral agents, automation has come for "knowledge work," technology encodes politics, and general intelligence leads to generic intelligence. Among his ideas, two captivated me—ethical framing and a mismatch between performance and understanding. The author sounds sympathetic to artificial intelligence. Users or humans hold AI responsible for producing discriminatory or racist language. On the contrary, the author objects to this accusation. He contends that "It's not the pen's fault that it wrote convincing misinformation" (p. 130). The human brain has programmed it, regulated it, and benefited from it. This is a strong rebuttal. And the other is a need for redefining learning, originality, and authorship. He does not advocate for the integration of AI unquestioningly. He sincerely warns readers of AI's threat. AI tools have been helping students improve their grades and writing, yet their mastery and achievement remain questionable. His warning mirrors this: "We should be preparing for a future of 'writers' and 'coders' incapable of authoring a single line unassisted" (p. 137).

Therefore, teachers and academic institutions must not excessively rely on AI policies. Instead of policing AI use in students' work, teachers should teach students how and when to use it, as ChatGPT, among other GenAI tools, has become exceedingly popular at all levels of education (Chan & Hu, 2023). Tenen boldly states that "There is no point in lecturing a 'smart' refrigerator about ethics" (p. 141). A creative and smart teacher creates questions for students that cannot be contextualized, sensed, or internalized by algorithms and redefines assessments so that they value genuine perspectives, critical participation, and original work. AI has pushed teachers to work smarter and more intelligently than before. AI has become a "wellwisher." Nonetheless, those who are still reluctant to embrace machine learning may feel compelled "to devote energy toward outpacing GenAI. That is, trying to develop assignments for which GenAI platforms cannot provide viable responses may be impractical—if not impossible—given the velocity of AI evolution" (Dobrin, 2023, p. 17). It reminds me of my rhetoric and composition professor who, once, confidently told us that AI would struggle to respond to his unique and critical thinking questions. Since artificial intelligence is an outcome of human thought, why can't a teacher outsmart a machine and design assignments that challenge a machine's mind? Instead of treating machines as competitors or aliens, educators can work with students to encourage ethical, collaborative work that maximizes learning outcomes (Rodriguez, 2025).

As a first-year writing instructor, I can relate my situation to the complexities of implementing AI in education. In the teaching of English or writing, AI can be an additional help to students who speak English as a foreign/second language. Now, whether we like it or not, machine learning has become part of our lives. Hart-Davidson (2018) noted that, before ChatGPT existed, teaching and writing robots had already entered human lives. Humans create robots, and they later influence humans. Nonetheless, humans possess the caliber to mitigate robots' detrimental effects. He suggested "theorizing, building, and researching writing by non-

humans" (p. 254). After six years of Hart-Davidson's assertion, Tenen solidifies this notion of collaborating with robots. "The paths of 'machine learning' and 'human learning' continue to converge, destabilizing some of our long-standing pedagogical assumptions in the process" (p. 138). Throughout the book, Tenen makes compelling cases for how learning and writing are not a product of a single intellect in the 21st century. Another strength of this book lies in weighing the merits and demerits of machine intelligence. As an AI advocate, the author's merits outweigh the demerits. Another critical achievement can be reflected in his interactions with readers. He leaves readers with questions to think about. He has substantiated his claim and advanced his arguments with convincing combinations of philosophy and machine intelligence. When he cites historical references, readers may find it difficult to resist his powerful argument. My perception has been influenced profoundly. By analyzing the political, practical, and ethical aspects of works like Cathy O'Neil's *Weapons of Math Destruction* (2016), Ethan Mullick's *Co-Intelligence* (2024), and Kate Crawford's *Atlas of AI* (2021), Dobrin's rhetorical focus is enhanced. Together, these books give academics and educators a better understanding of AI as a sophisticated sociotechnical system that challenges ideas of authorship, creativity, and critical literacy rather than just as a teaching tool. It is understandable that the book's primary goal is to emphasize the theories behind the emergence of "machine intelligence" and why it is not irresistible now or in the future. He has made a wise decision by striking while the iron is hot. AI has become a burning issue across every sphere of human life. In this ongoing war between "machine learning" and "human learning," neither will win nor lose. The current situation indicates that raising ethical awareness about AI will secure a future in which machine and human intelligence work together across all domains, particularly in education (Sherma, 2024). Collaboration overpowers individual efforts.

In conclusion, the book strongly supports its argument that computers and humans have been collaborating for centuries. The combination of machines and humans works better if precautions are taken. Future findings will present more solutions and implications. At the moment, teachers may help their students understand in class how any machine or tool can generate mistakes, fake information, racial and sexual stereotypes, broad implications, and irrelevant content through its algorithmic capabilities. Even if an institutional policy is not ready, a class protocol can be developed to guide and control the misuse of machine intelligence. If students realize that working with machine intelligence itself is not problematic, but their blind faith in it can lead them to unforeseeable consequences. One thing always prevails in life. Everything comes with binary opposites—merits and demerits.

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## Biodata

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# The Causes of English Language Learning Anxiety among English Major Seniors at a Vietnamese University

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## ABSTRACT

Foreign language anxiety has long been recognized as a significant factor affecting learners' performance and motivation in second language acquisition. However, limited research has examined this phenomenon among English majors who are expected to be highly proficient English users in non-native contexts. To address this paucity, this paper explores the causes of English language learning anxiety (ELLA) among English majors at a Vietnamese university. Drawing on mixed data from 103 questionnaire respondents and eight follow-up interviews, four major causes were identified: students' difficulties with English vocabulary learning, misconceptions about English language learning, test anxiety, and lack of preparation. The findings indicate anxiety as an existence and a challenge that instructors and learners ought to anticipate, acknowledge, and take notice of. The study also brings new insights into how anxiety might tend to derive internally from students themselves and suggests that language educators should incorporate supportive strategies to mitigate these causes in English learning settings.

**Keywords**: English language learning anxiety, foreign language anxiety, English majors

## Introduction

English has been the most international language for multilateral communication and diverse perspectives, spoken by around 1.5 billion people worldwide as a first or second language, excluding speakers of English as a foreign language. However, recent data from the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) in 2022 revealed that of the 2.1 million adult test takers from 111 countries and regions, a staggering 72% demonstrated low to moderate proficiency in English (EF EPI, 2022). These statistics clearly indicate the difficulties many learners face in acquiring a strong command of English.

Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive examination of various variables within the cognitive, affective, and miscellaneous domains of language learning (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992). Of particular importance is foreign language anxiety (FLA), which has been identified

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as a significant affective factor that hinders the language learning process and outcomes (MacIntyre, 2017; Liu, 2018; Teimouri et al., 2019). Research has shown a negative correlation between FLA and learners' willingness, motivation (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Manipuspika, 2018), as well as their linguistic achievement (Horwitz et al., 1986; Kamarulzaman et al., 2013; Bensalem, 2017).

Contrary to the belief that language anxiety affects only low-level learners, studies have revealed that even students pursuing an English degree in higher education experience distressing levels of FLA (Tóth, 2011; Said & Weda, 2018; Oravuo, 2021). In fact, a meta-analysis of 98 studies conducted by Teimouri et al. (2019) concluded that the impact of FLA on language achievement among college students surpasses its effect on junior and senior high school students. As adult learners, university students may have had negative experiences with English learning in the past, which can impede their language skill improvement, unlike children or individuals without such struggles (Kongi, 2015). Furthermore, higher education learners tend to be more concerned about public embarrassment compared to their peers in basic education, who generally exhibit less self- and other-related prejudice (Kostyuk et al., 2010).

Although efforts have been made to identify the causal factors of English language anxiety in Vietnamese educational context, particularly in secondary and high schools, very few studies, most notably Nguyen et al. (2023), Nhung (2013), and Le (2010), have focused on English-major students who are trained and expected to achieve high proficiency levels. Furthermore, none have targeted senior learners with a mixed-methods approach. Hence, to illuminate this uncharted area, the paper investigates the underlying causes of English language learning anxiety (ELLA) among seniors in the English major program at a Vietnamese university.

Very few studies in Vietnam—most notably Hanh (2018), Nguyet (2017), and Nhung (2013)—have focused on English-major students, and none have targeted senior learners with a mixed-methods approach.

## Literature Review

### *Anxiety from a psychological viewpoint*

Anxiety, which emerged as “an explicit and pervasive problem” in the twentieth century (Spielberger, 2013, p.4), has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary society. It is characterized by an individual's “uneasiness and distress about an unspecified, diffuse, uncertain, and often formless form of threat or danger” (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010, p.5). Psychologists have identified three types of anxiety: trait or global anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety is a relatively stable personality trait associated with being prone to anxiety (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010). State anxiety, on the other hand, is a momentary psychological and/or physiological response to an external stimulus or threat (Leal et al., 2017). Situational anxiety is both a relatively stable personality trait that arises in specific situations and a momentary reaction to those situations. Notably, anxiety has a self-perpetuating nature, fueling concerns about future consequences and paradoxically intensifying the anxiety further (MacIntyre & Serroul, 2015; Boudreau et al., 2018).

### *Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)*

FLA has been a subject of great interest in the realm of second/foreign language acquisition for over forty years. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), the leading scholars in the field,

FLA can be defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). To build upon their earlier research, Elaine Horwitz (2017) highlighted that language learners often experience FLA due to "distress at their inability to be themselves and to connect authentically with other people through the limitation of the new language" (p. 41).

Humphries (2011) categorizes language anxiety into facilitative and debilitative types. Facilitative anxiety motivates learners to approach new learning tasks as challenges, while debilitative anxiety leads to avoidance behaviors. FLA typically manifests debilitative anxiety, negatively impacting students' psychological, social, and physical well-being (Oxford, 1999).

FLA is a multifaceted phenomenon that manifests itself differently in individuals and language contexts. Horwitz et al. (1986) extensively examined FLA within the framework of academic and social performance assessment, identifying three primary contributing factors: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to learners' reticence to engage in foreign language communication due to shyness and worry. Test anxiety stems from concerns about academic underachievement. Fear of negative evaluation extends beyond test-taking situations to encompass broader social contexts. Young (1991) compiled an extensive list of potential determinants of language anxiety, categorized into three groups: factors associated with language learners, language instructors, and language institutions.

In further exploration of FLA, Tanveer (2007) investigated the influential factors that lead to language anxiety and highlighted demanding features of the target language, including pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Adopting a socio-cultural perspective, Tanveer suggested that FLA may result from the social environment surrounding the acquisition of the target language (limited exposure and practice within learners' communities can generate apprehension and shyness when tasked with communicating in the foreign language), errors in social setting (frequent feedback and corrections in the classroom may evoke students' frustration and self-consciousness), unequal status dynamics between teachers and students or among students themselves (dissimilar social status and identity can threaten individual identities and self-confidence).

Through the synthesis of these studies, it becomes evident that FLA is subject to various influences that significantly affect students' language-learning experiences. Understanding these complex dynamics is crucial for educators and researchers to address and mitigate the detrimental effects of foreign language anxiety.

### *Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and English Language Learning Anxiety (ELLA)*

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) refers to anxiety experienced in learning any non-native language and is typically characterized by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). English language learning anxiety (ELLA) denotes these same processes when they occur specifically in English learning contexts, which may involve English-specific pressures such as global expectations, classroom norms, or assessment practices (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Although FLA and ELLA share common mechanisms, including fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation, their scope differs: FLA applies across languages, whereas ELLA focuses solely on English (Horwitz et al., 1986). Accordingly, ELLA research often examines how English-

specific cultural, linguistic, and institutional factors shape learners' anxiety experiences (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001).

### *English Language Learning Anxiety (ELLA) in Vietnamese educational context*

Despite its significance, ELLA has been insufficiently explored in the Vietnamese educational context, particularly among undergraduate English majors. The existing literature primarily focuses on specific skills, such as listening, reading, and speaking. Research shows considerable anxiety about these skills, which affects students' overall language proficiency.

Listening anxiety has been a major area of investigation. Le (2010) explored listening anxiety among 30 freshmen majoring in English at a provincial university, revealing several contributing factors, including listening materials, the listening environment, and characteristics of both speakers and listeners. Nhung (2013) further examined this issue among 30 first-year English major students at a northwestern university, identifying pronunciation difficulties and the fast speech rate of native speakers as particularly challenging aspects of listening lessons. Hang (2017) expanded this focus by studying 100 General English students at a university of engineering and technology in Hanoi, uncovering three primary sources of listening anxiety: the quality of the listening input, listener characteristics, and the physical classroom setting.

Speaking anxiety has also been examined in recent studies. Dung and Hung (2020) studied 128 EFL non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education, revealing moderate levels of speaking anxiety (M=67.45) linked to fears such as making mistakes and being laughed at, which correlated with lower academic proficiency. Additionally, Tran (2022) investigated the origins and effects of anxiety on English-speaking skills among 150 students and 4 speaking teachers at the College of Electro-Mechanics, Construction and Agro-Forestry of Central Vietnam. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, revealing that anxiety stemmed from multiple sources, including personal perceptions and teacher interactions, and significantly affected students' speaking performance. Furthermore, Thuy and Ha (2020) explored listening anxiety among 171 first-year non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University, finding that, while students recognized the importance of listening skills, they often lacked enjoyment in listening classes and suggested methods to reduce anxiety. In another study, Nguyen et al. (2023) examined reading anxiety among 72 linguistics students at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, uncovering that negative emotions about their prior knowledge influenced their reading experiences.

It is apparent that a comprehensive examination of ELLA among English majors in the Vietnamese educational context is lacking. Building on prior Vietnamese studies that focused mainly on skill-specific anxieties, the present research aims to offer a broader view of ELLA among English majors. It extends existing work by examining multiple potential causes across various aspects of language learning, thereby contributing to a fuller understanding of how ELLA manifests among advanced learners in Vietnam's higher education context.

### *Research Questions*

The research aimed to answer the question:

What are the key causes of English language learning anxiety among English major seniors at a Vietnamese university?

## Methodology

### *Mixed methods approach*

This study adopted a mixed methods approach. Specifically, a questionnaire was used as an essential initial tool to assess the presence of ELLA among the student population and to potentially uncover underlying factors. However, due to the topic's intricate and multifaceted nature, a more extensive exploration was warranted, necessitating interviews to gain deeper insights. According to Yan and Horwitz (2008), insights can be gained by listening to participants' experiences and voices.

