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Principal Contact

Associate Professor Dr. Pham Vu Phi Ho

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Email: editor@i-jli.org or ijli.editorial@gmail.com

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A Note from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear authors and colleagues,

I am glad to offer to you the most recent edition of our prestigious publication, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2024. This issue contains a variety of interesting research papers that explore various aspects of English language instruction in Vietnam.

First and foremost, I want to thank the editorial team for their hard work in ensuring the publication's quality and timeliness. Their dedication and skill were vital in bringing this issue to conclusion.

I would also like to convey my heartfelt gratitude to the reviewers for devoting their time and expertise to thoroughly reviewing the entries. Their critical criticism and careful examination have substantially helped to maintain our journal's intellectual standards.

Last but not least, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the authors whose contributions constitute the foundation of this issue. Your commitment to increasing knowledge in the field of English language teaching is admirable, and I welcome your efforts to undertake relevant research and share your findings with the academic community.

We are pleased to present a varied range of papers that address current concerns in English language teaching and learning. From studying the difficulties faced by EFL postgraduate students in academic writing to investigating the advantages of teaching English to children in virtual classes, each piece provides unique insights and contributes to the continuing debate in the subject.

Thanks God for everything!

With warm regards,



Associate Professor Dr. Pham Vu Phi Ho
Editor-in-chief
Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, Vietnam

Problems with Academic Writing Encountered by EFL Postgraduate Students at a University in the Mekong Delta

Ho Thi Le Uyen^{1*}

¹ Tra Vinh University, Tra Vinh, Vietnam

*Corresponding author's email: hothileuyen1905@gmail.com

*  <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1869-1225>

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: academic writing, problems, postgraduate students

This small-scale survey aimed to investigate the frequent problems of EFL postgraduate students in academic writing. The subjects were 37 postgraduate students studying theand methodology of English language teaching major at a University in the Mekong Delta. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data in this study. The results of the questionnaires suggest that reference and citation, coherence and cohesion, plagiarism and paraphrasing, lexical, and grammatical problems are EFL postgraduate students' problems in academic writing. The results from semi-structured interviews indicated a variety of factors contributed to those problems. They are the difference between English and their mother tongue, lack of academic writing knowledge and experience, lack of understanding of the topic, and reference material. Realizing the existence of problems, EFL postgraduate students can find ways to overcome them. Besides that, lecturers and instructors can base on the problems and the reasons for problems to use appropriate teaching methods, approaches, and styles to support EFL postgraduate students in academic writing and minimize their problems.

Introduction

Language is considered a means to express thoughts, views, and ideas to communicate between individuals. Because it plays a role as the official language of more than 53 countries all around the world, English is believed to be a global language. Therefore, teaching and learning English increasingly play an essential role in the teaching and learning process.

English is one of the fundamental disciplines taught in schools. The Ministry of Education's Curriculum Specifications outline the four abilities that students must possess in three domains of language use: interpersonal, informational, and artistic (MOET, 2020, as cited in Phan, 2023). When learning English, students are taught four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL)

students, writing is one of the most essential and challenging skills. According to Klimova (2013), writing skills are vital in expanding other language skills, and metacognitive and writing skills are the most complicated skills to acquire in a foreign language. Kusumaningrum et al. (2019) stated that Writing is such a challenging and complex skill because it requires students to integrate a number of aspects, such as the topic, the goal of writing, and the intended readers (as cited in Vo, 2022). It is the most challenging linguistic skill to learn. Hence, learning writing must be sufficient in the English learning process.

One of the most significant types of writing is academic writing, especially for post-college education, where students' essay writing is the tool to evaluate students' achievement. According to Geyte (2013), academic writing is a formal kind written by scholars and used in college, post-college classes, and scholarly publications. Academic writing is also crucial because of its role in the students' learning and writing of research papers. Academic writing, particularly research writing, is often the means to decide whether students can graduate. For postgraduate students, academic writing is imperative, not only for proposals and theses but also for course assignments. Through academic writing skills, ideas and knowledge are imparted during the learning process and utilized in the logical style of thinking. Although English is required in Vietnam's schools, higher education students need help learning the language's writing conventions. They are learning English academic writing in Vietnam's higher education in general and post-college education, and they encounter obstacles that hinder students from academic writing to reach their professional goals successfully. Even if they are actively engaged in learning academic writing and using various writing exercises in their assignments, students still struggle with writing academically. As a result, most postgraduate students find it difficult to enhance their academic writing skills and face various problems in their writing despite their numerous years of learning English.

Literature Review

Academic writing

According to Al Fadda (2012), one of the fundamentals of academic writing is the ability of the students to locate pertinent references and analyze them to synthesize the many thoughts and perspectives to find their own voice. That means students can write their own words by exploiting others' views and then indicate from where those views have been taken. It differs from daily writing in that it has particular features, follows a specific format, uses more academic vocabulary and complicated phrases, and develops the argument logically while considering the intended audience. It can be in many forms: essays, journal articles, small scales, research proposals, theses, etc. Academic writing can be essays, literature reviews, research proposals, and research papers, particularly for students.

Students' problems with academic writing

Although academic writing is essential in higher education and post-college, there are problems for students to achieve. Language aspects such as grammatical errors and lack of vocabulary, expressing the writer's ideas, developing argumentations, writing critically, Coherence and cohesion, paraphrasing and plagiarism, and references and citations are students' problems in

academic writing.

Lexical problems

In terms of academic writing, errors related to the lexicon are the most frequent problems that EFL students commit (Abdulkareem, 2013; Al-Khairi, 2013). Students need a vocabulary size for them to function effectively in their writing. Alharbi (2017) finds out that in the vocabulary aspect, using appropriate vocabulary is the most problematic component in academic writing. Within the limited vocabulary, students will be unable to express their opinions freely and correctly. Lusta (2012) mentioned that using inappropriate vocabulary was the main error in EFL students' academic writing. Basir et al. (2015) stated that lexical errors in academic essays, wrong word choice, omission/incompletion, and misspellings were the most frequent errors made by EFL students.

Grammatical problems

Besides lexicon, grammar is a fundamental aspect of creating good writing. Mohammed and Abdalhussein (2015) investigated that the students make errors in tenses, prepositions, articles, active and passive voice, verbs, and morphological errors, including prepositions, in their writing. Anh et al. (2022) confirmed that articles, prepositions, plural/singular forms, tenses, passive voice, and subject-verb agreement were grammatical errors in the academic writing of EFL students. Academic writing, Tenses, adverbs, and pronouns were the most frequent grammatical errors in the academic writing of EFL students (Atashian & Al-Bahri, 2018).

Coherence and cohesion problems

Cohesion and Coherence are crucial components of academic writing's structure because they affect the text's readability and logical flow. Although students know the significance of Coherence and cohesion in academic writing, they reveal that it is quite hard to accomplish. Ahmed (2010) mentioned that students find writing the introduction, topic sentences, thesis statement, and conclusion challenging. Aguib and Bouaziz (2017) found that misuse, overuse, and ambiguity in using coherent and cohesive devices were the frequent problems that EFL students committed.

Plagiarism and paraphrasing problems

Good academic writing demands a variety of resources; the writers copy source documents without appropriate citation guides to plagiarism. Paraphrasing is an appropriate technique for students to avoid plagiarism and increase academic writing skills. Academic theft (plagiarism) occurs when we fail to credit other authors' contributions to current writing appropriately. However, that aspect is challenging for students to achieve. Loh (2013) presented that the students faced problems with grammar structures because of using synonyms without sentence structure changes and misunderstanding the original texts. Na and Mai (2017) stated that using synonyms to paraphrase without sentence structure changes, misunderstanding of original texts, and the lack of vocabulary to paraphrase were the problems in the academic writing of EFL students.

Reference and citation problems

Academic writing requires many resources and documents; therefore, using them appropriately is indispensable. Consulting various resources is necessary; however, writers must pay attention to academic crime, which is plagiarism. According to Lamptey and Atta-Obeng (2012), in terms of reference, using weak sources, inconsistencies in reference citations, and using various citation styles were the main problems in academic writing. Citation is the way writers report to the readers that certain documents used in their work came from other authors. It can be seen as a means to give credit to other authors whose ideas are paraphrased in current academic texts. To Shanmugam (2009), citation styles' poor accuracy and dependency on sources were the problems in academic writing citations.

Factors causing problems in academic writing

Each language has its own system, and there are differences between different languages. And it cannot deny the influence of the mother tongue on English language writing. Mohammed and Abdalhussein (2015) mention that grammatical and linguistic systems of the mother tongue affect EFL students' written production in the target language, which is the main reason for almost all grammatical errors in academic writing. In addition, the difference between EFL students' mother tongue and English language alphabet and writing style causes problems in academic writing (Al-Fadda, 2012).

Knowledge of a language is essential to language learning, especially in writing. Hence, a lack of English language knowledge is the main cause of most problems in English writing. Particularly, lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, misunderstanding of grammatical usage, and word-by-word translation are major factors causing EFL students' problems in academic writing (Arunsamran et al., 2011). For Al-Mukdad (2019), one of the reasons for problems in EFL students' academic writing is their awareness of the differences between academic and general English writing.

Besides that, practice is one of the good ways to enhance English writing. For this reason, a lack of academic writing practice opportunities is the main factor of EFL students' problems (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022). The problems in academic writing are influenced by a lack of knowledge about the conventions of academic writing and previous experience of writing academically (Al-Badi, 2015). Alharbi (2017) states that the habit of writing in English is a source of EFL students' problems in academic writing.

Research gap

There are several research studies in the world to investigate problems in academic writing (Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010; Al-Fadda, 2012; Abdulkareem, 2013; Al-Khairi, 2013; Al Badi, 2015; Alharbi, 2017; Kotamjani et al., 2018). These studies emphasized the problems, and few mentioned the reasons for problems in academic writing (Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010; Al-Fadda, 2012). There are few studies in the context of Vietnam (Anh et al., 2022; Thuy et al., 2022); however, they focus on several specific fields of problems, word choice, or grammatical problems. In the studies in the Vietnamese context, the factors causing the problems in academic writing were not discovered. This study aims to fill the blank that investigates the wide field of problems in the academic writing of postgraduate students in the Vietnam context, including

lexical and grammatical errors, Coherence and cohesion, plagiarism and paraphrasing, and references and citations. Besides focusing on the problems, this study also focuses on the causes of problems.

Research Questions

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

What are the frequent problems in the academic writing of EFL postgraduate students at a university in the Mekong Delta?

What are the factors that contribute to EFL postgraduate students' problems in academic writing?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The participants in this study are studying at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam, which has a total of 24 majors for post-college. Particularly, more than 50 postgraduate students in the Theory and Methodology of English language teaching major were admitted to the university after passing the entrance examination each year. In this major, the teaching staff consisted of over 20 teachers. Postgraduate students must use English in almost all courses except for Philosophy. Most of the final assignments are academic essays.

37 EFL postgraduate students at Tra Vinh University aged 22 to 40 were the participants in this study. All of them are Theory and Methodology of English language teaching major students and completed an Academic writing course consisting of 3 credits at school. They are required to conduct a study in the English language to graduate.

Design of the Study

The case study using a mixed-methods design was conducted to investigate EFL postgraduate students' frequent problems in academic writing and the reasons for those problems. For Fraenkel et al. (2012), mixed-methods research consists of qualitative and quantitative methods. A mixed-method design allows the relationship between variables to be clarified, explained, and explored in depth (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Quantitative data from the questionnaire was used to collect data on EFL postgraduate students' frequent problems in academic writing.

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews was used to follow up on the questionnaire and discover the reasons why postgraduate students face those problems. The interview involves open questions in which the participants can freely share their views and opinions (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017).

Data collection & analysis

The questionnaire adapted from Amiri and Puteh (2017) consists of two main sections, biodata and 26 Likert items, and is divided into five factors. The format of a five-point Likert-scale type ranges from (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly agree. Four factors, namely Lexical problems (items 1-3), Grammatical problems (items 4-9), Coherence

and cohesion problems (items 10- 15), Reference and citation problems (items 16-22), and Plagiarism and paraphrasing problems (items 23-26).

The questionnaires were sent to 40 EFL postgraduate students in the third week of the study. After two weeks, all questionnaires were gathered. Data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed through SPSS version 25.0. Then, the Descriptive Statistics Test, including mean scores (M) and standard deviation (SD), were processed to answer EFL postgraduate students' frequent problems in academic writing. In this study, M and SD can show the participants' awareness of the factors and items. After gathering the questionnaire, 12 participants were chosen randomly for the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were in Vietnamese, starting with open-ended questions based on the questionnaire and continuing with explorative questions to clarify what participants said.

Data collected from semi-structured interviews were analyzed to answer both research questions 1 and 2. There are 28 questions in the face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The record of each interview was transcribed. Then, the transcripts were translated into English, read carefully, and coded using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). Due to the similarities and differences, the participants' answers were gathered into themes. Four key themes were the differences between English language and EFL students' mother tongue, lack of academic writing knowledge and experience, lack of knowledge of the topic, and difficulties in finding reference material.

Results/Findings

Research question 1: What are the frequent problems in the academic writing of EFL postgraduate students at a university in the Mekong Delta?

Table 1

Frequent problems in academic writing of EFL postgraduate students

	Factor	n	M	S.D.
1	Lexical Problems	37	3.0	.935
2	Grammatical problems	37	2.8	.970
3	Coherence and cohesion problems	37	4.1	.709
4	Reference and citation problems	37	4.2	.610
5	Plagiarism and paraphrasing problems	37	4.1	.683

As seen in Table 1, there are differences among the five factors in problems in academic writing that postgraduate students face. Their rating differs significantly, as shown by the standard deviation ($SD > .6$). As can be seen from the Mean (M), the factor with the highest Mean (M) was reference and citation problems. That means postgraduate students face problems in this factor most frequently. They were followed by the group of two factors, coherence and cohesion

problems ($M = 4.1$, $SD = .709$), plagiarism and paraphrasing problems ($M = 4.1$, $SD = .683$). That means the problems in Coherence, cohesion, plagiarism, and paraphrasing were the problems that EFL postgraduate students frequently face with in academic writing—then followed by lexical problems ($M = 3.0$, $SD = .935$). It can be considered that problems related to lexicon were the third group of problems that EFL postgraduate students frequently face with. Lastly, the factors with the lowest Mean (M) were grammatical problems ($M = 2.8$, $SD = .970$). It can be understood that the problems in grammar were the problems that FFL postgraduate students less frequently face in academic writing.

Table 2

Frequent problems in term of reference and citation

	Items	n	M	S.D.
1	I make the reference list with the wrong format.	37	4.3	.588
2	I make the reference list with insufficient details of sources cited in the text.	37	4.4	.639
3	I make the reference list with inconsistency among details.	37	4.4	.594
4	I wrote incorrect elements of reference list entries.	37	4.3	.560
5	I write incomplete recordings of elements of reference list entries.	37	4.4	.676
6	I use more than one reporting verb for citing a quotation.	37	4.1	.918
7	I write direct quotations without the quotation mark.	37	3.7	1.045

In general, from the mean score (see Table 2), it can be said that EFL postgraduate students totally agree with the items in this factor. Specifically, they strongly agree with the idea and assert that they make the reference list with insufficient details of sources cited in the text (item 2, $M = 4.4$, $SD = .639$), make the reference list with inconsistency among details (item 3, $M = 4.4$, $SD = .594$), and write incomplete recording of elements of references list entries (item 5, $M = 4.4$, $SD = .676$). Followed by the lower mean score ($M = 4.3$), they verified that they made the reference list with the wrong format (item 1, $SD = .588$) and wrote incorrect elements of reference list entries (item 4, $SD = .560$). In addition, they also agree that they use more than one reporting verb for citing a quotation (item 6, $M = 4.1$, $SD = 918$). In this factor, EFL postgraduate students least agree with writing direct quotations without the quotation mark (item 7, $M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.045$).

Table 3

Frequent problems in terms of Coherence and cohesion

	Items	n	M	S.D.
1	I find it difficult to write coherent paragraphs.	37	4.2	.908
2	I find it difficult to use appropriate cohesive devices.	37	4.1	.954
3	I write irrelevant support sentences to topic sentences.	37	4.0	.833
4	I write a different idea in the conclusion.	37	4.1	.906
5	I write details that are not consistent with the points stated in the statement.	37	4.2	.750
6	I write meaningless/unclear statements.	37	4.2	.672

As can be seen from Table 3, the Mean (M) of all six items is 4.0. It can be concluded that EFL postgraduate students strongly agree that coherence and cohesion are their frequent problems in academic writing. Particularly, they agree that writing coherent paragraphs is difficult (item 1, $M = 4.2$, $SD = .908$). With the same mean score, they also agree that they write inconsistent details with points stated in the statement (item 5, $M = 4.2$, $SD = .750$) and write meaningless or unclear statements in their writing (item 6, $M = 4.2$, $SD = .672$). With the lower mean score, EFL postgraduate students confirm that they find it difficult to use appropriate cohesive devices (item 2, $M = 4.1$, $SD = .954$). Besides that, they also agree that they write irrelevant support sentences to topic sentences (item 3, $M = 4.0$, $SD = .833$).

Table 4

Frequent problems in term of Plagiarism and paraphrasing

	Items	n	M	S.D.
1	I use synonyms without sentence structure changes when paraphrasing.	37	4.2	.764
2	I change the meaning of the original text when paraphrasing uncaringly.	37	4.2	.760
3	I decreased ideas/important information in the original text when paraphrasing.	37	4.1	.848
4	I add more ideas/information are not stated in the original text when paraphrasing.	37	4.0	.763

With a broad view, the mean score shows that EFL postgraduate students strongly agree with all items in this factor (see Table 4). With the highest mean score ($M = 4.2$), they confirm that they use synonyms without sentence structure changes when paraphrasing (item 1, $SD = .764$)

and they also change the meaning of the original text when paraphrasing uncaringly (item 2, $SD = 760$). Next, they agree that they decreased ideas or essential information in the original text when paraphrasing (item 3, $M = 4.1$, $SD = .848$)—in contrast, adding more ideas or information that are not stated in the original text when paraphrasing (item 4, $M = 4.0$, $SD = .763$) is also agreed by EFL postgraduate student.

Table 5

Frequent problems in term of Lexicon

	Items	n	M	S.D.
1	I face problems in word choice.	37	3.7	1.106
2	I face problems in capitalization.	37	3.8	.877
3	I face problems in using word form.	37	3.7	.990

As shown in Table 5, EFL postgraduate students have different thoughts about the items in this factor. Specifically, they agree that they face problems capitalizing needed words (item 2, $M = 3.8$, $SD = .877$). They also agree that they face problems in making word choices (item 1, $M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.106$) and they face problems in using word form (item 3, $M = 3.7$, $SD = .980$).

Table 6

Frequent problems in term of Grammar

	Items	n	M	S.D.
1	I face problems in using articles.	37	2.8	1.101
2	I face problems in using prepositions.	37	2.9	1.031
3	I face problems in using verb tense.	37	2.8	1.058
4	I face problems in sentence structure.	37	2.8	1.050
5	I face problems in subject-verb agreement.	37	2.8	1.175
6	I face problems in word order.	37	2.8	1.167

The mean score in the Table 6 shows that EFL postgraduate students neither agree nor disagree with the idea of the items in this factor. With all mean score (M) lower than 3.0, it can be concluded that using prepositions (item 2, $M = 2.9$, $SD = 1.031$), using articles (item 1, $M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.101$), using verb tense (item 3, $M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.058$), writing appropriate structure of structure (item 4, $M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.050$), subject-verb agreement rules (item 5, $M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.175$) and making order of words (item 6, $M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.167$) are not the frequent problems of EFL postgraduate students in academic writing.

Research question 2: What factors contributed to EFL postgraduate students' problems in academic writing?

The results from the second part of the semi-structured interviews show the EFL postgraduate students' opinion on the reasons for frequent problems in academic writing. Four factors identified include [1] The differences between English language and EFL postgraduate mother tongue, [2] Lack of academic writing knowledge and experience, [3] Lack of knowledge of the topic, and [4] The difficulties in finding reference material.

Factor 1: The differences between English language and EFL postgraduate mother tongue

When asked about the reasons for participants' problems in academic writing, 5 of 12 participants agreed that the differences between the English language and their mother tongue is one of the reasons for their problems in writing for academic purposes. For instance:

There is no article in Vietnamese, sometimes, I do not use or use wrong article when writing a sentence in English. (S3, interview extract)

There are differences between Vietnamese and English in word order in a sentence, so when I think and write a sentence in Vietnamese and then translate it into English, sometimes I make mistakes with word order. (S6, interview extract)

In Vietnamese, the word is kept intact when appearing with various subjects, while in English, the verb is changed to belong to the subject and tense, when translating my ideas into English, I make mistakes with this. (S10, interview extract)

Factor 2: Lack of academic writing knowledge and experience

All of 12 participants expressed that a lack of academic writing knowledge and experience is the cause of their problems in academic writing. In particular:

Since I had never written academically before joining the MA course, I am unfamiliar with the conventions of academic writing. (S2, interview extract)

Do not comprehend the knowledge related to academic writing led me to many plagiarism problems. (S3, interview extract)

Without experience in writing academically, I usually use synonyms when paraphrasing. However, some words in the original text cannot be replaced, which can lead to plagiarism. (S4, interview extract)

When writing an essay, I am petrified of plagiarism, I feel tentative when paraphrasing because I not have much time to practice writing academically. (S11, interview extract)

Because I do not have the knowledge of academic writing and do not use academic writing in my work frequently, I think this is why I face problems in analyzing the writing requirements. (S12, interview extract)

Factor 3: Lack of knowledge of the topic

8 of 12 participants were concerned that lack of the topic's knowledge is the rationale of the problems they faced in academic writing. For example:

Writing about the topic is difficult when I do not understand it clearly. (S5, interview extract)

I cite unrelated ideas in my writing because I do not comprehend the topic.