### *Participants*

The participants were fourth-year English majors who had completed most of their English-core courses. In this programme, progressing to the final year requires a minimum B2 proficiency (upper-intermediate), as students must meet this benchmark to pass the core course assessments. Thus, the B2 level was institutionally verified through completion of coursework. The objective was to demonstrate that even independent, proficient English users can encounter ELLA. Using convenience sampling, the study included 103 English-major seniors (29 males and 74 females) who were almost complete in the study program and would provide a more comprehensive perspective. For the in-depth interviews, a purposive sampling technique was used to select eight participants (five females and three males) based on specific characteristics: gender, English proficiency level, and native province/city

### *Instruments*

### *Questionnaire*

Given the convenience and anonymity it offers many participants, an online Google Forms questionnaire was considered appropriate for gathering the necessary information while ensuring honesty. (Patten, 2016). To identify the main problematic areas, the theoretical frameworks of Horwitz et al. (1986), Young (1991), and Tanveer (2007) were utilized. The questionnaire consisted of 29 statements measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Ten items from Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (1986) were selected to improve reliability, and 19 additional statements were designed to align with the research objectives. The items were organized into different sections and subsections. The questionnaire began with key information about the study and was followed by assurances of confidentiality and informed consent.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using the coefficient ω (Omega) (ω = .93, 95% CI [.91, .95]), indicating excellent internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003). The average inter-item correlation was .32, suggesting that the items measured related but not redundant aspects of English learning anxiety.

### *Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were selected to provide flexibility in modifying the line of inquiry and exploring underlying reasons beyond the scope of the questionnaire (Seidman, 2013). Based on individual responses, follow-up questions were generated on the spot. Thirteen basic questions guided the interviews, four of which were adapted from Kongi's (2015) study. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to enhance participant understanding and comfort in expressing opinions. Prior to the interviews, participants were assured of confidentiality, informed about the study's purpose, and provided explicit rights

to withdraw at any time. To uphold ethical considerations, all recorded interviews were deleted after the analysis phase.

### *Data analysis*

The survey responses were compiled and coded in a CVS file. The data was then analyzed using JASP software and quantified using the mean analysis approach described by Pimentel (2010) (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

Interpretation of Mean Analysis

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| High | Strongly Agree | 4.51 to 5.00 |
| | Agree | 3.51 to 4.50 |
| Moderate | Neutral | 2.51 to 3.50 |
| Low | Disagree | 1.51 to 2.50 |
| | Strongly Disagree | 1.00 to 1.50 |

All eight audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, which itself "is a process of data analysis and interpretation" (Gillham, 2005, p.121). Following this, the comments were selected and organized into relevant sections and subsections. In accordance with ethical guidelines, participant names were coded as FN1 (Female number 1), MN1 (Male number 1), FN2 (Female number 2), MN2 (Male number 2), and so forth, based on gender and interview order.

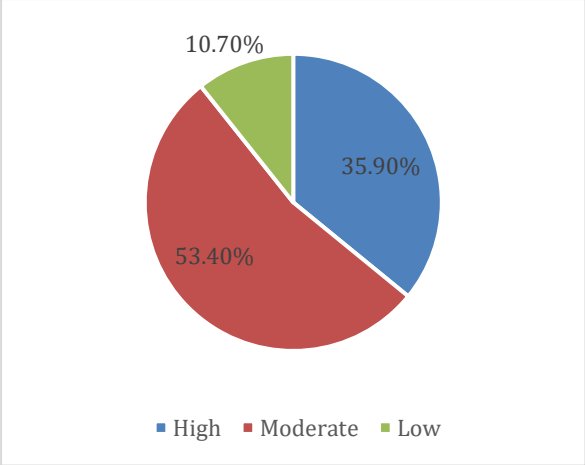
## Results

### *Students' levels of ELLA*

Before determining the primary reasons of ELLA within the target population, it was necessary to ascertain the existence and extent of this phenomenon among the students.

**Figure 1.**

Students' levels of ELLA



It was evident that the vast majority of the research subjects experienced moderate to high levels of ELLA (figure 1). This finding not only validates the legitimacy and gravity of the issue but also emphasizes the need for a comprehensive identification of the key causes underlying ELLA.

### *Major Causes of ELLA*

#### *Students' fear of tests and exams*

**Table 2.**

Students' Fear of Tests and Exams

| **Descriptive Statistics** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **S9. I am uneasy about the projects/ midterms/ finals that can affect my final scores.** | **S10. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.** |
| Valid | 103 | 103 |
| Missing | 0 | 0 |
| Mode | 4.000* | 4.000 |
| Median | 4.000 | 4.000 |
| Mean | 3.505 | 3.816 |
| Std. Error of Mean | 0.100 | 0.109 |
| Std. Deviation | 1.018 | 1.109 |
| Skewness | -0.639 | -1.032 |
| Std. Error of Skewness | 0.238 | 0.238 |
| Kurtosis | -0.152 | 0.532 |
| Std. Error of Kurtosis | 0.472 | 0.472 |
| Minimum | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Maximum | 5.000 | 5.000 |
| [a] The mode is computed assuming that variables are discreet. | | |

The participants exhibited a high level of test anxiety and fear of failure (Table 2). This finding is consistent with the themes identified during the interviews, which highlighted students' concerns about grading evaluations. For instance, MN1 said, "To me, grades matter a lot. I'm always so anxious and nervous during midterms and finals." Interestingly, the distribution of responses for S10 is the most skewed among the statements, suggesting that many responses are concentrated at the higher end of the scale, with few at the lower end. The interview data provided insight into this matter, with FN1 sharing, "Before a test, I'm often on edge thinking about what would happen if I got a bad mark. During the test, I think about what would happen if I failed the course". These insights suggest that exam seasons elicit excessive levels of anticipatory anxiety due to concerns about unfavorable outcomes.

*Students' lack of preparation*

**Table 3.**

Students' lack of preparation

| **Descriptive Statistics** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **S11. I feel very panicky when there is a surprise English test.** | **S12. I get nervous when the English lecturer asks questions which I have not prepared in advance** | **S13. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.** |
| Mode | 3.000* | 4.000* | 4.000* |
| Median | 3.000 | 4.000 | 4.000 |
| Mean | 3.359 | 3.447 | 3.379 |
| Std. Error of Mean | 0.095 | 0.099 | 0.103 |
| Std. Deviation | 0.969 | 1.007 | 1.049 |
| Skewness | -0.186 | -0.350 | -0.503 |
| Std. Error of Skewness | 0.238 | 0.238 | 0.238 |
| Kurtosis | -0.286 | -0.422 | -0.442 |
| Std. Error of Kurtosis | 0.472 | 0.472 | 0.472 |
| Minimum | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Maximum | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 |
| [a] The mode is computed assuming that variables are discreet. | | | |

The participants ascribed their ELLA to a perceived lack of preparation in the classroom (Table 3). Notably, surprise tests emerged as a significant causal factor (S11). The insights gained from the interviews shed light on the multifaceted impact of surprise tests, which not only elicited anxiety (FN3 stated: "*The surprise element always makes me bewildered; but I am especially anxious when I have to take a surprise test*") but also triggered various behavioral manifestations of language anxiety, including academic dishonesty (FN4 expressed: "If I'm informed of an upcoming test, I can spend time revising the materials and that can somewhat give me a piece of mind. A surprise test, on the other hand, will definitely freak me out and I will have to resort to other dishonest behaviors.") and tendencies to skip class or arrive late (MN2 narrated: "In one particular listening course, I was very anxious and reluctant to go to class because the lecturer was always giving out random tests every week.").

Furthermore, over half of the participants expressed discomfort when suddenly called upon by lecturers (S12). When describing their emotions in such situations, the interviewees used negative descriptors like "anxious", "confused", "pressured", "uncomfortable", and "terrified". Additionally, many interviewees reported a state of cognitive confusion, wherein they struggled to recall information or articulate themselves clearly. For instance, FN5 stated: "When the lecturer calls my name out of the blue, I often feel so anxious that I have a hard time calling anything to mind. My answers will be some kind of gibberish". Similarly, MN2 shared: "Being called on unexpectedly like that feels like being ambushed. Even if I knew the answer to the question, I might still have difficulties expressing my ideas because I am under too much pressure".

Lastly, S13 indicated that engaging in spontaneous speech without prior preparation contributed to feelings of anxiety. MN3 commented: "In a speaking class or a debate class, if I had time to prepare with a group or by myself, I would feel more certain and confident; but if I did not, I would be very confused and pressured".

*Students' misconceptions of English language learning*

**Table 4.**

Students' misconceptions of English language learning

| **Descriptive Statistics** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **S14. I believe English language learning is a special gift not possessed by all.** | **S15. I believe that primary and secondary education play a crucial role in English learning.** | **S16. I suppose that it is easier for the rich to learn English.** | **S17. I believe that the regional factor can affect your English ability (accent/ intonation/ liaison).** |
| Mode | 3.000* | 4.000* | 3.000* | 4.000* |
| Median | 3.000 | 4.000 | 3.000 | 4.000 |
| Mean | 3.252 | 3.796 | 3.320 | 3.806 |
| Std. Error of Mean | 0.095 | 0.088 | 0.102 | 0.078 |
| Std. Deviation | 0.967 | 0.890 | 1.031 | 0.793 |
| Skewness | -0.198 | -0.607 | -0.078 | -0.720 |
| Std. Error of Skewness | 0.238 | 0.238 | 0.238 | 0.238 |
| Kurtosis | -0.249 | 0.194 | -0.641 | 0.422 |
| Std. Error of Kurtosis | 0.472 | 0.472 | 0.472 | 0.472 |
| Minimum | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 2.000 |
| Maximum | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 | 5.000 |
| [a] The mode is computed assuming that variables are discreet. | | | | |

The analysis of student beliefs in this study reveals several misconceptions regarding English language learning (Table 4). Firstly, there is a prevailing perception among the participants that English proficiency is a gift possessed by only a select few (S12). Curiously, all eight interviewees shared the belief that linguistically gifted students held a clear advantage over others (FN1 stated: "My friend, T., is a very gifted student. She can memorize ten words in five minutes. I, on the other hand, after spending a whole day struggling to memorize the same words, forget them in a few days' time.").

The second misconception regarding the high *M*=3.796 concerns the significance of mandatory education (S15). This finding aligns with the interviews, in which most participants attributed their confusion, insecurity, and anxiety during their freshman year to inadequate English-language learning in their previous educational experiences (MN3 shared: "If I had had a stronger foundation from high school, the English courses in university would have been easier.").; FN1 expressed: "From grade 1 to 12, my old schools

focused mainly on grammar. Therefore, when I was a freshman, I was so insecure and nervous because we had to incorporate a lot of speaking and listening."). Interestingly, one interviewee held a contrasting view, stating that her prior prestigious education had an adverse effect on her confidence, creating a sense of obligation to outperform her university classmates (FN3: "I actually went to a high school for the gifted. During my freshman year at the university, I always compared myself to others; when I got a lower score than a student from a small-town high school, I would feel mortified. I constantly felt like I had to be better than my classmates, and it was so tiring and stressful.").

Thirdly, many participants believed that wealth significantly aided the English learning process. In his interview, MN2 acknowledged the influence of financial resources as "an important contributing factor to everything, including studying English", but emphasized its role as a "leverage", rather than a “determinant”. Finally, the majority of students associated regional factors with the ability to pronounce English words correctly (S17 with *M*=3.806). Intriguingly, S17 is the only item that encountered no “strongly disagree” (minimum of 2 and maximum of 5). All interviewees believed that individuals in major cities like Hanoi, known for their "standard accent", could adopt an English accent more easily than small-town learners. Conversely, those with “non-standard” accents often felt “embarrassed”, “anxious”, and “inferior” when conversing in English among their peers. Five interviewees perceived accentedness as exerting a strong influence on overall pronunciation, which they considered exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to modify.

*Students’ difficulties in English vocabulary learning*

**Table 5.**

Students' difficulties in English vocabulary learning

| **Descriptive Statistics** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **S27. It is hard for me to remember and retrieve new words.** | **S28. I am anxious because there are so many new words that I do not know.** |
| Mode | 4.000* | 4.000* |
| Median | 4.000 | 4.000 |
| Mean | 3.476 | 3.864 |
| Std. Error of Mean | 0.098 | 0.100 |
| Std. Deviation | 0.998 | 1.010 |
| Skewness | -0.474 | -0.769 |
| Std. Error of Skewness | 0.238 | 0.238 |
| Kurtosis | -0.585 | -0.182 |
| Std. Error of Kurtosis | 0.472 | 0.472 |
| Minimum | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Maximum | 5.000 | 5.000 |
| [a] The mode is computed assuming that variables are discreet. | | |

English vocabulary presented itself as a formidable challenge in the English learning process for most participants (Table 5). The most common response for both S27 and S28 is 4, indicating that a significant number of students selected this response as their answer. Notably, item 28 achieved the highest mean score of 3.86, indicating a serious concern regarding the vast number of English vocabulary items. From the interviews, three

participants identified vocabulary as the most challenging aspect of English. FN2 remarked, "There are just too many words and terminologies that I don't know". Similarly, FN4 shared their anxiety about learning new words, stating, "There are so many new words that it's impossible to know half of them." MN3 attributed his struggle with vocabulary to the lack of effective study methods.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study identified four primary causes of ELLA among senior English majors: difficulties in English vocabulary learning, misconceptions about English language learning, test anxiety and fear of failure, and lack of preparation. These factors emerged consistently across both quantitative and qualitative findings, offering a clear overview of how anxiety manifests among advanced learners. The quantitative analysis showed that 27 of the 28 items had medium or high mean values, indicating the relevance of key components of FLA—communication apprehension, fear of making mistakes, and test anxiety—in shaping English majors' anxiety experiences. These findings align with foundational work such as Horwitz et al. (1986) and Young (1991). The interview findings further supported the quantitative results and clarified which factors senior students perceived as most impactful.

First, difficulties in English vocabulary learning were identified as the most influential factor, consistent with Oxford's (1990) observation that vocabulary is one of the most extensive and demanding components of language learning. When students experience lexical inadequacy, they may struggle to comprehend input or express ideas, leading to embarrassment and withdrawal. This study further highlights that students' subjective perceived difficulty—not only the objective challenge of vocabulary—plays a central role in generating anxiety. When students overestimate the complexity of a task, it can create cognitive and psychological barriers, leading to feelings of anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt. Previous studies, including Liu (2016), have emphasized the importance of strategy use, and the present findings reinforce the need for tailored vocabulary-learning guidance and strategy training.