Without understanding the topic, it led me to write inappropriate titles with the requirement of the writing task. (S7, interview extract)

Because of many document sources from Google Scholar, I cite the wrong information of the topic when I do not understand what I am writing. (S9, interview extract)

I feel unconfident when writing about a topic that I am unfamiliar. I am scared that I will give wrong or missing information. (S12, interview extract)

Factor 4: Reference material

5 of 12 participants mentioned the difficulties in finding reference materials when asked about the cause of their problems in academic writing. For instance:

Many reference materials on the internet make it difficult to choose a reliable source to cite in my writing. (S6, interview extract)

I find it difficult to consider whether the reference material source is reliable because of the large number of them on the the internet. (S8, interview extract)

Reference materials like journals and articles contain an academic vocabulary, they are difficult for me to understand. (S12, interview extract)

Discussion

Research question 1: What are the frequent problems in the academic writing of EFL postgraduate students at a university in the Mekong Delta?

Academic writing is believed to be a complicated process, and EFL students face problems when writing academically. The results of the study showed that EFL postgraduate students encounter coherence, cohesion, reference, citation, plagiarism, paraphrasing, lexical, and grammatical problems in academic writing. It was proved by the mean score of participants' responses. The finding of this study reinforces many previous research studies, such as Al-Khasawneh and Maher (2010), Fahmida (2010), Kotamjani et al. (2018), Mohammad et al. (2018), and Mohamed (2021).

According to Fahmida (2010), EFL students make two main types of errors in academic writing: lexical and grammatical errors. The results of this study presented that in terms of grammar, EFL postgraduate students encountered problems in using prepositions most frequently. This result is consistent with the study of Mohammed and Abdalhussein (2015) that prepositions constitute the most problematic area for EFL students. However, in the study of Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2020), prepositions had the lowest percentage values of grammatical errors in academic writing. Kotamjani et al. (2018) also found that using appropriate academic lexical was the most difficult area in academic writing; besides that, writing a coherent paragraph is difficult for EFL students. In the lexicon aspect, this study presented that EFL postgraduate students encountered problems in capitalization and word choice. This result corroborates the

study of Lusta (2012) which indicated that EFL students face problems in using vocabulary appropriately. Likewise, Basir et al. (2015) mentioned that wrong word choice was the most common lexical error committed by students. Besides that, Amiri and Puteh (2017) indicated that capitalization was one of the four common errors that students performed. In terms of coherence and cohesion problems, the results of the current study showed that writing a coherent paragraph, writing details and statements consistently, and writing meaningful and clear statements were problematic in academic writing. The results were parallel with previous studies. Ahmed (2010) presented that writing the thesis statements and the topic sentences were the problems revealed by the students. Writing coherent paragraphs was ranked as the most difficult area in academic writing (Kotamijani, Abd-Samad & Fahimirad, 2018). As Al-Khasawneh and Maher (2010) stated the main difficulties in academic writing of postgraduate students are grammar, vocabulary, referencing, organization of ideas, spelling, and register. In the aspect of reference and citation problems in academic writing, the current study pointed out that making the reference list with sufficient details of sources cited in the text, making the reference list with consistency among details, and writing a complete recording of the elements in reference list entries were problematic for students. This result substantiates the study of Shanmugam (2009) that there were a large number of missing and inconsistent citations in the students' writing. From the results of the current study, it can be understood that students do not grasp the citation styles used in their writing. It supports the study of Lamptey and Atta-Obeng (2012) which stated that EFL postgraduate students faced problems in mastering reference style format, and they could not identify the citation format they used. In terms of plagiarism and paraphrasing problems, the current study indicated that students frequently paraphrase the original text by using synonyms while not changing the sentence structure and they change the meaning of the original text. This result reinforces the study of Na and Mai (2017), that students regularly used synonyms when paraphrasing, but infrequently altered the syntactic structure, and the students ran into several language-related problems, including poor comprehension of the source material and a dearth of appropriate vocabulary.

Research question 2: What are the factors that contribute to EFL postgraduate students' problems in academic writing?

The findings from semi-structured interviews showed the reasons for problems in academic writing are the difference between English and their mother tongue, lack of academic writing knowledge and experience, lack of knowledge of the topic, and reference material. The finding of this study reinforces previous research studies. Such as Al-Fadda (2012), he found that the difference in alphabet and writing styles between English, and the student's mother tongue was the main cause of EFL students' difficulties in academic writing. For Vietnamese students who study English as a foreign language in their mother tongue, the use of tenses does not significantly add to the meaning of the utterances because the time reference of the phrase can be represented through the use of the words themselves, not grammatical features. Lack of knowledge and experience in academic writing is one of the causes for students' problems. Academic writing is the kind that requires various conventions and rules. That rules are for the small unit as academic vocabulary up to the way to structure the writing. Moreover, academic writing demands the correct information and have the evidence. Hence, students have to know about the topic clearly to convey information to readers, and discuss on the topic as well.

Without comprehending the topic, students can provide inappropriate ideas in their writing, and more seriously, they can write a text deviating from the subject. To obtain the knowledge of the topic, students need to read many documents about it. However, to consult the documents about the topic is complicated. Reference materials is the other reason for students' problems in academic writing. Since the various reference materials in the Internet, students find it difficult to evaluate the quality of the document to cite in their writings. Almost reference materials are also in academic writing and contain various academic vocabulary, that makes students difficult to understand the document clearly. On the other hand, current research findings were also inconsistent with the findings presented by Al-Khasawneh and Maher (2010). They discovered that students' English knowledge foundation and environment are the reasons for their problems in academic writing.

Conclusion

This study looks into the frequent problems in academic writing of Theory and Methodology of English language teaching major postgraduate students in a public university in the Mekong Delta. The result of the study indicated that the problems in reference, citation, Coherence, cohesion, plagiarism and paraphrasing were the most frequent problems, followed by the problems related to lexicon and grammar, which were the group of problems that FFL postgraduate students less frequently faced in academic writing. Moreover, the causes of these problems are the differences between the English language and students' mother tongue; students find it difficult to transfer the ideas from their mother tongue. In addition, lack of academic writing knowledge and experience, lack of knowledge of the topic, and reference material were also the reasons for students' problems in their academic writing. This study proposes several pedagogical implications with the hope of making valuable contributions in learning English language, particularly in learning English academic writing. Students should be more self-directed, actively identify their problems, and improve their academic writing. To achieve those intents, students should gather knowledge of English language, academic writing, and the topic they want to write, and repeatedly practice writing academically. Furthermore, lecturers and instructors should effectively indicate EFL students' methods and approaches in learning academic writing.

Although the research was strictly observed, some unavoidable limitations go beyond the scope of the study. This study might undergo some limitations related to the generalization because the study was conducted in a small number of participants. A similar study could have to be conducted with more participants in different courses.

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Biodata

Ho Thi Le Uyen works as a freelance private English tutor in Vietnam. She has been teaching English for two years. Currently, she is studying for a master's degree in Theory and Methodology of English language teaching major at Tra Vinh University (TVU). In the learning process, she identified that academic writing is essential. However, students still face difficulties learning and practising writing English academically. Therefore, she is interested in research topics related to learning and teaching academic writing.

Investigation into Difficulties in Public Speaking among English-majored Students at University of Phan Thiet


Nguyen Thanh Tan^{1*}, Tong Thi Truong Nhung²

¹Faculty of Fundamental Sciences, University of Architecture Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

²Faculty of Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Phan Thiet, Binh Thuan Province, Vietnam

*Corresponding author's email: tan.nguyenthanh@uah.edu.vn

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3268-7595>

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: difficulties, strategies, public speaking skills, speaking skills

The main aim of the study was to identify the difficulties in public speaking skills among English-majored students at the University of Phan Thiet. A total of 60 students were asked to participate in the research. The findings revealed that students have clear perceptions about the significant roles and the high difficulty level of public speaking skills. Furthermore, of all the difficulties students encountered when speaking in front of many people, the two most common problems were fear of making mistakes and being observed, which wore down their confidence. Based on the findings, several suggestions were made to improve students' public speaking skills. The findings in this study were also expected to be beneficial to teachers, educators, and schools in improving the experience of students when taking public speaking courses.

Introduction

Public speaking is a multifaceted skill that is useful in the workplace, academia, or public advocacy. In fact, the ability to communicate effectively is an asset that contributes to success in various areas of life, ranging from personal to professional development (Baumayer, 2018). The definition of public speaking varies, depending on different factors, namely individual perspectives, professional contexts, educational emphasis, and cultural differences. However, public speaking, in nature, requires speakers to speak in front of an audience and other types, namely, a job interview, a presentation to potential clients, a talk with a journalist, or a talk with colleagues at a trade (Lamerton, 2001). In fact, research on public speaking skills has already been extensively studied. Lucas (2009) defines public speaking as a method of publicizing your ideas with others and influencing them. Regarding the benefits of public speaking, Farrell (2011) stated that speech can be even more powerful than handwriting due to the merits of public speaking ranging from better personal satisfaction, stronger reasoning skills, better research skills, and potential career advancement to the ability to advocate for causes and more.

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Recognizing the importance of public speaking in various personal and professional contexts, numerous studies have been conducted to point out difficulties that might hinder speakers from having successful speeches. Some studies showed that speech-making ranks near the top in provoking anxiety (Baumayer, 2018; Lucas, 2009). Even a successful speaker can be nervous before making a speech due to stage fright, which is a common worry among students in public speaking courses (Boonkit, 2010). According to this author, the main causes of this situation stem from fear of judgment and a lack of confidence. The findings from a case study in the Thai context revealed that undergraduate students lost confidence in communicating in public because they were anxious about making errors, making their voices low, and shaking their hands (Boonkit, 2010). According to Forman (2005), Thai EFL students' reluctance to communicate led to a loss of natural feeling when they were speaking, resulting in a lack of confidence to perform in the medium of the target language. In another study surveying non-English major students, Tuong (2022) indicated that students found it hard to understand in English without any preparation when they were presenting in front of their class.