As technology becomes increasingly integrated into language classrooms, a growing range of vocabulary learning methods has emerged. Meta-analyses and systematic reviews consistently show that technology-assisted vocabulary learning yields moderate to large improvements over traditional methods, with mobile-assisted and game-based approaches being particularly effective (Hao et al., 2021; Yu & Trainin, 2021; Simonnet et al., 2024). Hao et al. (2021) further noted clear advantages for mobile devices and on-the-move learning, suggesting that L2 vocabulary learning may be most efficient when students use mobile phones and are not restricted to classroom environments. Specifically, in the Vietnamese context, recent research has shown similar potential for mobile-assisted and technology-supported vocabulary learning. Ngo and Doan (2023) reported that EFL students significantly improved their academic vocabulary and learning motivation through mobile phone–based activities, while Nguyen (2024) demonstrated that English-major students effectively expanded their vocabulary and collocation awareness through online news resources and mobile applications. These findings underscore that technology-enhanced approaches not only facilitate vocabulary development but also help alleviate learners' anxiety by making vocabulary learning more flexible, autonomous, and engaging.

Second, students' misconceptions about English language learning were shown to contribute strongly to anxiety. These misconceptions, such as overestimating the role of early educational exposure or perceiving regional accents as fixed, could negatively affect motivation and self-

perception. Students who attended schools with inadequate English classes would feel inferior and anxious when studying in the same university program with their peers. Conversely, students who had extensive exposure to English throughout their formal education would feel pressured and obligated to outperform others. Another prevalent misconception was that the regional accent was unchangeable and played a crucial role in acquiring a native-like English accent. This belief can lead to unnecessary stress and insecurity. Individuals residing in major cities with the standard accent may feel compelled to speak English flawlessly, while those from smaller provinces with local accents may feel embarrassed and self-conscious when speaking English. Prior literature, including Ohata (2005) and Kráľová (2016), has similarly documented the anxiety that arises when learners' unrealistic expectations clash with classroom realities. The present findings extend this work by illustrating how these beliefs function among advanced English majors, shaping both their self-efficacy and their interpersonal comparisons in a linguistically competitive environment.

In line with current pedagogical perspectives, comprehensibility should be prioritized over native-like pronunciation. Accordingly, it is important for educators to create appropriate opportunities to discuss and address students' inaccurate beliefs, thereby reducing unnecessary pressure and fostering more realistic and productive orientations toward English learning.

Third, high levels of test anxiety and fear of failure were reported. Interestingly, test anxiety and fear of failure share similarities with generalized anxiety, which is characterized by concerns about potential future disasters (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010). The participants consistently engaged in thoughts about the consequences of failure before, during, and after tests. They perceived the possibility of failure as overwhelming and beyond their control. Although this might appear as an exaggerated response, it is a typical reaction to anxiety, as anxiety can be associated with both present events and future concerns (Jackson & Everts, 2010). In addition, the students exhibited excessive fear of receiving poor grades and of how it could lead to overall failure in the course. This finding supports the theory proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which links test anxiety to the fear of failure.

To mitigate these anxieties, students should thoroughly preview and regularly review course content to ensure a comprehensive understanding and adequate preparation. This can help students feel more in control and composed during exams, as they come to realize that their efforts can directly impact their results. In addition to consistent study routines, students may benefit from distributing their learning across smaller, more frequent sessions rather than relying on last-minute preparation, as spaced practice has been shown to strengthen long-term retention (Latimier et al., 2020). Instructors can further support this process by offering guiding questions, sample tasks, or low-stakes quizzes that help students monitor their progress without the pressure of high-stakes evaluation.

Fourth, lack of preparation emerged as another significant cause of ELLA. Situations involving unexpected events such as impromptu speaking, sudden questioning, or surprise tests were found to evoke uneasiness and anxiety among students. The participants revealed that they often went blank and failed to perform properly in such unforeseen circumstances. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) proposed that this phenomenon, commonly known as "going blank" or "freezing", can be attributed to the debilitating effects of anxiety. It can be inferred that the fear of being under- or unprepared is anxiety-inducing, as it directly affects academic performance and links it to the fear of failure. This study further demonstrates how unpredictability in classroom activities specifically heightens anxiety for advanced learners.

Considering these findings, it is suggested that instructors provide students with a comprehensive weekly or monthly agenda outlining expectations and lesson objectives. This clarity enables students to understand what is expected of them and prepare accordingly. Furthermore, it is advisable to minimize the use of surprise tests to reduce anxiety levels among students.

Essentially, although external factors such as instructors, the university environment, and the English language itself have been identified as contributors to ELLA, this study's findings reveal that much of the anxiety originates internally from students' beliefs, expectations, and self-judgments. The participants held self-limiting assumptions regarding how their background, perceived aptitude, or educational history should determine their English performance. A key insight emerging from this study is that senior English majors' anxiety stems less from fear of external evaluation and more from internalized pressure and self-comparison, highlighting an important psychological dimension of ELLA that warrants further attention.

This study examined ELLA among senior English majors at one Vietnamese university. Because the data were drawn from a single institutional context and a modest interview sample, the generalizability of the findings should be approached with caution. Given the significant role of instructors, future research on ELLA should explore instructors' and students' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards English language learning and teaching. Moreover, employing other research methods, such as observation, can provide a deeper understanding of the complex and multidimensional nature of English learning anxiety. Furthermore, future studies should investigate the effects of implementing various techniques to alleviate English-learning anxiety on students' psychological well-being and academic achievement.

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## Biodata

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# Code-mixing in Class and Communication: A Dimension of Translanguaging at the Tertiary-level in Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigates tertiary-level students' perceptions, benefits, and challenges of code-mixing, both foreign and domestic. A mixed-methods approach was employed to conduct the research at three private universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Using convenience sampling, quantitative data were collected through a survey administered to 100 tertiary-level students. Deploying purposive sampling, qualitative data were collected by semi-structured interviews with 5 domestic and 2 foreign tertiary-level students. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were respectively used for quantitative and qualitative data analysis. 50% agree that code-mixing eases communication, while 54% sometimes encounter challenges understanding class lectures due to code-mixing. The interviews find that the domestic students consider teachers' meshing of Bangla and English conducive to their classroom learning. In contrast, the foreign students perceive code-mixing as curbing their comprehension of class lectures and their learning. This research highlights the need for further exploration of how code-mixing affects classroom learning and English acquisition across departments and disciplines.

**Keywords**: Code-mixing, Translanguaging, Class, Classroom Communication, Tertiary-level

## Introduction

Bangla (L1) is the national language of Bangladesh, while English (L2) is taught to students from the primary through tertiary levels (Ara, 2020; Islam & Hashim, 2019). Bangladeshi tertiary-level students learn English through their academic discourses, as some basic (remedial) English courses are taught at public and private universities to make them proficient in the language (Mahbub-ul-Alam & Quyyum, 2016). They concurrently insert Bangla and English words and phrases into their spoken sentences, both inside and outside the university; that is what code-mixing is (Amin, 2020; Canagarajah, 2011; Hossain & Bar, 2015). Code-mixing is also known as translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2013; Park, 2013). The vastness of code-mixing can be explored by examining students' communication in Bangladesh (Aorny et al., 2022; Hoque et al., 2021; Kabir & Mohiuddin, 2017).

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Saha and Rahman (2022) investigated students' and teachers' perspectives on translanguaging (i.e., mixing of Bangla and English) in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) classes. Mixing Bangla and English was considered beneficial to help students learn new content and build rapport with them. Some teachers, on the contrary, did not find code-mixing worth doing, as they deemed the inclusion of languages to be disadvantageous. However, most students deemed teachers' integration of Bangla and English positive, as it helped them participate and perform in class. They believed teachers could give them feedback in Bangla along with English and incentivize less proficient students to engage in class participation. Thus, they could employ their repertoire of both Bangla and English to parse class lectures and assist peers in class activities. Akhter (2019) leveraged the Linguistic Ethnography approach (LE) to evince the de facto language policy and practice at Dhaka University. In other words, she researched how students chose and employed their known languages during different class activities. Students fused Bangla and English to learn English. They drew on translanguaging to facilitate classroom communication and to understand the meanings of English vocabulary. Also, they used Bangla to carry out tasks given in English.

Although Sultana and Fang (2024) extrapolated that Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction (MMI) embodies a utopian urgency, challenging monolingual ideology and bias, this might not be enacted in Bangladesh anytime soon. Notwithstanding, they remind us that the commencement and cultivation of MMI in class, through the recognition of native languages in linguistic resources, could be a transformative avenue for solidifying decolonial pedagogy and establishing educational equity within the Global South. This research, conducted in the context of Global South (in Bangladesh) in the neoliberal era, is a transformational addition to the reservoir of Southern epistemology in translanguaging, as Hamid et al. (2024) hope Southern applied linguists would decolonize their research envision and engagements by bringing disciplinary demands, modification, and adaptation to produce knowledge in, and reduce the problem in, putting theories in pedagogy/practice (i.e., praxis) depending on Southern context, perspectives, and necessities.

Although a handful of studies examined the types of code-switching observed in students' communication across universities in Bangladesh, they did not specifically and sufficiently report on the extent of use, causes, interlocutors, perceptions, advantages, and challenges of mixing Bangla and English (Hoque et al., 2021). Neither has adequately explored the perspectives, benefits, and challenges of code-mixing among foreign students at private universities in Bangladesh (Biswas, 2019; Fatema, 2024). This research tries to fill the research gap. It provides novel and notable insights for educators and educational policymakers aiming to improve students' content and L2 learning. This research could serve as a springboard for future translanguaging research. Researchers studying translanguaging could draw on the results of this research to more substantively discuss their findings.

Besides, to befit bilingual pedagogy, it is imperative to know students' experiences and perceptions of mixing L1 and L2 in class. Teachers could then be mindful of students' subjective and objective considerations of the affordances of code-mixing for content and target-language learning, which would help them approach teaching and select the language for classroom instruction more informedly (Rahman & Hu, 2025). The implication of this research is therefore far-reaching. It has sought to minimize the gap in understanding the perceptions of foreign and domestic students regarding the use of Bangla and English at Bangladeshi private universities. Also, it interprets the challenges and merits of code-mixing in English language teaching and learning.

This research is sequentially structured. The introduction provides background on code-mixing

in Bangladeshi educational settings. It then pinpoints the research gap, mentioning what previous research overlooked. The literature review critically contextualizes this research with prior studies. The methodology specifies how the research was conducted. The result comprehensively illustrates the findings and answers the research questions. The discussion interprets the key results and analytically connects them with the findings of earlier research. The conclusion summarizes the key findings and provides recommendations.

## Literature review

### *Theoretical Perspectives on Code-mixing and Translanguaging*

Code-mixing refers to the use of multiple languages in oral and written communication (Nagy, 2018; Poplock, 1980; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Williams (1994), however, coined 'translanguaging', referring to the planned and systematized usage of two languages for a particular lesson at educational institutions. Translanguaging, also known as code-switching/ code-meshing, or translingual practice, is just one term that refers to the use of students' whole linguistic resources (Canagarajah, 2011, 2013). On the other hand, it is argued that translanguaging is a more systematic approach to using the unified features of multiple languages than code-switching, which is simply switching between two languages' grammatical rules or linguistic systems (García and Wei, 2014). Although code-switching studies grapple with the ontological (i.e., existential) tension in the studies of multilingualism, the translanguaging lens does not dislodge (or remove) the existence and employment of code-switching (Seals, 2020). In other words, code-switching/mixing is a common component of and a necessity for translanguaging (Bhat & Bolonyai, 2019; Heugh, 2021). They share identical meanings and mechanics, as they emerge through translation and borrowing, drawing on L1 and L2 (MacSwan, 2017, 2022; MacSwan & Rolstad, 2024).

There are two types of translanguaging: universal translanguaging and classroom translanguaging (Lewis et al., 2012). Bilinguals deploy the former to communicate in their daily lives, switching/meshing between named languages, e.g., L1 (Bangla) and L2 (English); the latter, used by teachers, needs ponderation, planning, preparation, and pedagogical intervention. Classroom translanguaging enables multilingual students to tap into their L1+L2 as a unified, unitary linguistic resource (known as 'single mental grammar') (Grosjean, 2010; García & Wei, 2014). As a result, they can better comprehend and learn content (Canagarajah, 2015; Islam & Melo-Pfeifer, 2023; Otheguy et al., 2015). The process undertaken by multilinguals to mix one language with another is a structure-governed and creative creation, that presupposes linguistic instinct and intuition as well as linguistic capability and creativity, emanating from pragmatism or (un)precedented pragmatic deployment of a repertoire of languages (Chomsky, 1968; Grosjean, 1982; Pinker, 1994).

### *Pedagogical Implications of Translanguaging and Code-mixing*

Content learning is cardinal for students' academic education. So is the ability to articulate and write correctly and critically as well as daily and deeply in L1 and L2 (Datta, 2025; Pinker, 2014). Students who are good at thinking and writing in L1 are apparently the same at doing so in L2, and they leverage their L1 to make meaning and write in L2 (Shamsuzzaman et al., 2018). Therefore, L1 and L2 synergy can be leveraged to bolster multilingual students' writing (and thinking) through translation and meaning transfer between L1 and L2 (Ulum, 2024).

Code-mixing is perceived as a helpful tool for language learning. According to sociocultural theory, children's interaction with elder person(s) (e.g., father, mother, and grandparents) by a

mixture of L1 and L2 is important for their language learning and cognitive development; for children can well learn L1 and L2 by social and cultural exposure, involvement, and interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Likewise, Cummins (1979) put forward the 'Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis.' The hypothesis suggests that advances in learning and using L2 depend on sufficient development of L1 skills. As language learners (children in particular) begin to receive adequate and immersive L2 input, their L2 learning and acquisition improve, a result of a developmental process already available in their L1. Hence, he recommends that education in both L1 and L2 is necessary, and that this should be emphasized and implemented through an additive type of bilingualism by the school authority, when the objective is to achieve an ideal improvement in the intellectual and academic abilities of minority-language children.

Systematized translanguaging could lower university course dropout rates (Rafi, 2023). Through translingual pedagogy, teachers may nurture students who are yet to be competent in English and who confront linguistic impediments to do well (and even pass) in academic subjects (Beiler & Castro, 2025; Islam & Rahman, 2019; Javaid et al., 2025). It is, however, important that multilingual students become competent (and then proficient) in English, given the language's necessity in higher education, employability, and globalization (Maranan et al., 2025). Therefore, students should master using L1 and the English language through conscious, continuous effort. The sooner they do so, the better (Karim et al., 2023; Rahman & Singh, 2021). Moreover, translingual pedagogy requires teachers (here, teacher education is essential to equip them) to appropriate students' whole repertoire made of L1 (Bangla), L2 (English), and L3 (if available), so students fully comprehend and learn content(s) (Canagarajah, 2006; Rahman, 2020; Shahed & Rahman, 2022).