In Vietnam, in a study conducted by Van et al. (2021) in Ho Chi Minh University of Education to find problems in public speaking courses, the results indicated that fear was the most common barrier. However, no studies have been conducted in the context of the University of Phan Thiet. Therefore, this research was carried out to understand the current situation in terms of difficulties students faced when taking speaking courses and to see whether students at Phan Thiet University (UPT) encountered similar problems to students in other contexts. Phan Thiet is a coastal city that is home to numerous five-star hotels and resorts. If job candidates have good public speaking skills, they can easily get a good job. This means that public speaking skills are important for students at UPT after graduation. However, the reality shows that graduates suffer from public speaking anxiety, which hinders their professional growth. This study aims to delve into the specific challenges faced by the English-major students at the University of Phan Thiet, providing insights that can inform targeted teaching strategies to strengthen their public speaking proficiency. The results from this research are expected to contribute to developing courses to reduce difficulties among students in learning public speaking and to help educators create an education curriculum that is more effective in enhancing public speaking skills among students.

Research questions

This research investigates the students' difficulties in public speaking and strategies to overcome those challenges. Therefore, the research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What were students' general perceptions toward public speaking skills?
2. What were students' specific difficulties when dealing with public speaking skills?

The purposes of the study

The purposes of the study are threefold: (1) to gain insight into the students' general opinions about public speaking skills; (2) to find out barriers that students encounter when speaking in public; (3) to offer strategies to help students defeat those challenges.

Literature Review

Definitions of public speaking

The concept of public speaking is diverse. In the Cambridge dictionary, the word "public" is defined as relating to or involving people in general rather than being limited to a specific group of people. In other words, public speaking is the process of speaking to a few or many people to inform, motivate, persuade, educate, or entertain the listeners (Schreiber & Hartranft, 2017; Steel, 2010). In line with this, Baumeyer (2018), an instructor in Organizational Leadership and Management and Teaching Business Courses, said that public speaking is considered the process of communicating information to an audience. This process is usually done before a large audience, namely in school, the workplace, or even in our personal lives. Lucas and Wattam (2019) state that public speaking is a technique to communicate messages or ideas in front of people to make them understand the information or alter others' views or opinions. Slagell (2009) further confirms that public speaking refers to the communication practice of a speaker sharing ideas with an audience primarily through speech.

Types of Public Speaking

Informative Speaking

Informative speaking is among the most often used styles of public speaking. According to Lucas and Wattam (2019), an informative speech is one where the speaker intends to educate their audience on a specific topic. The aim of such a speech is to transfer data and information to help the audience better understand the topic. Researcher teams at the University of Pittsburgh further affirm that informative speaking generally centers on speeches describing an object, showing how something works, reporting on an event, and explaining a concept. However, it is important to remember that when it comes to an informative speech, the speaker's job is to enlighten rather than advocate (Lucas and Wattam, 2019). At the same time, a persuasive speech would seek to modify attitudes or ask the audience to adopt a specific position, which is not a feature in an informative speech (Lucas and Wattam, 2019).

Persuasive Speaking

When persuading someone, you act as an advocate; therefore, your job is to get listeners to agree with you and, perhaps, to act on that belief, or to defend an idea, to refuse an opponent, to sell a program, or to inspire people to action (Lucas and Wattam, 2019). Similarly, Chen (2005) says persuasive speaking is speaking with the goal in mind to convince your audience of your idea or point of view, which usually includes emotional elements and strong language. Persuasive speech is arranged in such a way as to hopefully cause the audience to accept all or part of the expressed view. Though the overarching goal of a persuasive speech is to convince the audience to accept a perspective, not all audiences can be convinced by a single speech, and not all perspectives can persuade the audience. The success of a persuasive speech is often measured by the audience's willingness to consider the speaker's argument. To create the greatest impact, the speaker needs to employ many different communication skills, namely tone of voice to inform their audience on how they should feel while listening, body language such as hand gestures, eye contact, and posture to improve their persuasive speech as well as to set the tone to draw the listener in.

Ceremonial Speaking

Ceremonial speaking is a speech conducted on a special occasion, for instance, a graduation speech or an office party, which often involves a personal or emotional connection to the people you are speaking to (Chen, 2005). The goal of a ceremonial speech is to captivate an audience

and create a sense of response to the situation or occasion. The occasion will inform what kind of experience the speaker is creating. Different occasions have different expectations for speakers based on values that they rely on inspiring, commemorating, accepting, or unifying. In other words, when speaking at a special occasion, your job is to bring the community together by elevating and advocating for a perspective appropriate to the contextual values.

Demonstrative Speaking

Demonstrative speaking is explaining how to do something. Lucas and Wattam (2019) defined demonstrative speeches as explaining how listeners can do something by giving them specific instructions and details. It is a form of expository speaking. If you are in the technology field or any field where processes are part of your work, demonstrative speaking is a skill you will want to cultivate. In a demonstration speech, the presenter must give background information on the subject and set the scene for the audience. After that, they can move forward with the demonstration, which can be as simple as teaching people how to put on a swim cap or as complex as teaching people how to make deviled eggs. Most of the time, the speeches are limited to around 10 minutes, and the speaker may use one person to assist with the demonstration.

Previous studies on barriers to public speaking skills

Results from previous research indicate several difficulties hinder the positive outcomes of learners in dealing with public speaking skills.

Public speaking anxiety

Public speaking anxiety is a problem that many people encounter, particularly students in their academic careers. According to Schreiber and Hartranft (2017), public speaking anxiety constitutes a unique type of anxiety characterized by physiological arousal, negative thought patterns, or behavioral reactions during real or anticipated public presentations.

Liu (2007) studied 547 non-English major students (430 males and 117 females) in their first years. The author used surveys, observations, reflective journals, and interviews in the study. The result revealed that (1) more than a third of the students felt anxious when speaking English in their class, (2) the more proficient students tended to be less anxious, and (3) responding to teachers in English when doing presentations was the most anxious. Liu (2007) also stated that the main sources of public speaking anxiety come from a lack of vocabulary, low English proficiency, and poor memory. The findings indicate that the results cannot be generalized to other EFL students because the author did not study English-majored students and students in their second, third, and fourth years.

However, there are opposite opinions about public speaking anxiety. Chen (2005), Fiadzawoo (2015), Kirkwood, and Melton (2002) indicated that students are more concerned about being ridiculed by their friends when they are doing their presentations in front of their class. However, the authors had different perspectives on public speaking anxiety. While Chen (2005) stated that this anxiety can boost students' motivation to study English harder, Fiadzawoo (2015), Kirkwood, and Melton (2002) claimed public speaking anxiety makes students lose their self-esteem, resulting in poor performances.

Language factor

According to Liu (2007), language factor derives from that fact that students do not pronounce words correctly, lack ideas, and lack vocabulary. This factor can be the result of the inability to perform the target language well (Liu, 2007). Similar to Liu's opinion, Adayleh (2013) stated that "not being able to find the words you need to express yourself is the most frustrating

experience in speaking another language”. This is also in line with Tuyen and Dan (2021), the authors studied obstacles hindering public speaking ability of English-majored students at Can Tho university, Vietnam. There were 100 participants (68 females and 32 males), all of whom were English-majored in their second year. The findings showed that limited language knowledge was the major barrier. However, this may not be the case if the participants were in the fourth year, as their language skills might be better than those in the second year.

Social shyness

Horwitz (2001) defined shyness as an emotion strongly linked to the fear of others. This can be caused by general personality traits such as quietness, shyness, and reticence. Regarding shyness, Santos et al. (2022) studied 264 participants with an average age of 21 in an analytical, observational, and cross-sectional study. Their study aimed to clarify the relationship between shyness and public speaking. The findings showed that shy participants scored lower in public speaking skills. Shy participants had more vocal symptoms, such as higher vocal pitch and weaker loudness when speaking in public. The study makes sure the relationship between shyness and public speaking skills. However, it cannot ascertain the extent to which shyness has a negative impact on the public speaking skills of different groups of people, such as English and non-English major students.

Test Anxiety

Brown (2000) states that when students are afraid of getting bad results in a public speaking exam, they are more likely to suffer from test anxiety. This may be caused by their previous testing experiences related to their poor performance. In addition, Tsai & Chang (2013) added that students may experience test anxiety because of the high levels of pressure, and their concern about test outcomes can heighten test anxiety. In some contexts, the type of test can influence a student's anxiety levels, with public speaking exams being the most stressful (Liu, 2007). A public speaking test is particularly intricate as it generates anxiety both during the test itself and in the fear of being negatively judged (Tuyen and Dan, 2021). However, Chen (2005) argued that a little anxiety caused by public speaking exams can boost students' creativity, which makes them perform better.

Fear of negative evaluation

Horwitz (2001) states that this form of anxiety is broader than situational test anxiety. Fear of negative evaluation is closely linked to apprehension because students sometimes doubt their own capacity when attempting to engage with others in a second language. According to Grieve et al. (2021), the overriding fear of negative evaluation may hinder students from demonstrating their knowledge and intellectual skills. Both Horwitz (2001) and Grieve et al. (2021) concluded that fear of negative evaluation might restrict active learning as students are afraid of asking their teachers questions and interacting with their classmates during public speaking lessons.

Solutions for reducing public speaking anxiety.

Lucas (2009) states that to speak effectively in public, speakers should have a clear purpose, select a good topic beneficial to audiences, and be verbally articulate. Similarly, Horwitz (2001) stated that outstanding public speakers must organize, plan, and edit the content of their speeches to adjust the audience's interests. However, according to Kondo & Ying-Ling (2004), good preparation is the most important of all solutions for reducing public speaking anxiety. This refers to the standard efforts devoted to the learning process and the strategies used. Kondo & Ying-Ling (2004) further stated that positive thinking can be very valuable as it helps to reduce the problematic cognitive processes underlying student anxiety. These tactics seek to shift focus from stress-inducing scenarios to more favorable ones. These solutions help students

reduce anxiety and nurture their self-assurance as they consistently maintain a positive outlook on their speech performance and anticipate favorable outcomes.

The research gap

Although there is much research in many countries about the difficulties of public speaking skills, there is little research conducted in the context of the University of Phan Thiet. Therefore, this research is conducted to determine whether the University of Phan Thiet students have the same difficulties as those in previous studies. Thanks to the result, lecturers at the University of Phan Thiet will be able to offer proper strategies for students to enhance their public speaking skills.

Methodology

Participants

A group of 60 English majors at UPT, including 17 males and 43 females, was chosen as the study's participants. The samples were in their second and third year. The reason for choosing the samples from second and third-year students was that first-year students in UPT were required to finish three speaking courses as prerequisites to be eligible for the public speaking course. In addition, students have to pass this subject to enter the fourth year. That is why there were no first-year and fourth-year students in the study. These research topics were purposely chosen as they were directly related to learning English and experienced speaking to many people ahead of the crowd. They were exposed to and applied many public speaking skills when participating in clubs and communicating with friends, teachers, and everyone around them, so they understood the difficulties and inadequacies of learning public speaking.

The study employed purposive sampling in choosing the participants since the researcher was conscious that the selected subjects meet fundamental and essential requirements for the research purposes and questions (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012).

Table 1.

Participants' demographic information in the first phase

	Current academic school year				Gender	
	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year	4 th year	Male	Female
Frequency	0	34	26	0	17	43
%	0	56.7	43.3	0	28.3	71.7

Research design

The study employed the questionnaire to explore the participants' difficulties when dealing with public speaking skills. Several explanations can be given for choosing questionnaire as a data collection method. First, questionnaires are very useful for gathering large-scale information regarding different kinds of issues, such as language needs, communication difficulties, preferred learning styles, preferred classroom activities and attitudes, and beliefs (Nunan, 1992). Second, questionnaires would best investigate people's perceptions, behavior, activities, or attitudes (Wisker, 2001). Third, questionnaires allow researchers to collect a large amount of factual information in a relatively short period of time (Thomas, 2003). Finally, questionnaires are economical, standardized, confidential and used for specific purposes (Thomas, 2003). After taking into consideration the advantages of using questionnaires to serve

the purposes of this research, the researchers decided to use a questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection.

Students' challenges in dealing with public speaking skills were measured in the form of a survey research design by means of a self-designed questionnaire. The items in this self-designed questionnaire were compiled from questionnaires in studies conducted to find similar concerns. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: the first gathered general information about the participants, the second explored the participants' general perceptions of public speaking skills through multiple-choice questions allowing more than one response, and the third identified challenges the students encountered when learning public speaking skills. Regarding part 3, the students' difficulties were categorized into confidence challenges, attention concerns, fear of making mistakes, pressure from lecturers, lack of topic knowledge, and subjective matters. Questions in the final part employed a 5-point scale to score the agreement levels of aspects regarding students' difficulties when learning public speaking skills based on the following criteria.

Table 2.

The criteria of the agreement levels of aspects concerning students' difficulties when learning public speaking skills

Scale	Mean range	Agreement level
1	1.00-1.49	Strongly disagree
2	1.50-2.49	Disagree
3	2.50-3.49	Undecided
4	3.50-4.49	Agree
5	4.50-5.00	Strongly agree

Results then were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics 20. The data was analyzed, tabulated, and interpreted by using means, percentages, and frequencies. Mean (M) was used to calculate the average level of agreement on aspects concerning the students' challenges when dealing with public speaking skills. Standard Deviation (S.D.) depicted the spread of the scores of the respondents within the respondent group.

Results

Student's general perception towards public speaking skills

The researcher first discovered the students' perceptions towards public speaking skills before gaining insights into specific challenges encountered by the students when dealing with public speaking skills.

Table 3.

Rate of difficulty level among four English skills

Rate of the level of difficulty	Frequency	%
Listening	9	15
Speaking	24	40
Reading	10	16.7
Writing	17	28.3
Total	60	100

Table 4.

Rate of difficulty level of public speaking skills

Rate of difficulty level of public speaking skills	Frequency	%
Very difficult	20	33.3
Difficult	35	58.3
Neutral	2	3.3
Easy	2	3.3
Very easy	1	1.8
Total	60	100

As shown in Table 3, the highest proportion of the participants, 40%, reported speaking as the most challenging skill for them, compared to only 28.3%, 16.7%, and 15% of those who rated writing, reading, and listening as the most difficult, respectively. This finding was further asserted when most participants rated public speaking very difficult (33.3%) and difficult (58.3%). Meanwhile, only a small percentage of the students indicated public speaking skills were either easy or very easy.

Table 5.

Rate of the importance of public speaking skills

Rate of the importance of public speaking skills	Frequency	%
Not important	0	0
Slightly important	3	5
Moderately important	5	8.3
Important	9	15
Very important	43	71.6
Total	60	100

Based on a 5-level Likert scale (Very Important, Important, Moderately Important, Slightly Important, and Not Important), the surveyed students showed the importance of speaking skills mainly at the levels of "very important," "important" (71.6% equivalent to 43 choices), and "important" (15% or 9 choices). They appreciated that having good public speaking skills would greatly help them.

Table 6.

The total time spent by students on improving English speaking skills

Rate of the importance of public speaking skills	Frequency	%
More than 3 hours	4	6.7
2 - 3 hours	5	8.3
1 - 2 hours	20	21.7
Under an hour	18	30.0
I do not have time to practice English every day	13	33.3
Total	60	100

However, when it comes to the total amount of time the surveyed students spent enhancing their public speaking skills, the highest proportions of the students did not spend time for everyday practice due to time constraints, at 33.3% or spent just under an hour, at 30%. Only a small percentage of the samples spent between 2 hours and 3 hours improving their public speaking skills.

*Students' specific difficulties in dealing with public speaking skills.**Confidence concerns*

Table 6.

Confidence challenges

Confidence Concerns	Mean	SD
Lack of confidence when speaking in front of teachers and friends	3.70	.962
Fear of not speaking well enough	3.60	.960
Fear of being judged	3.87	.747

Table 6 shows challenges related to confidence concerns when the students were dealing with public speaking skills. Overall, most of the participants agreed with all the comments about the lack of confidence mentioned in the survey questionnaire. Lack of confidence when presenting in front of class and lecturers got the highest mean score of 3.70. This result indicated that they lost confidence when giving presentations. This is also a situation that needs to be overcome urgently so that the students can be more confident in studying and working while speaking English in front of a crowd. Furthermore, fear of not speaking well and fear of being judged when speaking also received strong agreement among the students, with an average score of 3.60 and 3.87, respectively.

Attention concerns

Table 7.

Attention concerns

Fear of being the center of attention	Mean	SD
Get nervous and forget things I know	4.22	.739
Display poor body language when presenting	3.92	.645
Get nervous when being the focus of attention	4.07	.710

Table 7 clearly shows the anxiety of the students about being the center of attention when speaking in front of a crowd. The participants largely agreed with all the comments about attention anxiety mentioned in the survey questionnaire. When dealing with public speaking skills, students who worried and forgot things they studied earlier had the highest score of 4.22. This result is significant; many students commonly experience it when speaking in front of a crowd. In addition, students who felt nervous when they were aware of being the focus of attention had an average score of 4.07. Meanwhile, the percentage of the students who worried about their awkward body language was the lowest, with a mean score of 3.92 in this regard.

Fear of making mistakes

Table 8.

Fear of making mistakes

Fear of making mistakes	Mean	SD
Be afraid of making grammatical mistakes	3.87	.769
Be afraid of making pronunciation mistakes.	3.85	.840
Worry about a limited vocabulary knowledge, making sentences not diverse and unattractive to listeners.	4.00	.781

Similarly, fear of making mistakes is also a common concern among the students when presenting in front of a crowd. The students mostly agreed with all the comments about the fear of making mistakes mentioned in the survey questionnaire. They were afraid of not having enough knowledge, which can make their sentences broken and not attract listeners, with the highest score of 4.00. In other words, most of the students were afraid of a lack of vocabulary for themselves, making them take a longer time to think of the words to respond. In addition, when speaking in front of many people, students' fear of making mistakes in pronunciation and grammar also rated high, with average scores of 3.85 and 3.85, respectively. This result seemed to indicate that most of the students had a fear of getting into public speaking practice.

Pressure from instructors

Table 9.

Pressure from lecturers

Pressure from instructors	Mean	SD
Get a pounding heart when teachers call my name	3.52	.930
Not knowing how to answer teachers' questions.	3.52	.833

As shown in Table 9 about difficulties related to pressure from instructors, the results indicated that students were also under pressure due to their lecturers. Most students shared fears of getting a pounding heart when their teachers called their names and when they did not know how to answer their teacher's questions, with an average score of 3.52 each.

Lack of knowledge

Table 10.

Lack of topic knowledge

Lack of topic knowledge	Mean	SD
Have limited knowledge about presented topics	3.70	.850
Be not well-prepared to respond promptly to inquiries from listeners.	3.50	.997

The results of Table 20 show the lack of knowledge about the topic students discussed when speaking in front of a crowd. In general, most of the participants agreed with all the comments in the survey questionnaire about their lack of knowledge on the topic. The responses from the students who believed that they had limited knowledge about the presented topics had the highest score of 3.70. This result indicated that the students need to study more knowledge about the topic to be more confident when speaking in front of a crowd. Meanwhile, the situation where the students needed to prepare better in time to answer promptly inquiries from the audience had a slightly lower score of 3.50.

Subjective matters

Table 11.

Subjective matters

Subjective matters	Mean	SD
Not spend much time enhancing public speaking skills	3.15	1.147
Not being active in class activities	3.27	.989
Lack of motivation when learning public speaking skills	3.63	.863
Lack of seriousness when learning public speaking skills	3.58	1.033

Table 11 shows students' subjective concerns when dealing with public speaking skills. This category received the lowest rate of agreement among the students. The highest response of the students fell into the lack of motivation when learning, with an average score of 3.63. The second place in this category was not being active in-class activities, with an average score of 3.27. Meanwhile, the students who needed more seriousness when learning public speaking skills and spent less time on improving their speaking skills had an average score of 3.58 and 3.15, respectively.

Discussions and Recommendations

This study collected data from a questionnaire survey of English majors to identify their difficulties in handling public speaking skills. Based on the results, there were some solutions, and suggestions to improve the public speaking skills for students.

Student's general perceptions toward public speaking

The results showed that most students consider public speaking skills important for their future careers, even though they found them to be the most challenging skills compared to writing, listening, and reading. However, despite understanding the importance and challenges of public speaking skills, the students did not spend a lot of time honing their public speaking skills. The results show that most of the participants devoted less than one hour to enhancing their public speaking skills because they were busy.

Students' difficulties when dealing with public speaking skills.