### *Research Gaps in Translanguaging and Code-mixing*

Previous research has not sufficiently illuminated foreign students' perspectives on code-mixing (Ferdous et al., 2024; Javed et al., 2021). Research on tertiary-level institutional policies regarding code-mixing and bilingualism is still limited (Rafi, 2024). Little is known about whether the mixture of local language(s) and English positively or negatively impacts students' and teachers' classroom learning, communication, cognition, and language acquisition (Mulyani et al., 2024; Natsir & Aliah, 2024).

Hasan and Snigdha (2024) found that foreign students at a Bangladeshi public university encountered difficulties in communicating, understanding lectures, improving academic writing, and interacting with society due to language and cultural gaps. However, a research gap remains in exploring how Bangladeshi domestic and foreign students perceive code-mixing and the benefits and obstacles they encounter when combining Bangla and English at private universities (Hoque et al., 2021). This research, therefore, not only reports how they perceive code-mixing in class and communication but also explores what benefits and challenges they respectively earn and encounter from code-mixing.

### *Research Questions*

Keeping the research objectives in mind, the researcher conducted the study using a mixed-methods approach across three private universities in Dhaka, where the medium of instruction (MOI) was English. The researcher posed four critical questions to carry out the research:

1) How do domestic and foreign students perceive code-mixing during communication at private universities?

2) How do domestic and foreign students perceive teachers' code-mixing during lectures at private universities?

3) What are the benefits of code-mixing for domestic and foreign students in class and communication?

4) What are the challenges of domestic and foreign students in code-mixing in class and communication?

## Methods

### *Research Design*

The researcher employed a mixed-methods design. In other words, the researcher applied both quantitative and qualitative methods. Doyle et al. (2009) stated that a mixed-methods research design can be used when neither quantitative nor qualitative methods alone is sufficient to collect adequate data.

The researcher, nonetheless, accumulated data from tertiary-level students at three private universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. A survey questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions was designed in Google Forms. It was then distributed to 100 participants to collect quantitative data. No framework was followed in formulating the questionnaire; it was developed based on the research questions. At the beginning of the survey, the definition of code-mixing with examples was provided, and it was stated that participation was completely voluntary. In section A of the survey, there were questions about participants' age, gender, L1 and L2, and academic discipline. Thus, the researcher collected the participants' demographic information. Section B consisted of closed-ended multiple-choice and Likert scale questions. In section B, there were questions about whether participants mixed Bangla and English at their universities; with whom and why they code-mixed; whether they faced problems understanding lectures due to code-mixing; and whether they considered code-mixing detrimental to their English language learning.

To collect qualitative data, the researcher used a semi-structured approach and interviewed 5 Bangladeshi domestic and 2 foreign students. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow the researcher to pose follow-up questions and collect descriptive data limited to responses to the survey questionnaire. Qualitative data offer deeper insights that collected quantitative data cannot provide (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Therefore, quantitative data from 100 survey participants, along with qualitative data from 2 foreign and 5 domestic students, were necessary for the researcher to answer the research questions comprehensively.

### *Participants of the Survey*

A total of 100 students at three private universities in Dhaka, where the Medium of Instruction (MOI) was English, participated in the survey. To ensure confidentiality, the participants' identities were de-identified. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 24 years. The participants were students of Economics, Electrical Engineering, Architecture, Journalism, Philosophy, Mathematics, Business Administration, English Literature and Linguistics, and Computer Science. Of the 100 students, 58 were male, and 42 were female. The participants' native language (L1) was Bangla, while their second language (L2) was English.

The researcher deployed convenience sampling for quantitative data collection. Due to financial constraints, convenience sampling was the most appropriate method for the researcher to select participants and collect data. As the researcher amassed data from a total of 100 students, it was thus apparently possible for him to control bias; Golzar et al. (2022) as well as Skowronek and Duerr (2009) averred that the inclusion of a moderately large number of participants, from separate settings of a particular research, is worthwhile with a view to controlling bias in data

collection.

### *Participants of the Interview*

The researcher also interviewed 5 Bangladeshi domestic students at the same three private universities in Dhaka where the research setting took place. Their pseudonyms were DS1, DS2, DS3, DS4, and DS5; they were respectively studying Electrical Engineering, Finance, English Linguistics, Economics, and English Literature. The researcher deliberately chose interviewees with educational backgrounds in Humanities, Science, and Commerce. Their L1 was Bangla and L2 was English. Additionally, the researcher interviewed 2 foreign students from one of the universities where the research was conducted. Their pseudonyms were FS1 and FS2. They were from India and Kenya, pursuing an MA in ELT (English Language Teaching). FS1's L1 was Hindi, while FS2's L1 was Swahili. They could speak Bangla to some extent. The researcher leveraged purposive sampling to select domestic (Bangladeshi) and foreign students for qualitative data collection. Such a sampling system is fruitful for conducting research with information-enriched participants relevant to the research focus (Palinkas et al., 2015).

### *Instrument and Data Collection*

The researcher used two instruments, i.e., a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, to collect quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. For quantitative data collection, the survey questionnaire was distributed online to the students. Furthermore, the researcher informed the interviewees about the interview's schedule. Each interview lasted about 15-20 minutes and was audio-recorded on Google Meet with the interviewee's permission. During the interview, along with probing questions, the researcher asked them if they used to do code-mixing on their campuses, with whom and why they did code-mixing, how they perceived code-mixing, if they found mixing of Bangla and English beneficial or disadvantageous to their understanding of class lectures and English language learning, and whether they faced challenges in comprehending teachers' lectures for code-mixing.

### *Data Collection and Confidentiality*

The researcher obtained oral consent from all interviewees to audio-record the interviews. A written consent form, which included details on the research's purpose, interview modalities, associated risks and benefits, and the data-sharing process, was explained to each interviewee in detail. The interviewees were given adequate time to decide whether they would participate in the research. They were made aware that they could question the steps and stages of the interview before and after consenting, and that they could withdraw from the research at any time. All the interviewees, however, verbally consented to participate in the interview. The researcher recorded verbal consent at the beginning of the interview. Furthermore, only the researcher had access to the collected data. The researcher then de-identified the participants' identities to maintain confidentiality. The researcher gave the interviewees pseudonyms, concealing their actual names. The researcher did not mention the names of the participants' universities either. Thus, the participants' identifying information was kept confidential.

### *Data Analysis Process*

Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics. In other words, the researcher used pie charts to display the percentage distributions of survey responses. The researcher found that the central tendency of percentage distributions best depicts the most representative value. To find the mean score (M), numerical values were assigned to the responses on the Likert scale. The mode was found by finding the most frequent response.

Further, thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), inductive thematic analysis is effective and efficient for exploring appropriate themes from interviews. The data collected from the interviews were manually and minutely read, coded, and categorized to garner themes. To do so, the researcher first identified the recurring responses from the interviews to find the codes. The explored codes were then categorized into several themes.

## Results/Findings

*Research Question 1: How do domestic and foreign students perceive code-mixing during communication at private universities?*

*Domestic and Foreign Students' Perception of Code-mixing*

Chart 1.

The percentage of mixing Bangla and English

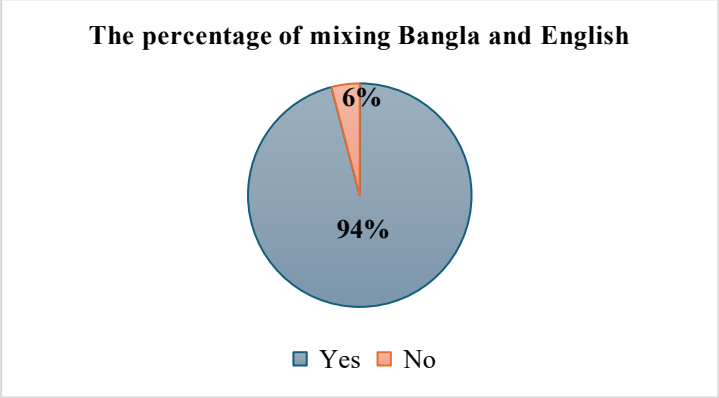


Chart 1 shows that 94% of 100 students mix Bangla and English in their communication at their universities; on the other hand, 6% do not. The highest percentage (94%) denotes that most students mix Bangla and English while communicating. The central tendency, which emerges from the mean score M = 0.94, and the mode is '*Yes'* (as '*Yes'* is the most common answer), suggests that most students merge Bangla and English at their universities.

Chart 2.

Perceived reasons for mixing Bangla and English

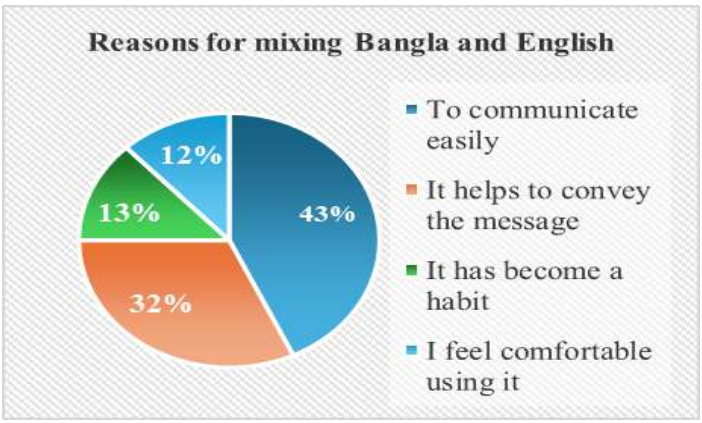


Chart 2 shows that 43% of the students mix Bangla and English to communicate easily, whilst

13% do code-mixing as it has become their habit, and 32% use code-mixing because it helps them convey their messages. Conversely, 12% employ code-mixing because they feel comfortable with it. The mode is 'To Communicate Easily', which is the most frequent answer, reflecting the highest percentage of students who code-mix to communicate more conveniently.

DS3 and DS5 stated that they used to mix Bangla and English at their university. When DS3 could not find a specific English word, she would mix Bangla words. DS5 emphasized the need to use Bangla and English words in communication.

In this regard, DS3 mentioned,

> I am required to mix Bangla and English both inside and outside the campus. Yes, I firmly believe code-mixing makes perception so obvious to others. Code-mixing is sometimes essential because I need to express myself in a way that's understandable. I do not always get the exact vocabulary in English. It can smooth out our daily and academic communication. Though it is not always necessary. [DS3].

FS1 commented,

> You know both Bangla and Hindi have come from Sanskrit. Hindi isn't helping me, as Bangla sounds a bit like Hindi. I mix Bangla and English. My teachers are very impressed. I learn Bangla from vendors, bus drivers, and rickshaw pullers. I am challenging the challenge. Though it is challenging for me to learn Bangla, I am trying to learn Bangla. I think translation is important.

DS5 said,

> It is time-consuming to search for uncommon words in either Bangla or English. To save time, I mix English words with Bangla and vice versa in the same utterance. I use English words that are likely known to those with whom I communicate. [DS5, Male, age 19].

DS2 said,

> Yes, I do mix Bangla and English on my campus. When I talk to my classmates, I use it. At that time, I used more code-mixing. But whenever I talk and respond in my class lecture, I do, but very rarely, since the language of instruction is English. That is why we are always supposed to speak in English in academic communication. [ DS2, Female, age 22].

DS4 mentioned,

> Code-mixing occurs during communication at my university. Subconsciously or out of concern, I sometimes insert English words into a Bangla sentence. Also, I insert Bangla words into English sentences. Even though I try to speak English in my class, most of my classmates prefer to talk to me in Bangla. So, I can't continue speaking English. I need to switch to Bangla at that time [DS4, Male, age 22].

Code-mixing is recursively irresistible at the three private universities; most of the interviewed students mix Bangla and English. DS4 stated he was required to switch from English to Bangla to communicate with his classmates. It is thus apparently facile to fathom why an interlocutor, in this case, a Bangladeshi multilingual student, is not left with an option other than answering in the language (e.g., Bangla) in which he has been asked a question by the other interlocutor, even if both interlocutors know English. In Bangladesh, Kamal and Roy (2024) found that both undergraduate and graduate students were accustomed to inserting English words — and for

them, the fusion of Bangla and English words was a disposition and necessity — into communication; it was further found that a graduate participant altered languages between ten to fifteen times in class. Ahmad et al. (2024) state that students use flamboyantly fancy words from English, Hindi, and Bangla, and are keen to code-mix for three reasons: translanguaging, social media, and the use of entertainment platforms from other countries.

*Research question 2. How do domestic and foreign students perceive teachers' code-mixing during lectures at private universities?*

*Perceptions of Domestic and Foreign Students on Teachers' Code-mixing*

DS1 recounted in this regard,

> I think teachers may speak in Bangla because some topics in class might be new to their students. Teachers can teach students in Bangla as well as in English. It is a helpful strategy. Although it should be used to some extent. [ DS1, Male 23, age 23].

With respect to that, FS1 said,

> I do not mix Bangla and English while talking to my teachers. But when my classmates and teachers were asking and answering questions in Bangla, I struggled to understand them. I could understand a few words of what they said. I could understand 30-40% of what they were saying. The amount of English is low when teachers communicate only in English outside the classroom. So, we need to speak English as much as possible in the classroom. [FS1, Male, age 19]

FS2 said,

> English is an easy language for me. I can understand the maximum in English. It is difficult to understand the concept in class if my teachers speak in Bangla. I can't read or write Bangla. So, reading and writing in English are convenient for me [FS2, Male, age 26].

Likewise, DS3, DS4, and DS5 claimed that code-mixing should not occur when a foreign student is in class. Foreign students enroll in different departments at DS3's university. And DS3 and DS4 had foreign classmates who hardly knew Bangla. DS5 suggests that English classes should be taken in English.

DS3 said,

> In our academic context, code-mixing is not necessary to understand teachers' lectures. Some students in our classes are from other countries. They hardly know Bangla in a tertiary-level class. If our teachers and we communicate with them in code-switching, it would be difficult for the foreign students, and they deserve to be considered part of the whole class. It is their right. If there are no foreigners, code-mixing may perhaps help.