Fear of making mistakes and being the center of attention

Noticeably, the categories “fear of making mistakes” and “fear of being the center of attention” received the highest agreement level among the participants. More specifically, the pressure when standing in front of many people made them nervous and forget things to be presented. This result is consistent with Horwitz (2001) about a strong association between speaking outcomes and anxiety. The consequences of these fears might include displaying inappropriate body language or appearing shy. It is because students believe that they will make many grammar and pronunciation mistakes or even produce poor sentences. To help students overcome this problem, Lucas (2009) states that, to speak effectively in public, speakers should have a clear purpose of what they are going to speak about, select a good topic beneficial to audiences, be verbally articulate, keep a calm attitude, and manage themselves effectively.

Looking at these fears from a positive perspective can help students anticipate the worst possible outcomes from the current circumstance. To illustrate, Horwitz (2001) stated that if speakers could not properly deliver their talks, they would experience negative feedback from the audiences, which would drive them to be better prepared before the speech. Teachers should tell their students about challenges and opportunities of fear of making mistakes and being the center of attention (Alnuzaili & Uddin, 2020).

Additionally, public speaking should be more focused in class activities for two main reasons. First, students will have a calm and confident mind when speaking in public. Secondly, they will be more open to the audience's opinions, regardless of positive or negative ones. Finally, this helps students to anticipate questions that are more likely to be asked during their presentation.

Lack of knowledge about the topic

Subjective difficulties have the lowest agreement among the surveyed samples. It is because students did not study public speaking skills seriously and were inactive in class activities. Students need to expand their knowledge in various aspects, reading books and newspapers in English to have more ideas and, most importantly, to practice public speaking skills regularly. In other words, students should listen to English speeches more often to learn the presentation styles and enhance their language proficiency, which are the keys to success in public speaking. This is consistent with the suggestions from the research by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) about the importance of having good preparation. Fortunately, these are much easier for students at present as many useful social networking sites are available online. According to Nguyen and Pham (2022), technology greatly influences speech. The study found that film, YouTube, PowerPoint, Speech Recognition Software, and other technological tools can significantly improve EFL learners' oral communication abilities. Moreover, support from lecturers (effective teaching skills, good lesson contents, engaging class activities, and encouragement) could play a major role in enhancing the students' public speaking skills. Regarding class activities, communicative activities, such as information gaps or jigsaw exercises, can improve students' speaking skills (Vo, 2022)

Confidence challenges

The results from the study also indicated that confidence challenges were also noticeable among the students because confidence challenges discouraged students from actively presenting in front of their teachers and friends. This could be explained by the fact that students thought their speeches could be judged negatively by the audience (Tuyen & Dan, 2021). Seriously, students were also worried about being asked unexpected questions or to present promptly. The situation could be worse if the students did not have a decent knowledge of the topic they were talking about. In fact, to speak confidently and fluently, students need a lot of practice in standing in front of a crowd to develop confidence.

According to Liu (2007), to avoid the phenomenon of timidity or lack of confidence when speaking in public, students need to stay calm and take deep breaths to be more comfortable while speaking. In addition, to make the atmosphere more natural, students should interact with the audience to create a more friendly and fun atmosphere. More importantly, for a successful presentation, students must be well-prepared and rehearse many times beforehand. It can reduce anxiety when they are speaking in public. Speaking is a skill that requires hard work, and it can develop over time with proper practice.

Limitations of the research

Although the writers tried to clarify the research's purposes, there are still many limitations. The number of participants is not large enough (only 60 participants attending the survey). It is likely that some students answered perfunctorily, or they might not carefully read the questions when answering them, so the results were not 100% certain. However, the researchers made a lot of effort to access the data and make the results from the questionnaires as valid and reliable as possible. From the above limitations, the writer hopes that other researchers will rely on the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of this study to have better results in the future.

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Biodata

TAN Thanh Nguyen is currently a full-time lecturer at University of Architecture Ho Chi Minh City (UAH), Vietnam. He holds an M.A. in TESOL from Edith Cowan University, Australia. He teaches ESP to students of Architecture, Interior Design, Graphic Design and Construction majors. His research interests include positive psychology in language education, ESP vocabulary acquisition.

TONG, Thi Truong Nhung is currently a full-time English lecturer at Phan Thiet University (UPT), Viet Nam. She holds an M.A. in TESOL from Edith Cowan University, Australia. Her research interests include pedagogical scenarios, assessment and evaluation, and curriculum development in language education.

A Study on Adult Learners of English as A Foreign Language in Vietnam: Motivations, Advantages, and Challenges

Nguyen Le An Phuong^{1*}, Nguyen Thi Hoang Bau¹ 

¹ The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam

*Corresponding author's email: nlaphuong@ufl.udn.vn

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8569-9756>

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language, adult learners, learning challenges

English has become highly popular in Vietnam, emerging as the preferred language for diverse purposes. The increasing attendance at English Training Centers and schools shows a surge in adult learners seeking language refinement. Motivated by career progression, job prerequisites, learning objectives, and communication needs, these learners encounter many difficulties. This article explores the obstacles Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners face, providing practical solutions for both learners and educators. A comprehensive study involving 70 adult learners studying EFL at the University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies (UD-UFLS) utilized questionnaires and interviews, employing qualitative and quantitative analyses. The research revealed that despite high motivation driven by job and career goals, learners struggle due to time constraints, limited English literacy skills, and financial burdens, diminishing the effectiveness of their learning. In response to these difficulties, constructive recommendations are offered to enhance the learning experience and address the prevalent issues.

Introduction

In recent years, the impact of globalization and integration has led to a remarkable increase in the number of adult English learners in Vietnam. English is widely recognized as essential to meet occupational demands and fulfill the learning outcome requirements of various training programs. A significant aspect of this linguistic journey is the VSTEP (Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency) examinations, which serve as a pivotal means for achieving English proficiency, required for graduation from undergraduate courses and as an entry requirement for postgraduate programs (Nguyen, 2020).

While adult learners possess valuable attributes like independence, experience, and motivation (Mei, 2023), they also face a unique set of challenges due to their multiple roles and responsibilities (Brookfield, 1986) and the influence of age-related factors (Zhu, 2017). These

challenges can often impede their progress and hinder their success in learning English. To address these obstacles and provide better support for adult learners, this article aims to identify the prevalent issues in the Vietnamese context and propose various effective strategies that can benefit educators and learners.

Literature review

Adult learners

Adults are characterized as being independent and self-directed learners, possessing a wealth of life experiences and knowledge. Furthermore, they are goal-oriented, value relevance, are practical, and demand respect (Lieb, 1991). However, the precise definition of adulthood varies across societies and cultural groups. Likewise, adult learners are perceived in diverse contexts. They constitute a varied group with distinct educational backgrounds and diverse learning needs, characterized by maturity and understanding (Svetina & Perme, 2004).

Adult learners, participants in adult learning opportunities, encompass individuals with varying educational histories and needs. They are mature and seek additional skills and knowledge to enhance their personal and professional lives (Hudson, 2002; Tight, 1996). Described as more autonomous, adult learners can independently develop their knowledge and experiences in learning a second language. Krashen (1988) defines adult learners as formal thinkers capable of employing conscious grammar, meta-awareness, and general abstract language rules. While defining adult learners of English as a foreign language remains challenging, it is apparent that these learners juggle multiple roles in their lives and often opt for part-time rather than full-time courses.

Adult learners' learning challenges

Extensive research has been conducted to investigate the challenges adult learners encounter acquiring the English language. In particular, Mali (2017) posits that adults face a multitude of non-academic responsibilities, such as tending to their families, participating in family-related gatherings, and managing financial obligations. These demands can significantly divert their attention from their studies. This perspective aligns with the findings of Ruijuan Wu, Wu, and Tai (2014), who demonstrated that the "family factor" exerts a detrimental impact on adults' English as a Second Language (ESL) learning.

The challenge of learning English for adults is explored by Cozma (2015), who contends that, due to their lower energy levels and a plethora of responsibilities, adults often arrive in English classrooms fatigued. Mei (2022) delves into the psychological aspects, noting that adults tend to possess stronger self-esteem and emotional sensitivity. While this can make them less hesitant to communicate and share their ideas, it also renders them particularly averse to potential ridicule stemming from mistakes. This lack of self-confidence and courage hampers their ability to seize valuable opportunities to practice their second language and enhance their overall language skills.

In a comprehensive study, Ruijuan Wu and colleagues (2014) explored how adults often experience stress when they struggle to articulate themselves clearly and accurately in a second

language. Cozma (2015) emphasizes that anxiety among adult learners can arise from a variety of factors, including a perceived lack of progress, reluctance to speak during English classes, and a fear of making errors. These anxieties are closely linked to concerns about losing face, which become more pronounced with advancing age.

Nevertheless, there is a notable scarcity of studies conducted within the context of Vietnam aimed at identifying the specific challenges adult learners face in their pursuit of language learning, particularly in the case of English. Such research is crucial for enhancing the quality of both teaching and learning in this domain.

Research Questions

The study aimed to provide answers to the following research questions

1. What motivates adult learners to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?
2. What advantages do adult learners have in EFL education compared to children?
3. What challenges do EFL adult learners face?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Seventy participants of this study are EFL adult learners at The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies (UD-UFLS) with 77.1% identified as male and 22.9% as female. Roughly 50% of the participants fall within the age range of 25 to 35 years old, while 42% are in the 36 to 50 years old category. The participants comprise individuals employed in the public sector, including but not limited to teachers, police officers, soldiers, and various government officials. Additionally, more than half of the participants have been learning English for more than five years. They are currently enrolling in the program of Bachelor of English language program at UD-UFLS, specifically designed to attain a C1 (VSTEP) proficiency level.

Data collection & analysis

The research is conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Regarding quantitative analysis, information was gathered using a survey comprising of 14 questions. The questionnaire used in this study is adapted from the research conducted by Ruijuan, Ruiting, and Tai (2014). Their study, titled "Challenges of Adults in Learning English as a Second Language: Focus on Adult Education in China," served as the foundation for the questionnaire. The survey was translated from English to Vietnamese before being distributed to participants, considering their limited proficiency in English. Subsequently, the results obtained were translated from Vietnamese to English for the purpose of analysis and inclusion in the study.

The initial four questionnaire questions investigated adult learners' motivations for learning EFL in Vietnam. The subsequent five questions were designed to identify the advantages that adult learners have in acquiring EFL compared to younger learners. The last set of five questions scrutinized the difficulties encountered by participants while learning EFL.

The study's questionnaire has demonstrated noteworthy reliability within the defined context, as evidenced by the substantial Cronbach's alpha of **.795**. This robust statistical measure attests to the consistency and dependability of the results obtained through the questionnaire.