DS4 mentioned,

> It depends on the institution in which students are. We have foreign students, so we should speak English at that moment. Most of us will be willing to have Bangla in class. But we cannot deprive ourselves of English to learn better. As we have foreign students, we also want our teachers to speak English.

DS5 said,

> It would be difficult for some foreign students to understand the lecture. Without code-

> mixing, classes can be conducted; if there are foreign students, code-mixing should be avoided in class lectures, and English classes should be in English.

According to the interviewees, although code-mixing helps domestic students understand difficult topics, it impedes foreign students' comprehension of the class and communication. So, the interviewees suggest that, if there is a foreign student, lectures should be in English in the classroom. Odhiambo (2021) stated that L2 English is used effectively and primarily in Kenya when foreigners participate in communication, thereby reducing the use of vernacular dialects. Ennin and Manariyo (2023) found that the blending of two languages (i.e., Gujarati and Hindi) diverted foreign students' attention from class and hindered learning. Because of the language gap, as English was used slightly inside and outside class, the foreign students could not completely comprehend lectures, nor could they communicate in class. They could not function in the host community either. Thus, their academic attainment and social adaptability were not at all impressive.

*Research question 3. What are the benefits of code-mixing for domestic and foreign students in class and communication?*

*Domestic and Foreign Students' Benefits of Code-mixing*

Chart 3.

Students' opinions on whether code-mixing eases communication

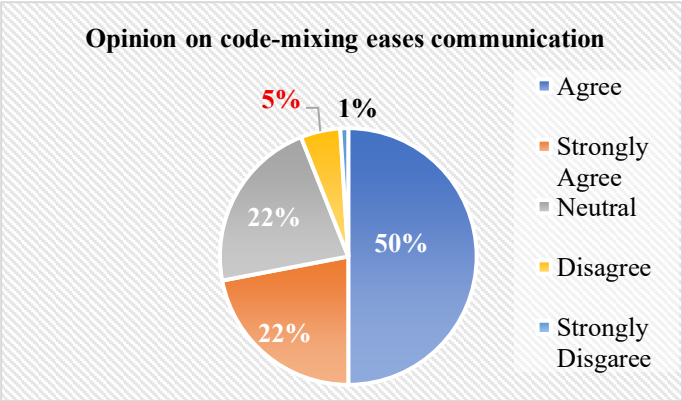


Chart 3 shows that, of 100 students, 50% agree and 22% strongly agree that code-mixing eases communication. Furthermore, 5% disagree that code-mixing makes communication easier, in comparison to 1% who strongly disagree, while 22% remain neutral. 50% of students agree that code-mixing eases communication. The mean score (M) is 3.87. This mean score suggests that, on average, students agree and remain neutral when asked whether code-mixing eases communication. Here, the mode is '*Agree'* because it is the most common response among the majority of students.

DS1 stated,

> My teachers use some code-mixing when explaining a critical idea. Also, it helped me to communicate and understand class lectures at the very beginning of my undergraduate studies. There are many students at my university whose background was Bangla medium. Code-mixing helped me learn my topic from my teacher.

DS5 said,

> Unless students can comprehend English, then using Bangla helps them understand the

> lecture. Sometimes a teacher needs to use code-mixing to help students understand their lecture. It depends on the topic and the students, but teachers and students need to speak English in class. However, in some cases, teachers may use Bangla to help students understand some complicated topics. A difficult lesson can be easily explained through code-mixing. Sometimes our teachers use technical terms that can be new and difficult for us. Then, teachers can explain new terms through code-mixing.

DS3 mentioned,

> Students mix Bangla and English during academic communication to make their communication happen. I think it depends, yes, it depends. On one hand, no because code-mixing is not necessary for academic communication and class lectures, but it depends on the context. If the subject matter requires code-mixing, then it is necessary for correct communication. Students and teachers both may take help from it as long as they use it carefully. Some of my teachers make class understandable by using code-mixing. It helps students to understand a lesson if they are not competent in English.

FS1 expressed,

> I can listen to and speak a little Bangla. I sometimes intentionally mix Bangla and English with my classmates. And even I mix Bangla, Hindi, and English as well. My intention is to learn a new language. I am in a new setting, so I should be the one who learns Bangla. I ask my classmates to speak Bangla with me and to help me understand what you are saying. I think translation is important. If we can understand Bangla and Hindi, we can easily translate the message into English. Code-mixing itself has several components. We have Bangla, Hindi, and English.

FS2 conveyed,

> In terms of understanding the topic, students will understand it better in their mother language. My point is that the mother tongue can be used in class. But it should be used minimally.

The interviewees' opinions mirror the perceptions of the teachers and students interviewed by Maqsood et al. (2022). The integration of Bangla and English is beneficial for classroom learning and improves communication clarity and smoothness (Begum et al., 2024). Teachers mixed Bangla and English to help their students understand lectures and build rapport with multilingual students (Anderson, 2022). Thus, translanguaging leads students to learn content, making the classroom a linguistic-and-cultural egalitarian ground, where almost all students apparently can communicate and collaborate through participation, by the synergism of their full mental grammar comprised of L1+L2 (+ L3+L4) (Canagarajah, 2009; Cenoz & Gortor, 2021; Case, 2024).

*Research question 4. What are the challenges of domestic and foreign students in code-mixing in class and communication?*

*Domestic and Foreign Students' Challenges of Code-mixing*

Chart 4.

Challenges of mixing Bangla and English in understanding class lectures

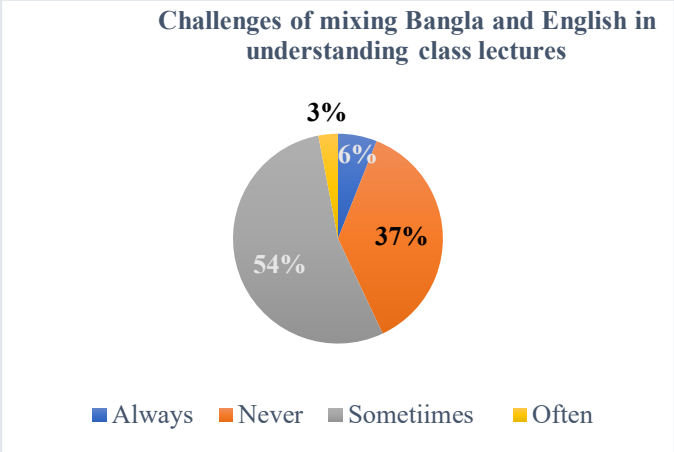


Chart 4 shows that 3% of students often face challenges understanding class lectures when Bangla and English are mixed. Conversely, 6%, 37%, and 54% of respondents always, never, and sometimes face problems in comprehending class lectures due to the mixture of Bangla and English. The highest percentage, 54%, suggests that most students sometimes face challenges understanding class lectures due to code-mixing. The mode is '*Sometimes'* because it is the most frequent answer among students. The mean score (M) is 1.78, which indicates that, on average, students sometimes and never face challenges in comprehending class lectures due to code-mixing.

FS1 and FS2 used to face hurdles in understanding class lectures and communicating with their teachers and classmates due to code-mixing. FS1 and FS2 stated that it was difficult for them to comprehend Bangla.

FS1 mentioned,

> In my first semester, I faced a lot of challenges in understanding Bangla. I even used to ask my classmates the meanings of Bangla words and sentences my teachers used.

FS 2 said,

> When someone speaks in different dialects of Bangla, I have trouble understanding the message. Classes should be in English because our university has students from diverse backgrounds, including non-Bengalis.

**Chart 5.**

Perceived negative impacts of code-mixing on the English language learning

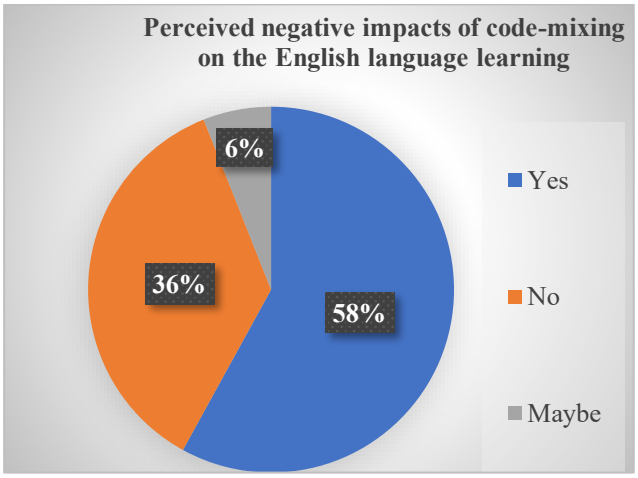


Chart 5 shows that 58% of students believe code-mixing has negative impacts on their English language learning, while 36% do not. However, 6% think code-mixing may negatively influence their English language learning. The highest percentage, 58%, indicates that the majority perceive code-mixing as negatively affecting their English language learning. Therefore, the mode is '*Yes'*, as it is the most common response, selected by most students.

DS1, DS2, DS3, DS4, DS5, FS1, and FS2 are concerned that colossal code-mixing may be prejudicial to their L2 acquisition and learning, for they might get so snug in deploying Bangla substantially and English marginally; as a result, the paucity in linguistic inputs of English may mar their (sub)conscious English acquisition. According to DS3, code-mixing should be used sparingly. DS3 remarked,

> Code-mixing may lead to a scarcity of English. So, it will have a bad impact on students' speaking skills. And in formal situations like teaching, teachers and students should be aware of this code-mixing issue. Classes can be conducted without code-mixing. We use it because we are habituated to it. But mixing too much code might be problematic, in my opinion; it would be bad practice.

DS5 said,

> If we do it excessively and continuously, it will hamper our 2nd-language acquisition. If we are habituated to it, we are likely to lose our fluency in English. I think code-mixing is not necessary in class. We use it because it is easier to express our feelings and opinions in Bangla. It feels so easy to express something by code-mixing.

FS1 commented,

> Only communicating in English and Bangla outside the classroom is not enough. If we use Bangla more, it would not be as beneficial as if we included more English in the classroom. Some repetitive phrases and sentences often appear in communication between students and teachers, for example, "How are you?" "You should soon submit the assignment." "Send me an email." But if classes are taught entirely in English, students will learn more vocabulary, sentence structures, and phrases. Students will receive more input in English, which will help them acquire the language.

FS2 said,

> Where will students use English if they always communicate in their mother tongue in

> academic settings? Outside academic settings, we may speak in several languages. But for English language learning, we need to speak, listen, write, and read in English. Since Bangla is my lesser-known language, I find it harder to understand lectures when my teacher mixes Bangla while teaching. It is expected. In this way, my exposure to English is limited. If exposure to English is limited, I believe learning is also limited.

In the ESL context, although code-mixing positively influences language teaching and learning, it may hinder mutual comprehension when students interact with foreigners (Ezeh et al., 2022). This parallels the results of this research, as FS1 and FS2 reported difficulties in grasping teachers' classroom talks when Bangla and English were mixed. Moreover, the surveyed and interviewed students consider excessive code-mixing harmful to the development of English language proficiency. This finding aligns with the research by Spice (2018), which interviewed 13 multilingual English language learners and an English teacher; they acknowledged that excessive code-mixing slows L2 acquisition and leads learners to use it as a crutch, ultimately losing the ability to construct L2 sentences. Similarly, participants in earlier research consider exceeding code-mixing detrimental to the development of English language application and acquisition (Ezemba et al., 2022; Kaushanskaya & Crespo, 2019; Tarigan & Girsang, 2025).

## Discussion

This section interprets key results, relates them to convergences and divergences in earlier research, specifies the novel contribution, addresses the research's limitations, and provides suggestions for future research.

The participants, who find code-mixing both beneficial and disadvantageous, use Bangla (L1) and English (L2) to a greater degree; they code-mix mostly with their classmates because it eases communication. They find code-mixing conducive to their classroom learning as their teachers make them understand tough topics by mixing Bangla and English. On the other hand, they consider code-mixing as disadvantageous to international/foreign students' comprehension of class lectures, and most participants think code-mixing has negative impacts on their English language learning. These findings are in line with previous research on code-mixing and translanguaging (Fatema, 2024; Mekuria & Mohammed, 2025; Rafi & Morgan, 2022a).

Participants find code-mixing worth doing not only because it makes communication facile and functional but because — it entails and embodies a speaker's acuity and aptitude to eloquently and efficiently speak in two languages (Bangla and English, e.g.), and — the participants feel cozy combining languages in communication (Awan et al., 2025; Taş & Mirici, 2025; Trinh, 2025). In the same vein, Ali (2024) explored that his research participants deployed translanguaging by translating and paraphrasing words to assist their fellows with low proficiency in English. DS1, DS2, and DS3 also emphasized the necessity of code-mixing to make a class comprehensible when students cannot understand English.

According to Sultana (2014), however, young adults are marginalized through the colonial construction and the continued dominance of English. Two participants in her research were Mac and Nikita. Mac mixed such English words as 'class' and 'mouse' with — whilst Nikita added the words 'sir', 'rat', and the phrase 'after all' to Bangla sentences. Hence, Sultana claimed that young adult students are irresistibly innovative, pragmatic, and systematic mixers of linguistic and semantic features of Bangla and English with new metalinguistic methods. Przymus (2023) stated that both translanguaging and code-switching — the former a metonym, the latter a metaphor — are cognitive and communicative components of verbal interaction,

vital to the study of human communication and language education. Similarly, domestic students regard code-mixing as vital and effective for comprehending new topics and fostering content learning. Therefore, it is academically acknowledged that teachers can integrate languages, which is an effective way to address the difficulties of content and target-language learning (Biswas, 2019; Fuster & Bardel, 2024; Li & Wang, 2024).

This research shows that the interviewees are wary because students might be habituated to code-mixing, which could be insidious to the improvement of their English language skills. 58% of survey participants deem code-mixing to negatively impact their English language learning. Similarly, prior studies addressed that excessive employment of L1 and L2 could be problematically consequential, and there should be a cap be put on unconscionably exceeding code-mixing, as it could create a scarcity of linguistic inputs of a language, causing a setback to learners' second language acquisition and learning (Datta & Roy, 2024; Nteziyaremye et al., 2024; Tam & Chi, 2024).

However, this research shows that 54% of the surveyed students sometimes face challenges understanding lectures due to code-mixing. Similarly, FS1 and FS2 used to encounter challenges in comprehending lectures if Bangla and English were used. These results align with the research findings of Luqman et al. (2021), who argue that international students' communication barriers should be addressed to maximize learning and succeed in their academic environments. Ennin and Manariyo (2023) suggested that lectures should be in English to support foreign students' comprehension and learning.