The study also utilized a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews that delved into three key themes: the motivations driving adult learners to study English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the advantages experienced by adult learners in the process of acquiring EFL skills, and the difficulties they encountered. The research involved conducting five distinct interviews with five adult learners actively engaged in the study of EFL. The first two participants successfully obtained a Bachelor of English language from UD-UFLS five years ago. The following three participants are currently enrolled in the In-service Bachelor of English program at UD-UFLS. They were queried about the challenges they encountered while studying English and their expectations for alleviating these issues. These valuable discussions and shared experiences have provided deep insights into the challenges faced by adult learners.

Findings and Discussion

In this study, a series of 14 questions was formulated and subsequently administered to a group of 70 participants. All respondents completed and returned the questionnaire.

The motivations adult learners have for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Table 1 illustrates the motivations driving adult learners to pursue the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Table 1

Motivations for undertaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning

SDA=strongly disagree; DA= disagree; NC= no comment; A= agree; SA=strongly agree

	n	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
6 The Vietnamese government strongly emphasizes English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Vietnam.	70	8.6%	12.9%	31.4%	24.2%	22.9%
7 In Vietnam, adults must learn English as a foreign language to improve their chances of career advancement.	70	11.4%	15.7%	34.3%	25.7%	12.9%
8 Proficiency in English is highly significant for Vietnamese adults to stay competitive in the job market.	70	2.9%	2.9%	21.3%	38.6%	34.3%
9 The English language is a crucial tool for Vietnamese individuals to generate income.	70	1.4%	4.3%	17.1%	41.3%	35.9%

Observing the data in the table, we can see that approximately 47% of participants acknowledge the emphasis placed by the Vietnamese government on the significance of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The majority of participants, comprising 72.9%, believe that English proficiency is crucial for job competitiveness, while 77.2% view it as a valuable tool for income augmentation. Notably, Participant 3 shared, "*I initially learned Chinese as a second*

language. However, due to job requirements as a border guard managing immigration gates, I enrolled in an in-service English course." Only slightly higher than one-third (38.6%) concur that English is mandatory for career advancement.

Advantages adult learners obtain in EFL education over children.

Table 2 delineates the advantages adult learners possess in acquiring English as a Foreign Language (EFL) compared to children.

Table 2

Advantages that adults might possess in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in comparison to children

SDA=strongly disagree; DA= disagree; NC= no comment; A= agree; SA=strongly agree

No.		n	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
10	Adults tend to focus on learning more readily than children do.	70	18.6%	20%	34.3%	17.1%	10%
11	Typically, adults take on greater responsibility for the learning process and are more actively engaged in learning compared to children.	70	10%	17.2%	40%	21.4%	11.4%
12	Adults tend to display a higher motivation level in learning English than children.	70	10%	15.7%	34.3%	27.1%	12.9%
13	Adults generally exhibit a higher cognitive capacity compared to children.	70	5.7%	7.1%	31.4%	35.8%	20%
14	Adults learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) typically possess broader general knowledge and greater life experience.	70	2.9%	2.9%	10%	40%	44.2%

As can be seen from the table, the majority of participants (84.3%) believe that having a broader general knowledge and more experience is a significant benefit in learning English. Participant 3 expressed this by saying, "I believe that as an adult, I have more experience in memorizing and logically organizing vocabulary and knowledge. Additionally, I have a stronger determination, which proves valuable when presenting something in English."

Around 55% of participants agree that adults exhibit superior cognitive abilities. However, only 27% believe that adults have better concentration than young learners, and nearly 34% agree that adults take more responsibility for the learning process and are more actively engaged in their learning. Less than half (40%) acknowledge that adults are more motivated to learn English than children.

Challenges EFL learners face

The difficulties adult learners encounter while studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

Challenges associated with adults' English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning

SDA=strongly disagree; DA= disagree; NC= no comment; A= agree; SA=strongly agree

	n	SDA	DA	NS	A	SA
10 Adults, in particular, encounter challenges in acquiring a native-like accent.	70	4.3%	5.7%	21.4%	28.6%	40%
11 Adults who did not have the opportunity to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) during their childhood may suffer a loss of confidence.	70	4.3%	1.4%	21.4%	32.9%	40%
12 Adults frequently experience stress when they struggle to articulate themselves clearly and accurately in a language that is not their native tongue.	70	2.9%	4.3%	14.3%	47.1%	31.4%
13 Family-related factors negatively impact the learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for adults	70	20%	22.9%	25.6%	22.9%	8.6%
14 Adults encounter significant interference in learning English when their first language is prominent.	70	4.3%	20%	28.5%	24.3%	22.9%

It is obvious that a large proportion of participants (68,6%) believe that it is nearly impossible for adults to achieve native-like pronunciation. It is widely accepted that achieving native-like pronunciation in a foreign language, particularly for those who commence learning a second language after puberty, is considered a challenging feat (Lenneberg, 1967).

Furthermore, 72.9% express a lack of confidence stemming from their limited English background. EFL students often experience fear of speaking when they lack mastery of grammatical rules, sufficient vocabulary, and the ability to pronounce words accurately. Similarly, in research of Tuong (2022), one of the difficulties of non-English majors in speaking English is getting stuck with vocabulary and pronunciation. A significant hindrance to the effective communication of EFL students is the lack of vocabulary knowledge (Adam, 2016). A significant proportion, 78.5%, find discomfort in expressing ideas in English, and an equal percentage admit feeling pressured when attempting to articulate thoughts in the language. In addition to the specific figures obtained from the questionnaire, there are major challenges faced by adult EFL learners found through face-to-face interviews with participants.

Time constraints

Time constraints are a prominent issue for adult English learners, particularly for mature individuals laden with work responsibilities, duties, and family obligations. Effective English learning demands a significant investment of time and focused concentration. Participant 3, currently an in-service student majoring in English at UFLs, highlights the lack of time as his major hurdle. Unlike formal training students, he cannot dedicate the majority of his time to studying English due to his concurrent work commitments and family responsibilities. Participant 4 also faced an overload of family responsibilities, resulting in her habitual tardiness to class and frequent absences.

Similarly, Participant 1, an in-service graduate from UFLs, faced difficulty finding time for after-class practice due to frequent work interruptions. The struggle to manage time to attend classes with fixed schedules at English centers is echoed by Participant 2, who articulates,

I work eight hours a day and sometimes have extra tasks to do after working hours. While I attempted English classes with fixed timetables on several occasions, I eventually gave up halfway. Such classes are impractical for full-time employees like me, given their prolonged duration and the requirement for regular attendance."

Limited English literacy

Limited English literacy is a prevalent issue among adult learners, stemming from various factors. Many adults come to English classes with minimal experience and literacy in the language, influenced by factors such as having learned other foreign languages in secondary and high school or not recognizing the importance of the subject when they were younger. Participant 1, for instance, acknowledges that his limited English foundation hinders his progress in class, despite putting in considerable effort. He faces challenges in memorizing vocabulary, retaining only 20% of what he learns in a week and subsequently forgetting it two weeks later. Participant 5 acknowledged that her limited English background contributed to her failure in the mandatory proficiency English test required for completing her master's degree.

Financial Burdens

Learning English can be financially burdensome, particularly for older learners who contend with numerous expenses. The costs associated with English learning can become even more daunting when considering the need for sustained lessons over several years. Participant 2, for example, previously invested a substantial amount for a six-month English study program in Canada. However, he soon realized that the financial strain exceeded his capacity, prompting him to opt to study the language in his home country, which better aligned with his budget.

Participant 1 shares a similar financial struggle: "*Given my busy schedule, I chose one-on-one lessons with a tutor to facilitate quick learning with a flexible schedule. However, I could only sustain this form of learning for four months before depleting my bank account.*" The expenses associated with English learning, especially for personalized or overseas programs, can pose significant challenges for adult learners, particularly those with numerous financial obligations. Based on the results generated from the questionnaires and interviews, it is evident that English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning significantly influences the participants' career

development. As individuals strive to attain proficiency in English, they encounter various obstacles and challenges, despite possessing certain advantages compared to younger learners.

Recommendations

The study's findings highlight the challenges Vietnamese adult EFL learners face, including struggles with achieving native-like pronunciation, a lack of confidence, and limited progress due to their English background, time constraints, and financial burdens. Recommendations are proposed for teachers, education centers, and adult learners to address these issues. For educators, establishing an encouraging learning atmosphere with diverse and captivating activities, scaffolded instructions, and ample space for group and pair work is crucial. Collaboration stands as a vital learning tactic for everyone, as it allows learners to inspire and provide mutual support to each other. (Deborah, Lori & Salwa, 2018). Additionally, collaborative learning can alleviate feelings of isolation among students and enhance their overall productivity (Phan, 2023). Flexibility in teaching approaches, alternative class times, and additional support outside regular hours can alleviate time constraints. For adult learners, collaboration for knowledge and experience sharing, along with cultivating effective immersion habits like reading, listening, and watching English content, can enhance memorization, pronunciation, and authentic language interaction. Technology activities using more generic and non-personal channels like television and the internet are used to provide visual and audio support for language acquisition (Jiuhan, Evie & Deanna, 2011). These measures aim to enhance the overall learning experience for Vietnamese adult ESL learners.

Conclusion

This paper explored various aspects related to Vietnamese adult EFL learners. Regarding learning objectives, it was established that the majority of learners pursue English studies to enhance job competitiveness and increase income. Despite adults having certain advantages over younger learners, they encounter several challenges in their EFL journey. The paper suggests recommendations as potential solutions to these issues.

This study is subject to certain limitations that warrant acknowledgment. The relatively modest sample size may inadvertently introduce bias into the findings and subsequent discussions. The interviews conducted with a limited number of participants might offer a constrained viewpoint, potentially undermining the reliability of the study. Additionally, the adult learners participating in the study predominantly hail from specific roles within the public sector, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other work environments. Therefore, future research endeavors could enhance the existing knowledge base by exploring teaching approaches and learning strategies aimed at enhancing adult English education. Furthermore, investigating adult learners in diverse working sectors would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of their unique needs and challenges in language learning.

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Biodata

Nguyen Le An Phuong earned a Master of Arts in TESOL studies in 2006 from The University of Queensland, Australia. In addition, she completed an Advanced Diploma of Event Management in 2012 at William Angliss Institute, Australia. Presently, she serves as a lecturer at the Faculty of English, Da Nang University of Foreign Language Studies, where she earned her Bachelor of English degree in 2004. Phuong boasts 20 years of teaching experience and has been involved in the National Project of Foreign Languages for ten years as a trainer.

Nguyen Thi Hoang Bau holds an M.S in Tourism Management from Chinese Culture University, Taiwan (2015) and an M.A in Applied Linguistics from the University of Melbourne, Australia (2018). She is a lecturer at the Faculty of English for Specific Purposes, the University of Foreign Languages Studies, the University of Danang, where she obtained her Bachelor of Business English in 2012. She is an accomplished author of local and international papers and has guided students in research. Her research interests span tourism and linguistics.