The novelty of this research is that, unlike previous research, it did not overlook how foreign students perceive code-mixing. Thus, exploring foreign students' perceptions of code-mixing enabled the researcher to identify the challenges they face in L2 learning and in classroom settings. This research has important implications. The findings will make institutional authorities aware of foreign students' difficulties in grasping lectures due to code-mixing. Teaching and learning can be conducted in English if foreign students, who do not adequately understand the local language, are present in class (Masum et al., 2025).

Nonetheless, pedagogical translanguaging warrants informed teacher education, in which pre-service and in-service teachers learn the ins and outs of translanguaging (Magadan et al., 2025; Nahiyan et al., 2025; Permana & Rohmah, 2024). Educational institutions may offer pedagogical training to teachers so that they can draw on translanguaging to maximize content learning, minimizing the loss of English language learning, use, acquisition, and advancement (Cummins, 1981; Cummins, 2019; Cenoz & Gortor, 2022). In the backdrop of bilingual education in Bangladesh, among educators and policymakers, discussion and deliberation should take place on the effective enactment and examination of the extent to which and how translanguaging can be applied in the classroom (Rafi & Morgan, 2022b; Rafi & Morgan, 2022c; Rafi & Morgan, 2022d).

Future research should investigate how code-mixing influences the English language learning, use, and acquisition of both foreign and domestic students. Because of code-mixing, what types of challenges foreign students face should be researched. Further, researchers could research with a large and randomized sample size. Random selection, along with a large sample size, will improve the generalizability of research by minimizing sampling bias and maximizing its transferability and applicability. The findings from a large, randomly selected sample of participants will help researchers depict a broad picture of code-mixing usage, experiences, effects, and perceptions.

## Conclusion & Recommendation

This research has found that most participants engage in significant code-mixing at their universities, regardless of its advantages and disadvantages. Code-mixing helps them continue their communication. Although they find code-mixing necessary to communicate conveniently and to absorb classroom content, they deem excessive code-mixing with trepidation about not being able to acquire English to its fullest. The concern is not merely about the jeopardy of their English acquisition and learning, but about the hindrance to foreign students' comprehension of class lectures. Thus, among the participants, there is a prevalent worry about the loss of their classroom learning, English language use and learning, and the acquisition of code-mixing.

Ongoing advancement in L1 and L2 is vital and viable in enabling students to use their full linguistic resources. Teaching and learning, however, may be conducted in English if foreign students are present in the classroom so they can fully comprehend the lectures. To equip foreign students to function socially within and beyond their institutions, universities should offer courses on communication skills in the local language.

### *Limitation*

This research may have been affected by sampling bias, as convenience sampling was used: participants were selected based on availability rather than randomly. The findings may not generalize the extent to which students at other Bangladeshi public and private universities mix Bangla and English, as it was conducted only at three private universities in Dhaka. And the number of interviewees was small. So was the number of survey participants. Participants may not represent the broader research population, which may have more diverse perceptions and experiences of and with code-mixing at public universities in Bangladesh.

### *Direction for Future Studies*

Research should be conducted to examine and describe the state of content, target (English), and local-language learning among international students at both public and private universities. This research underscores the need for further investigation into how foreign students perceive — and what challenges they face with — code-mixing. The earlier such an apparent concern is investigated, the better, because international students' comprehension of lectures (where the language of instruction is used effectively) is a linchpin to the success of their studies. Domestic and foreign students' academic accomplishments through classroom learning are among the indicators of a country's educational progression and prestige. Further, future research should investigate the long-term effects of translanguaging in the classroom on students' English proficiency. The applicability of translanguaging should be researched to explore how the effectiveness of code-mixing differs across departments and disciplines.

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## Biodata

Srejon Datta teaches the English Language and English literature at Starlit School of English in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He completed his Bachelor's in English Linguistics and Master's in TESOL at North South University, Bangladesh. What is field and football to a footballer is teaching, reading, writing, and researching to Srejon's intellectual pursuit and progression. Otherwise put, he enjoys reading and writing as well as teaching and researching, forming a continuous cognitive synergy and symbiosis.

# Code-Switching in EFL Classrooms: Students' and Teachers' Attitudes in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the attitudes of EFL students and teachers toward code-switching in EFL classrooms. Participants included 60 English majors and 10 EFL teachers from schools in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The research gathered data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The conclusions indicated that participants had positive attitudes toward code-switching. Students acknowledged that code-switching not only aids in addressing English competence and communicative problems but also sparks interest, confidence, and motivation in language learning. Teachers asserted that code-switching increases the effectiveness of EFL classrooms; however, some expressed feelings of shame and unprofessionalism. The functions of student code-switching were to maintain the discourse, engage and communicate with classmates, and prevent miscommunications. Providing understanding of lesson content, manipulating classrooms, and strengthening classroom relationships were functions of teacher code-switching. The study has implications for instructors and students in EFL contexts and is a valuable resource for further research on code-switching.

**Keywords**: attitudes, code-switching, EFL classrooms, functions

## Introduction

In the digital era, English is seen as a vital tool for global communication among countries and regions. It is also a means by which people exchange information, knowledge, experience, and even cultures. Therefore, in Vietnam, English has been made a compulsory subject in the educational system for students in grades 3 to 12 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). This led to the organization of many bilingual classes across the country, and a tendency to incorporate language varieties during conversations in EFL classrooms is emerging. It comes with the emergence of code-switching as a popular phenomenon.

Both teachers and students prefer code-switching for different purposes. Teachers implement code-switching as a useful technique to manage the classroom, simplify instructions, translate complex terms, provide basic understanding, and relax learners (Liu, 2010). This indicates that

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code-switching is an effective method for teaching a foreign language. Meanwhile, students engage in code-switching to reflect on their learning, discuss grammatical structures, hold the floor, affirm, and give humorous talks, which facilitate their education in multiple ways (Horasan, 2014).

In the Mekong Delta context, considerable research has identified several factors influencing students' communication, including limited vocabulary and poor learning environments (Ly et al., 2023; Vo et al., 2018). Meanwhile, Dar et al. (2014) stated that switching languages is widely used in EFL and ESL courses where students' communicative proficiency is inadequate. In accordance with this, Modupeola (2013) suggested that when teachers have less time to explain confusing words thoroughly, code-switching is employed as a pedagogical tool to provide precise classroom instruction and to give students opportunities to engage in conversations and improve comprehension. With the benefit of code-switching, it appears to be a supportive strategy in second-language teaching for students with limited English proficiency. However, many studies found that code-switching has negative effects because the alternation between languages leads to misunderstandings of the speakers' messages. On the other hand, this language change might make listeners feel disrespected (Rahmatova & Qurbonova, 2018).

As Grant and Nguyen (2017) stated, code-switching is prevalent in EFL classes at schools and universities in Vietnam. However, research examining the attitudes of EFL students and teachers toward this phenomenon in the Mekong Delta is limited. For this reason, this study aims to investigate the attitudes of both students and teachers regarding the application of code-switching in EFL classrooms. Simultaneously, the study seeks to explore the functions of code-switching in learning and teaching English as a foreign language. Through addressing this research gap, this study contributes to a broader literature on code-switching. The findings are intended to provide insight into the future use of code-switching in EFL contexts.

## Literature review

### *Definition of Code-Switching*

The concept of code-switching has been defined in many studies. According to Poplack (1980), it was defined as the linguistic replacement of sentences of two languages in a dialogue. Fareed et al. (2016) referred to it as the switching of people from their first language (L1) to their second language (L2) and vice versa within their conversation. In line with this, Lin (2008) and Ngo (2025) regarded code-switching as the use of alternation between languages for specific purposes. Correspondingly, code-switching is the use of diverse combinations of languages within a single speech event by bilinguals (Gardner-Chloros, 2009, as cited in Horasan, 2014). While Manal A.Ismai (2015, as cited in Rahmatova & Qurbonova, 2018) explained that code-switching is the practice in which language users choose or change linguistic components to contextualize a conversation in an interactive context, Shafi et al. (2020) demonstrated that code-switching allows for the performance and completion of various tasks with no effect on the initial setting. In this regard, Heredia and Altarriba (2001) pointed out that bilinguals employ code-switching to switch between languages, with accompanying grammatical and functional

rules, in a common context. This means it is a complicated phenomenon used by bilingual or multilingual people to transition between languages in the same conversation.

### *Functions of Code-Switching in Classrooms*

The use of L1 languages, in addition to the target language, in classrooms for specific purposes is considered classroom code-switching. Strikingly, Rose and van Dulm (2006) found that, to achieve academic objectives, both teachers and students employed code-switching functions, such as expanding, confirming, and clarifying. In their study of student functions, Narasuman et al. (2019) asserted that they alternated between L1 and L2 to become proficient in a foreign language. Additionally, Obaidullah (2016) demonstrated that students code-switch to acquire information efficiently and to understand course materials. On the other hand, while Mattson and Burenhult (1990, as cited by Sert, 2005) pointed out that teachers were ignorant of the benefits or consequences of alternation, it has been discovered that several fundamental functions of the phenomena are beneficial for language acquisition. Consequently, to understand the functions of code-switching in classrooms in more detail, they would be presented in the sections on student code-switching and teacher code-switching.

### *Student Code-Switching's Functions*

Students prefer to use code-switching as a coping strategy due to a lack of L2 language competence (Selamat, 2014). Through code-switching, learners maintain conversational flow despite their target-language proficiency being inadequate. As cited in Sert (2005, p. 3), the functions of student code-switching comprise "equivalence, floor-holding, reiteration, and conflict control" (Eldridge, 1996).

According to Sert (2005), for equivalence, students used their native language to continue the discussion when they could not explain a specific lexical item in the second language. The equivalent function of code-switching helps them deal with gaps in competence. Regarding the second category, floor-holding, learners use their L1 to fill the conversation's gaps because they do not recall or use proper L2 structures. Therefore, to keep the dialogue going, they code-switch to convey their thoughts. However, it may eventually lead to a reduction in fluency because linguistic substitution could be harmful to the acquisition of more language. Referring to the third one, reiteration, the research explains that students tend to code-switch when they think they may not have accurately conveyed the message in the intended language, or when they consider it a better way to show their teachers that they understand the material or what they are learning. The last one, conflict control, illustrates students' intention to convey meaning by using code swapping as a strategy to prevent misunderstandings or to use words implicitly for certain goals. Additionally, this function helps students avoid misinterpretation by providing culturally comparable vocabulary in both the target and native languages. Equivalently, Greggio and Gil (2007) found that learner utterance functions were primarily concerned with problems, such as keeping the conversation moving, bridging a language gap, giving and receiving equal meaning in both languages, questioning grammar principles or structures, and elucidating comprehension of grammar rules. The study by Barredo (1997, as cited in Ataş, 2012) aligned with these findings because the author observed Spanish-Basque pupils and asserted that they tended to code-switch for several reasons, ranging from simplicity, as a means of bridging linguistic gaps, to the complexity of utterance levels. According to studies, learners routinely

switch between their first and second languages to overcome language barriers, maintain interaction, handle unclear terms, and ask for clarification on grammatical rules to make them comprehensible.

### *Teacher Code-Switching's Functions*

In the context of teaching a second or foreign language, code-switching has been broadly used as a pedagogical tool (Avery, 2015). Ferguson (2003) reported that the findings of studies on the functions of code-switching were similar across settings. From the results, Ferguson categorized code-switching's functions into three main types as follows:

- Code switching for curriculum access
- Code switching for classroom management discourse
- Code switching for interpersonal relations

(Ferguson, 2003, p.2)

The first category mentioned the use of code-switching to present lesson content in an understandable way. Simultaneously, the second one tends to encourage, correct, commend, and control students' attitudes. The third category emphasizes the classroom as a social and emotional space where students and teachers negotiate identities and connections. On the other hand, the classroom encompasses both societal and emotional dimensions. Nevertheless, Sert (2005) presented three main categories originally developed by Mattson and Burenhult (1999), consisting of "topic switch, affective functions, and repetitive functions" (p. 2). With topic switch, depending on the subject, teachers will modify the language they use, while with affective function, teachers employ code-switching to foster close relationships and connections with students. The latter, repetitive functions are applied to make language content comprehensible. Canagarajah (1995, as cited in Selamat, 2014) described teachers' code-switching into two functional categories, as detailed below.

#### *Management of the classroom*

- Starting the lesson
- Discussing instructions
- Asking for assistance
- Handling discipline
- Encouraging
- Praising
- Teacher regulations
- Teacher warnings
- Moderation
- Pleading
- Informal conversations

#### *Transmission of content*

- Revising
- Explaining
- Discussing cultural implications
- Translating in parallel
- Interacting with students informally

Although teacher functions are proposed in various studies with different numbers of types and names, their uses are relevant together. Consequently, the study obtains that teachers prefer to use code-switching to access the curriculum, manage the classroom, and build interpersonal relations.

### *Previous Studies*

In terms of attitudes towards teachers' and students' use of code-switching, multiple studies have examined code-switching in EFL or ESL classrooms. Firstly, Dar et al. (2014) found that code-switching effectively works as a teaching method in language classes. This was because teachers used code-switching as a form of instruction to help students understand challenging material, provide examples from L1 since L2 lacked relevant terminology, help learners grasp concepts, highlight specific ideas, and offer guidance. Nonetheless, some instructors held the view that pupils cannot absorb an appropriate model for learning English if they frequently use their native language during lessons. Finally, because the study examined teachers' perceptions, the authors concluded that they had positive cognitive and behavioral attitudes.

Equivalently, Selamat (2014) analyzed perceptions and beliefs regarding code-switching in Malaysian ESL classes and found generally favorable attitudes among participants. In cognitive attitudes, teachers viewed code-switching as an effective pedagogical tool that facilitated learning and managed classroom emotions, though opinions varied regarding its drawbacks on language learning. For students, code-switching emerged as a beneficial strategy for language acquisition, comprehension, and motivation. Nevertheless, inconsistent use of the L2 was noted among students, with some opting not to use their native language at all. Behavioral attitudes revealed that teachers frequently employed the first language as a practical solution to classroom challenges, while students utilized code-switching to navigate language proficiency issues and improve group dynamics. The study, however, did not explicitly address the participants' affective attitudes, focusing instead on perceptions, beliefs, and code-switching functions.

Similarly, Patmasari et al. (2022) investigated the perceptions of both teachers and students toward the utilization of code-switching. The study revealed that most students had a positive attitude towards teachers' use of code-switching in classrooms. Specifically, this use in English classrooms may increase their opportunities to be proficient in English. Furthermore, students responded to the reasons teachers code-switched, including translating abstract terms, providing instructions, motivating their students, managing the classroom, and assessing students' comprehension. As a result, although this study investigated students' cognitive attitudes, their behavior and emotions toward code-switching were not examined. Otherwise, teachers acknowledged the importance of English as an L2 in the classroom, which is why they limited themselves to code-switching in class. They also confirmed that they code-switched to ensure students' understanding of the material, to give directions, to explain lesson content, and to clarify abstract terminology. Hence, teachers' cognitive and behavioral attitudes were assessed, and conclusions were drawn.

In line with the above examination, Horasan (2014) conducted research on teachers' and students' perceptions of code-switching in classrooms. The researcher concluded that the participants shared a belief that code-switching helped to draw attention and tell jokes. Besides,

they viewed code-switching as a communication method to promote successful learning at the earliest stages. Consequently, completely stopping the use of code-switching in EFL classes should not be a rigid policy. Put another way, in this circumstance, Horasan (2014) found that all participants had positive attitudes toward code-switching in terms of cognitive perception. Additionally, the study found that a function of code-switching used by students and teachers was to comment on work and discuss grammar. It was evidence that the author investigated participants' behavioral attitudes.

Fareed et al. (2016) also conducted research to investigate how ESL/EFL students perceived teachers' use of code-switching in English classes. The findings indicated that, while some students believed educators' code-switching restricted their interaction with English, they held a positive attitude toward this practice. The students also said that teachers' code-switching boosted their self-assurance and motivation to learn. However, the study focused only on students' perceptions, resulting in a lack of teacher perspectives on the application of code-switching in classrooms. Overall, the survey was unable to draw conclusions about every facet of attitudes.

Under other circumstances, Rahmatova and Qurbonova (2018) found that speakers frequently code-switched when they felt furious or exhausted; however, they occasionally conveyed their emotions by code-switching when they were joyful. That is, code-switching enabled communicators to recognize their mood within communications. According to Lee (2006, as cited in Rahmatova & Qurbonova, 2018), code-switching should be used in classroom discussions because it enables students to participate in conversations and speak freely. So, the paper examined the affective aspect of attitude, clearly indicating the role of switchers' emotions in code-switching. Subsequently, the authors discussed the behavioral component of attitude through listing the specific functions of code-switching. Namely, code-switching brings typical merits, such as clarifying the target, explaining grammatical points, reducing gaps in specific words, and enhancing the effectiveness of class discussion activities. In contrast, the authors reported that code-switching not only influences *information comprehension but also affects* the efficacy of speech because certain terms, including metaphors, groups of words, or admonitions, are restricted. As a consequence, these are the cognitive judgments and beliefs about code-switching. That is, the authors covered the three facets of code-switchers' attitudes.

Although many studies indicated a favorable attitude among participants toward code-switching in EFL contexts, they were unable to assess all facets of participants' attitudes. Evidently, the earlier studies placed less emphasis on participants' emotional component. That is, while they have examined cognitive and behavioral components, the affective component is less discussed.

### *Research Gaps*

Although numerous studies have examined attitudes toward code-switching in EFL or ESL classes, their conclusions were varied. In particular, many of them examined the cognitive and behavioral components of attitudes, such as perceptions (Dar et al., 2014; Horasan, 2014; Fareed et al., 2016; Patmasari et al., 2022; Selamat, 2014) or beliefs (Selamat, 2014). Very limited research has explored the affective aspect of attitudes, encompassing participants'

emotions or feelings towards code-switching in EFL classrooms, which remains significantly underexplored. Besides, studies from other EFL contexts, such as Malaysia (Selamat, 2014) or Indonesia (Patmasari et al., 2022), have shown that teachers and students have positive attitudes towards the implementation of code-switching in language classrooms; however, this finding has not been substantiated in the specific context of the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. This suggests that it is unclear whether these positive attitudes towards code-switching *generalize to* this new context. Therefore, the present study is encouraged to address this research gap by comprehensively investigating all three components of attitudes among students and teachers in the Mekong Delta.

### *Research Questions*

The research attempts to address the following questions in light of relevant studies and their conclusions about code-switching:

1. What are the attitudes of English-majored sophomores and EFL teachers toward the use of code-switching in EFL classrooms?
2. What are the functions of student and teacher code-switching in EFL classrooms?

## Methods

### *Pedagogical Setting & Participants*

The study was conducted at a university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. The questionnaires were distributed to 70 participants. Namely, there were 60 English-majored sophomores, including 12 males and 48 females (19-20 years old). Moreover, 10 EFL teachers, 2 male and 8 female, have worked at public and private schools in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. They are between the ages of 24 and 39, have been teachers for 1 to more than 10 years, and have enrolled in a master's program. The participants were selected for data collection using convenience sampling because they were accessible and aligned with the scope. Subsequently, five instructors with over three years of experience instructing various target students were selected for the semi-structured interview. Finally, participants would feel free to voice their thoughts, as their answers and personal information would remain confidential solely for the study.

### *Design of the Study*

The current study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In particular, two questionnaires: one for students and one for teachers. Each comprises two distinct parts: attitudes toward code-switching and attitudes toward its functions. They are the most common instruments for the quantitative method. The questionnaire is adapted from Issarangkura Na Ayuttaya (2017), Pham and Nguyen (2024), and Selamat (2014), using a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The bilingual questionnaire has 15 closed-ended questions for students and 22 questions for teachers. Each questionnaire has two sections: participants' attitudes toward utilizing code-switching in EFL classrooms and the functions of code-switching in classrooms. The pilots had run with 10 random students and 3 teachers before the official questionnaires were sent to participants to assess reliability. As a result, the Cronbach's Alpha for the student questionnaire was 0.874, while the teacher questionnaire received a score of 0.868. These results indicate a high level of reliability for both

questionnaires, enabling their official distribution to participants for data collection.

In the latter, five teachers who had participated in the previous survey were interviewed in a semi-structured manner. Furthermore, each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, with 12 questions adapted from Selamat (2014). For the interview questions, the researcher conducted a pilot to test the interviewees' comprehension. Following the pilot test, the questions were reworded and asked differently to enable the interviewees to provide insightful responses to the research. Besides, the researcher, as the interviewer, and the interviewees can also use both Vietnamese and English to convey ideas with the best comprehension. The interview recordings will be transcribed and carefully checked for analysis. The research will use thematic analysis of the interview transcripts to interpret the qualitative data. However, the study conducted interviews only with teachers due to time constraints during the research.

### *Data collection & analysis*

After receiving responses from the sample, the researcher will use the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 to analyze the questionnaire data. Participants' responses will be calculated and presented afterward to show the levels of their perceptions. As presented by Sözen and Güven (2019), the mean scores are described as follows:

- Strongly disagree: 1.00-1.80
- Disagree: 1.81-2.60
- Neutral: 2.61-3.40
- Agree: 3.41-4.20
- Strongly Agree: 4.21-5.00

Regarding the scores, item values range from 1.00 to 2.60, indicating negative attitudes, and from 3.41 to 5.00, indicating positive attitudes toward the statements. Regarding the interview data, a thematic analysis will be conducted on the transcript. The researcher will read it carefully to uncover deep insights, then compare them with the survey responses to determine whether they align. The interview questions are designed to complement the questionnaire, facilitating effective comparison. Microsoft Word will create and adjust tables that present the data results.

## Results/Findings

### *The Reliability of the Questionnaires*

The student questionnaire was administered to English-majored sophomores to gather their responses regarding code-switching and its functions in EFL classes. The Cronbach's Alpha for the last questionnaire was 0.873, which, compared to the acceptable value of 0.61, indicates that it is a reliable measure. This result proved the questionnaire's reliability.

**Table 1**

The reliability of the student questionnaire

| Cronbach' s Alpha | n of items |
|---|---|
| 0.873 | 15 |

Equivalently, a Cronbach's Alpha test was performed to assess the internal consistency reliability of the teacher questionnaire, which was used to gather the teachers' attitudes on code-

switching use and its functions. The result was 0.854, a good score that established the questionnaire's credibility.

**Table 2**

The reliability of the teacher questionnaire

| Cronbach' s Alpha | n of items |
|---|---|
| 0.854 | 22 |

*Students' Attitudes toward Using Code-Switching*

A descriptive statistics test was performed to determine the mean scores of English-majored students' attitudes toward using code-switching in classrooms. The test results are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3**

Students' attitudes toward using code-switching

| | n | M | S.D. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **3.58** | **0.62** |
| I find the class more interesting when the teacher speaks in my language. | 60 | 3.53 | 0.97 |
| I feel more assured and motivated to study English when the teacher speaks in my own tongue. | 60 | 3.62 | 0.94 |
| Using my mother tongue improves my second language acquisition. | 60 | 3.48 | 1.08 |
| By speaking in my own language, I can concentrate on the subject without being distracted by new vocabulary. | 60 | 3.65 | 1.02 |
| I can communicate with my peers more effectively when I utilize my first language. | 60 | 3.63 | 0.96 |
| During classroom instruction, I prefer that the teacher speak solely English and not my native tongue. | 60 | 3.00 | 0.88 |
| I would like the teacher to use both English and my first language during lessons. | 60 | 4.40 | 0.96 |
| I have difficulties understanding since the teacher does not employ my own language to clarify new terms, subjects, or ideas. | 60 | 3.72 | 0.98 |
| I have trouble focusing on English classes when the instructor speaks solely in English. | 60 | 3.50 | 1.14 |
| In conversation, code-switching confuses me. | 60 | 3.22 | 1.18 |

As can be seen in Table 3, most students agreed with the statements (overall M=3.58, SD=0.62). More specifically, participants' level of like-mindedness varies, as mean scores range from 3.48 (SD=1.08) to 4.40 (SD=0.96). The participants thought that using their first language makes them enjoy the classroom, boosts motivation and confidence, helps them acquire a second language better, pays more attention to lessons, communicates with friends effectively, and is interested in using both English and their first language in classes with teachers. Besides, many students found it hard to comprehend new words, subjects, or ideas, and were distracted by these new words when their teachers used only English to explain and give instructions in class, in the absence of their first language. However, many students express neutral opinions about using code-switching to get their attention in conversations (M=3.22, SD=1.18) and prefer to speak only English in the classroom (M=3.00, SD=0.88). These data show that students prefer

code-switching in classrooms and struggle when it is absent.

### *Student Code-Switching's Functions*

Subsequently, descriptive statistics were conducted to identify the functions of code-switching that English-majored students used in the classroom. The detailed results are presented in Table 4 below.

**Table 4**

Student code-switching's functions

| | n | M | S.D. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **3.87** | **0.68** |
| I utilize code-switching when I can't communicate in English. | 60 | 3.82 | 0.95 |
| I employ code-switching to keep the conversation going. | 60 | 3.62 | 0.94 |
| I interact with my friends who speak the same language by using code-switching. | 60 | 3.80 | 0.95 |
| I communicate complex words and phrases to my classmates by using code-switching. | 60 | 4.13 | 0.85 |
| I employ code-switching to prevent misunderstandings. | 60 | 3.98 | 0.89 |

Students largely admitted to using code-switching for different functions, as shown in Table 4 (overall M=3.87, SD=0.68). According to the table, students tend to switch languages when they are unable to continuously express their ideas in English (M=3.82, SD=0.95), and to help them maintain the flow of communication (M=3.62, SD=0.94). Moreover, a group of participants acknowledged that they code-switch when interacting (M=3.80, SD=0.95) and talk about words or phrases in greater complexity with same-language friends (M=4.13, SD=0.85). A majority of respondents also agreed that the use of code-switching helps them avoid misunderstandings during the processing of language use (M=3.98, SD=0.89). This shows that code-switching helps students address communication issues.

### *Teachers' Attitudes toward Using Code-Switching*

A descriptive statistics test was conducted to examine EFL teachers' attitudes toward code-switching in classrooms. The results of the test are shown in Table 5, including mean scores (M) and standard deviations (S.D.).

From Table 5, the majority of teachers who took part in the survey tended to agree with views about code-switching, with an overall mean of 3.63 (SD=0.37). It was demonstrated through the mean scores running from 3.50 to 4.40 Particularly, code-switching helps the learning process easier (M=3.90, SD= 0.57), should be a part of EFL classrooms (M=3.70, SD=0.95), be an effective and save-time method (M=4.00; SD= 0.82), makes learning outcomes better (M=3.80, SD=0.79), helps to teach grammatical more productively (M=4.40, SD=0.52), be useful to give directions (M=3.50, SD=0.85), and should be used in cooperative activities (M=3.50, SD=0.97). Moreover, respondents also approved of the claim that code-switching causes students' dependence on teachers (M=3.80, SD=0.42) and that teaching English is better than teaching only in English-only classrooms (M=3.50, SD=0.53). It indicates that some teachers believe code-switching is beneficial in classrooms, whereas others believe it negatively affects students' learning.

**Table 5**
Teachers' attitudes toward using code-switching

| | n | M | S.D. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **3.63** | **0.37** |
| Code-switching makes learning a language easier. | 10 | 3.90 | 0.57 |
| Code-switching is a method that will make students more dependent on the teacher. | 10 | 3.80 | 0.42 |
| An essential component of the EFL lesson should involve code-switching. | 10 | 3.70 | 0.95 |
| In EFL classes, the students' native language and English must be kept strictly apart. | 10 | 3.00 | 0.82 |
| Code-switching is a productive and time-efficient method. | 10 | 4.00 | 0.82 |
| Classrooms with solely English are the greatest places to teach English. | 10 | 3.50 | 0.53 |
| The quality of English will decrease as a consequence of the usage of other languages in EFL classes. | 10 | 3.40 | 0.84 |
| A native speaker is the best person for instructing English. | 10 | 3.40 | 1.08 |
| Learners have greater outcomes the more English is utilized. | 10 | 3.80 | 0.79 |
| Students can focus better in EFL classes when they use L1. | 10 | 3.30 | 0.82 |
| Teachers can use code-switching to illustrate grammatical structure or explain the distinctions among L1 and L2 more effectively. | 10 | 4.40 | 0.52 |
| As teachers change the language to provide instructions, it is helpful. | 10 | 3.50 | 0.85 |
| When participating in collaborative tasks, students ought to be allowed to speak their native language. | 10 | 3.50 | 0.97 |

In addition, teachers had neutral perceptions of four items, such as "In EFL classes, the students' native language and English must be kept strictly apart." "The quality of English will decrease as a consequence of the usage of other languages in EFL classes." "A native speaker is the best person for instructing English," and "Students can focus better in EFL classes when they use L1." with the same mean score, M=3.40, and SD=0.82, SD=0.84, SD=1.08, SD=0.82, respectively. The data show that teachers did not view code-switching as good or bad in EFL classrooms.

### *Teacher Code-Switching's Functions*

Another descriptive statistic test was carried out to identify the function of code-switching utilized by teachers in EFL classrooms. The test findings are shown in Table 6.

As shown in Table 6, most teachers agreed to the use of code-switching between Vietnamese and English in their English lessons for specific purposes, with an overall mean of 3.90 and SD=0.50. It is shown when the mean scores are arranged from 3.50 to 4.30 with different SDs. Specifically, teachers tend to utilize code-switching to get students' attention (M=4.10, SD=0.74), the explicate meaning of vocabulary and sentences (M=3.90, SD=0.74), teach grammar effectively (M=4.30, SD=0.82), translate referential words (M=4.00, SD=0.47), organize tasks (M=3.70, SD=0.82), manage classes (M=3.50, SD=0.71), reduce student anxiety (M=4.00, SD=0.94), and increase students' confidence and motivation to learn English (M=4.20, SD=0.92). Nevertheless, some teachers responded with an impartial view regarding

code-switching, stating, "I convey stories or jokes by using code-switching" (M=3.40, SD=1.08). The results mean that teachers apply code-switching to teach lesson content, manage tasks and the classroom, and encourage learners.

**Table 6**

Teacher code-switching' s functions

| | n | M | S.D. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **3.90** | **0.50** |
| I draw attention by using code-switching. | 10 | 4.10 | 0.74 |
| To clarify the meaning of terms and phrases, I employ code-switching. | 10 | 3.90 | 0.74 |
| I utilize code-switching to effectively teach grammar. | 10 | 4.30 | 0.82 |
| I employ code-switching for translating referential words. | 10 | 4.00 | 0.47 |
| I manage tasks for class using code-switching. | 10 | 3.70 | 0.82 |
| I practice code-switching to keep the classroom orderly. | 10 | 3.50 | 0.71 |
| I convey stories or jokes by using code-switching. | 10 | 3.40 | 1.08 |
| I implement code-switching to help students feel less anxious when studying English. | 10 | 4.00 | 0.94 |
| I employ code-switching to boost learners' confidence and drive to learn English. | 10 | 4.20 | 0.92 |

The semi-structured interview was conducted with five teachers who have taught English for more than 3 years and participated in the previous survey. After transcribing the interview recording, many interesting insights emerged, highlighting a positive attitude toward code-switching in English classes. First, all the teachers (5 out of 5) agreed that code-switching is a good way for students to overcome difficulties while learning English.

> *Yes. It is a good way to help students understand lesson content swiftly when students' English proficiency is inadequate. (T2)*

> *Yes. It will be a great method for diverse-competent classes in which some students cannot comprehend the lesson, and for which 100% English is used to teach. (T3)*

The majority of teachers, 80%, preferred to teach grammatical structures in Vietnamese to enhance students' comprehension. They believed it was better to use Vietnamese to make the grammar explicit, as speaking entirely in English may lead to misunderstandings among students with varying levels of English proficiency.

Four out of five teachers used the same speech, with natural code-switching. As students show their lesson incomprehension, teachers switch the language to help students access the content more readily, or when they show distraction, teachers use it to regain students' attention. Meanwhile, the other said that he plans to switch the language.

> *Yes, I have plans when I change the language in my classes. In vocabulary or grammar lessons, since I consider words, word groups, or grammar points difficult to explain and teach in English, I code-switch to increase the effectiveness of the lesson content. (T2)*

In terms of student code-switching, teachers said that students prefer to code-switch because of the following reasons: filling conversation gaps, maintaining the flow of communication, limiting English competence, expressing ideas more easily, forgetting target words, being afraid

of inaccuracy, communicating with peers, being a habit of changing languages in communication, and lacking English rules from teachers.

> *When students want to keep conversations going, they hold up the flow because of the fear of using the wrong word or mispronouncing it. (T1)*
>
> *I think students code-switch because of a lack of vocabulary, not knowing how to express or pronounce in English, and fear of making mistakes. Besides, students use it in groups of the same level or talk to classmates. (T2)*
>
> *Students have a habit of switching. There is a lack of rules for using English in class from teachers to students. (T4)*

Based on the teaching experience, the teachers presented various advantages of code-switching for teachers and students. For students, code-switching helps them absorb lessons more easily, reduces anxiety, increases motivation, and conveys ideas more effectively; meanwhile, it aids teachers in saving time and helps the class run smoothly. Although the teachers employ code-switching in their EFL classes, they consider several factors when using it, such as frequency of use, students' language proficiency, students' attitudes, L1 and L2 speech types, cultural dimensions, essential situations, and language for instruction.

> *I consider the students' abilities. (T1)*
>
> *I will consider the students' attitudes, nuances, and the nature of the lesson. I look at their facial expressions to see whether they understand the lesson. If they do not understand, I will code-switch. (T2)*
>
> *When code-switching, I will pay attention to cultural factors to find relevant words for students to understand. (T4)*
> *I consider using it when it is necessary. For classroom commands, I must use English. (T5).*

The teachers had the same idea: they always encourage students to use English more frequently than Vietnamese through diverse activities such as pair and group discussions, classroom communication, asking questions, and praise by speech or awards. However, when students need support, they may consider code-switching. Besides the benefits of code-switching, all the teachers agreed that code-switching in EFL classrooms will cause students' improper language use, overuse, and over-dependence on their mother tongue.

> *Yes. It should be used sparingly. If teachers use it too frequently, students will become accustomed to it, leading to ineffective communication in real-life contexts. (T3)*
>
> *Yes. Students will depend on L1, preventing them from thinking and reasoning in English. (T4)*
>
> *Yes. Students cannot think to understand when teachers use L2. (T5)*

Apart from these problems, the teachers acknowledged that code-switching may cause several disadvantages. For students, code-switching makes them encounter language disorders and be passive and dependent on the teacher's translation. Furthermore, it decreases the effectiveness of communication, and English thinking, makes grammatical mistakes, develops bad language

habits, and slows the development of language skills. Two out of five teachers said that using code-switching frequently is unprofessional in EFL classrooms. In line with this opinion, a teacher said that she tried her best to explain the grammatical structure in English and to limit the use of the mother tongue in the EFL classroom.

> *I tend to explain the structure in L2 as briefly as possible; however, if the class is still unclear, I will use L1 to clarify or check their understanding. (T5)*

Nevertheless, most of the teachers (4 out of 5) acknowledged that they had not provided any guidance or advice on how to control students' use of code-switching in the classroom. What is more, 80% of the teachers said that they do not feel ashamed when changing languages during teaching. And one expressed feeling ashamed of switching languages for instruction. But in general, 100% of the teachers shared the view that they should be allowed to practice code-switching as a teaching technique.

## Discussion

To investigate students' and teachers' attitudes toward code-switching and identify the functions of student and teacher code-switching, questionnaires were distributed to two groups of participants. Then, a semi-structured interview was conducted with teachers. The results revealed that the majority of participants held favorable attitudes toward code-switching in EFL classrooms, consistent with the findings of Dar et al. (2014), Fareed et al. (2016), Horasan (2014), Patmasari et al. (2022), and Selamat (2014).

### *Students' Attitudes toward Using Code-Switching*

From the survey regarding students' attitudes toward code-switching in classrooms, several insights emerged. Firstly, regarding cognitive attitudes, a majority of students acknowledged the benefits of code-switching for language acquisition, aligning with Selamat (2014), who noted its positive impact on learning. Students reported that code-switching helped them focus better and minimized distractions, supporting findings by Horasan (2014) and Selamat (2014) that indicated such practices enhanced concentration and facilitated understanding of lesson content.

Code-switching also enabled effective communication among peers, as highlighted by Lee (2006, as cited in Rahmatova & Qurbonova, 2018), who noted its role in fostering participation in dialogue. Conversely, challenges arose when teachers did not employ code-switching, as students struggled to grasp new vocabulary and concepts, contradicting Rahmatova and Qurbonova's (2018) assertion that code-switching adversely affected comprehension.

On the affective side, students expressed confidence and motivation regarding code-switching and viewed it as a beneficial practice for emotional expression in language learning. This finding diverged from Fareed et al. (2016), who argued that students gained self-assurance and motivation primarily from their teachers' code-switching practices. However, Rahmatova and Qurbonova (2018) indicated that code-switching effectively communicated students' emotions, reinforcing its significance in the affective domain. Regarding behavioral intention, students exhibited neutrality toward restricting the use of their mother tongue and toward the exclusive

use of English in lessons, which contrasted with Horasan's (2014) findings advocating for code-switching in educational settings.

### *Student Code-Switching's Functions*

The functions of student code-switching align with Selamat's (2014) findings, which showed that students frequently switch languages when they are unable to interact with counterparts on complex topics. These observations were confirmed by Greggio and Gil's (2007) research, which supported the notion that language switching addresses proficiency challenges and enhances conversational dynamics. In contrast, Horasan (2014) noted that students also code-switched to reflect on their learning and grammatical discussions. Furthermore, students indicated that code-switching mitigated misinterpretation, which echoed Eldridge's (1996, as cited in Sert, 2005) claim that it helps control intentions and avoid conflicts. However, the study underscores a limitation by focusing solely on communication contexts, suggesting the need for future research to explore additional scenarios in which code-switching occurs.

### *Teachers' Attitudes toward Using Code-Switching*

From the analysis of teacher questionnaire responses, diverse perceptions regarding code-switching in teaching English were identified. Most teachers recognized its benefits for both EFL teachers and students, which was consistent with prior studies that endorse code-switching as an effective teaching strategy (Dar et al., 2014; Selamat, 2014). Regardless, many educators also voiced concerns about the drawbacks of using the first language, particularly regarding language separation, lesson quality, the availability of native instructors, and student concentration. This aligned with Selamat's (2014) findings among teachers, who held differing views on the negative effects of code-switching on language acquisition. Dar et al. (2014) echoed this sentiment, indicating that frequent code-switching may limit students' exposure to English. Furthermore, research by Patmasari et al. (2022) found that teachers often reduce code-switching to maintain an English-speaking environment. As indicated in the interview, teachers expressed ambivalence about the impact of code-switching, with some feeling embarrassed by its use and considering it unprofessional, while others reported no such feelings. Regarding their future intentions, teachers indicated planned instances for code-switching, particularly in vocabulary and grammar lessons, to clarify complex concepts. This practice was affirmed by Rahmatova and Qurbonova (2018), who suggested that code-switching is beneficial for elucidating the target language and explaining grammatical structures.

### *Teacher Code-Switching's Functions*

The study suggested functions of teacher code-switching in EFL classrooms, and the majority agreed. In comparison with the types of functions of teacher code-switching presented by Canagarajah (1995, as cited in Selamat, 2014), Ferguson (2003), Mattson and Burenhult (1999, as cited in Sert, 2015), the current study demonstrated that teachers used code-switching to access curriculum, manage classrooms, and build interpersonal relations. In other words, code-switching is significant for English teachers in many ways. Nevertheless, the result differed from Horasan's (2014) finding, which showed that teachers code-switched to tell jokes, whereas in this study, teachers took a neutral stance toward it.

In-depth interviews with teachers revealed that students often switch languages in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms due to their English proficiency, communication challenges, and classroom problem-solving difficulties. Although teachers acknowledged the benefits of code-switching in language teaching, as noted by Lee (2006, cited in Rahmatova & Qurbonova, 2018) and Shafi et al. (2020), they expressed concern over multiple factors when implementing it. Teachers preferred that students use English predominantly because code-switching was found to negatively affect second-language acquisition, including diminished communication quality, delayed English-language thinking, reliance on teacher translations, and the development of poor conversational habits. These concerns echoed the findings of Rahmatova and Qurbonova (2018) regarding effective communication. However, this perspective contrasts with the neutral stance reported by Pham and Nguyen (2024), who suggested that code-switching should be permitted in EFL classrooms. It was also similar to Horasan (2014) and Selamat (2014), many teachers feel that code-switching should not be entirely prohibited but rather adopted as a strategic tool in teaching. The report highlighted the lack of pedagogical guidance for teachers on managing language alternation, indicating a clear need for future attention in this area.

The study provides insights into code-switching between EFL teachers and English-major sophomores in EFL classes in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. It highlights the advantages of code-switching as a strategy for second language acquisition and for enhancing educational outcomes for both educators and learners. Furthermore, the research identifies existing factors influencing code-switching practices and suggests avenues for further investigation. Ultimately, it serves as a foundation for developing effective code-switching methodologies in educational contexts, encouraging instructors to consider pedagogical strategies that facilitate optimal student engagement and learning outcomes.

## Conclusion

The study investigated the attitudes of English-majored students and EFL teachers towards code-switching in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Findings indicated a general favorability towards code-switching, viewed as a beneficial strategy for both learning and teaching EFL. Students reported that code-switching assists in effective communication, enhances their understanding of lessons, and increases their interest, motivation, and confidence in language learning. The primary function of student code-switching was identified as facilitating communication.

Teachers also acknowledged the positive aspects of code-switching, noting its role in improving students' learning experiences. However, they raised concerns about its potential disadvantages for language acquisition and their discomfort with its use in classrooms. Despite these reservations, teachers expressed a desire to incorporate code-switching as a teaching method to enhance comprehension, manage classroom dynamics, and foster interactions. The findings highlighted positive attitudes from both students and teachers across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Nonetheless, it sparked the need for training programs that promote effective pedagogical practices involving code-switching, thereby creating a more relaxed and

productive classroom environment.

Nonetheless, the research had limitations, particularly a small sample size and a brief research period, which limited the ability to gain a deeper understanding of attitudes toward code-switching. The teacher questionnaire also lacked elements related to behavioral and emotional aspects of attitudes, leaving insights into feelings and behaviors regarding language switching unexplored. To address this, interviews with students are recommended to provide greater insight into teacher-student code-switching beyond questionnaire data. Besides, future research should broaden the stakeholder participant pool and investigate policies or training programs that help teachers use code-switching effectively in classrooms. Additionally, subsequent studies could include a broader context for students' code-switching, extend the research period, and compare code-switching frequency across contexts, such as rural versus urban EFL classes, while also examining factors influencing students' and teachers' attitudes toward code-switching. The enhanced questionnaires are suggested to capture these attitudinal dimensions more comprehensively.

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## Biodata

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