Appendix

Survey to Investigate Challenges Faced by Vietnamese Adult Learners of English as a Foreign Language

Part A: Please highlight only one selection

1. Your native language: a. Vietnamese b. English
2. Gender: a. Male b. Female
3. Age: a. 18-24 b. 25-35 c. 36-50 d. Over 50
4. Duration of studying English as a foreign language (up to the present moment)
 - a. Less than 12 months
 - b. Over one year to four years
 - c. Over four years to nine years
 - d. Over nine years
5. The highest level of education achieved
 - a. High school b. Certificate/diploma c. Bachelor degree
 - d. Master degree e. Doctoral degree f. Others (please specify) _____
6. Your current job/position
Please specify _____

Part B: Please highlight your most appropriate response

Directions: Indicate your most suitable response based on the following criteria

SDA = strongly disagree

DA = Disagree

NC= no comment

A= Agree

SA = Strongly agree

No.	Challenges Faced by Adult Learners of English as a Foreign Language: A Case in Vietnam	Scaled scores				
	Motivations for undertaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning					
6	The Vietnamese government strongly emphasizes English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Vietnam.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
7	In Vietnam, adults must learn English as a foreign language to improve their chances of career advancement.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
8	Proficiency in English is highly significant for Vietnamese adults to stay competitive in the job market.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
9	The English language is a crucial tool for Vietnamese individuals to generate income.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
	Advantages that adults might possess in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in comparison to children					
10	Adults tend to focus on learning more readily than children do.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA

11	Typically, adults take on greater responsibility for the learning process and are more actively engaged in learning compared to children.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
12	Adults tend to display a higher motivation level in learning English than children.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
13	Adults generally exhibit a higher cognitive capacity compared to children.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
14	Adults learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) typically possess broader general knowledge and greater life experience.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
	Challenges associated with adults' English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning					
15	Adults, in particular, encounter challenges in acquiring a native-like accent.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
16	Adults who did not have the opportunity to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) during their childhood may suffer a loss of confidence.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
17	Adults frequently experience stress when they struggle to articulate themselves clearly and accurately in a language that is not their native tongue.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
18	Family-related factors negatively impact the learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for adults..	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA
19	Adults encounter significant interference in learning English when their first language is prominent.	SDA	DA	NC	A	SA

Effects of Strategy-Based Instruction on Vietnamese EFL College Students' Reading Comprehension: A Mixed Method Approach

Nguyen Thi Lan Phuong^{1*}, Nguyen Van Nhat¹

¹ Hau Giang Community College, Vĩ Thanh City, Vietnam

*Corresponding author's email: ntlphuong@hgcc.edu.vn

*  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9937-4496>

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: strategy-based instruction, reading comprehension.

Few studies have been quite successful in examining how Strategy-Based Instruction affects students' reading comprehension. However, these studies have only looked at specific reading strategies, like cognitive or metacognitive strategies, and have not used a reading instructions model to look at all phases of pre-, while-, or post-reading. To evaluate the impact of SBI, particularly the reading framework model Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach, on EFL college students' reading comprehension, sixty EFL students at Hau Giang Community College participated. A mixed-methods approach with tests and semi-structured interviews was used. The conventional approach was used to teach reading to the Control Group, whereas SBI was used for the Experimental Group. The results show that SBI significantly improved the reading comprehension of EFL students. They also have the drive and self-assurance to develop into proficient readers on their own. Therefore, it is suggested that English reading comprehension be taught more widely using SBI.

Introduction

Without a doubt, English is becoming more and more important in Vietnamese culture nowadays. The nation's educational resources are severely strained by the widespread desire to use English as an international language. English instruction and study have become crucial since the government introduced an open-door policy to promote foreign business and cooperation. English is also commonly used as a powerful language for international communication. It is the vernacular of business, science, technology, travel, athletics, music, and numerous other fields. In order to satisfy the needs of students at all educational levels, the Ministry of Education and Training's National Foreign Languages Project has highlighted the urgent need to enhance the quality of language instruction and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) (Ministry of Education and Training, 2008).

The four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are interconnected and must be mastered by students in order to learn English. Reading is important because it gives knowledge of the target language and helps the student improve other language skills. According to Nunan (2003), reading is a fluid activity in which readers build meaning by fusing information from a text with what they already know. In addition to having a vast vocabulary and knowledge of grammar rules, they also need to be well-versed in the reading strategies employed to become competent and talented readers (Liu, 2013). However, most readers only use strategies for reading on the spur of the moment when they are reading (Pritchard, 1990). Therefore, in order to succeed in their four years of university study and career, EFL students must equip themselves with appropriate English reading skills (Zare, 2007).

Reading is a fundamental ability for learning English since it allows students to communicate and expand their knowledge more rapidly and efficiently. Teachers in Vietnam continue to use traditional lecturing and memorization-oriented training; students at all educational levels have had minimal exposure to recognizing main ideas, finding details, and drawing conclusions (Huan, 2013). In particular, in the researchers' school, students continue to struggle with vocabulary, memory recall, comprehension of text coherence, and improper reading practices. As a result, they become weary and bored with learning in a reading class. The truth is that even with all of their effort and dedication, they still receive extremely poor results on reading assessments. According to Nguyen (2022), to encourage better involvement in learning reading, teachers should use reading comprehension teaching strategies tailored to each student's aptitude and personality. Moreover, Mehrdad et al. (2012) demonstrate that inexperienced readers can develop into proficient ones if given instruction in efficient reading techniques.

To help readers expand their knowledge, guiding them while establishing appropriate reading methods is crucial. SBI promotes an approach that enables students to comprehend both what they can read in class and how to read it more efficiently. It is crucial to language acquisition, and the impact of teaching reading methods on students' reading comprehension in EFL classes at a university is still an emerging area that needs further research. Regretfully, not much research has been done on how the SBI affects EFL college students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, previous studies have mostly concentrated on certain reading strategies, cognitive or metacognitive strategies of using a reading instruction model to assess all phases of pre-, during-, and post-reading. As a result, the current investigation seeks to answer both of the questions that follow:

- (1) How does the SBI affect EFL college students' reading comprehension?
- (2) What are students' attitudes towards the SBI on EFL college students' reading comprehension?

From there, it aids educators in developing efficient lesson plans and enhancing students' reading comprehension abilities.

Literature Review

Strategy-based instruction

Reading methods can assist learners in reading more efficiently. They are also viewed as conscious methods of understanding the author's meaning (Olshavsky, 1976) or strategies for overcoming difficulties in meaning construction (Duffy, 1993). Both authors propose that reading methods can assist readers in overcoming issues with meaning production and comprehension. Furthermore, they underline the significance of approaching a reading assignment with a plan or strategy in place, which can help readers reach their goals more efficiently (Bimmel et al., 2001). Reading strategies can be described as the cognitive processes or comprehension techniques that readers choose and utilize to comprehend and derive meaning from the material they are reading (Abbott, 2006).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) proposed a model for dividing learning processes into three types: metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective. Metacognitive methods like gist reading, skimming, and scanning form the foundation for task prediction, planning, and evaluation. Furthermore, cognitive methods such as classifying, taking notes, building on previous information, summarizing, and inferencing improve individual tasks. Social/affective tactics such as clarifying questions, cooperating, and self-talk engage other learners and group projects to facilitate effective learning. Furthermore, Chamot and O'Malley (1994) emphasize that developing reading abilities requires concentration, particularly in an academic setting, and that learning and reading strategies can help learners achieve this.

According to Sementin and Maniam (2015), employing metacognitive approaches allows language teachers to comprehend the diverse reading styles of their students and identify the most effective methods for teaching reading in the language classroom, based on Chamot and O'Malley's thesis. In essence, these approaches link cognitive reading strategies to specific learning tasks, integrating them into the learning process. Techniques such as rereading, scanning, analysis, summarization, and utilizing the first language for idea formation support and motivate students to comprehend the reading material. Grabe and Stoller (2002) emphasize the undeniable importance of learners' self-perceptions, feelings about reading, interest in specific topics, and eagerness to engage with texts and acquire knowledge in their educational environment, particularly when addressing the influence of socio-affective factors on reading development.

The term Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) refers to classroom activities in which language learning approaches are integrated into language teaching by the instructor (Chamot et al., 1999). This instructional approach is learner-centered and involves the explicit teaching of reading skills. In SBI, learners are introduced to specific processes, learn the reasons for using each method, observe the teacher demonstrating the techniques, and are provided with opportunities to practice these tactics (Cohen et al., 1996). This approach focuses on teaching learners how to effectively employ various reading strategies to become proficient strategic readers (Akkakoson, 2013; Block & Pressley, 2002). According to O'Malley et al. (1985), a research report identified effective learning techniques for learners, demonstrating that explicit instruction in the use of these strategies significantly enhanced student performance.

Reading comprehension

Anderson (1985) defined reading as "the process of constructing meaning from written texts." It is a complicated ability that necessitates the coordination of several interconnected sources of information" (p. 7). Grabe and Stoller (2013) define reading as the ability to extract meaning from written text and successfully interpret it. To recap, reading entails analyzing a text and getting as much information as possible from it.

Comprehending written texts is crucial for both the instruction and acquisition of reading skills. As stated by Grellet (1981), "comprehending a written text involves extracting the necessary information from it as efficiently as possible" (p. 3). Grellet emphasizes the reader's capacity to derive meaning from a text by utilizing their prior knowledge. Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) propose a method of deriving meaning from a text by understanding the text as a whole rather than isolating meaning from individual words or phrases. Reading comprehension, therefore, is the process of constructing a mental representation of a text's meaning that aligns with the readers' existing knowledge.

Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension

Several factors impact children's reading comprehension abilities. Among these factors are their reading attitudes, relevant education on comprehension approaches, flexibility, text shape, and understanding of various reading comprehension tactics. Other features include linguistic expertise, previous experience, metacognitive information, and reading processes (Koda, 2007). There are several causes of children's reading problems. Their understanding is typically hampered by a lack of vocabulary knowledge, poor fluency, unfamiliarity with the subject matter, text-level readability, and insufficient use of excellent reading practices (Westwood, 2008). The adults lack confidence and make limited progress because their English background is not enough (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). According to Meniado (2016), text structure susceptibility, inference formation, and comprehension checks are all factors that influence students' reading comprehension ability.

However, several factors impact college students' reading comprehension, including a lack of vocabulary knowledge, challenges in recalling prior information, difficulties in grasping the cohesiveness of texts, and the adoption of incorrect reading practices. Firstly, a grasp of vocabulary is essential for interpreting intricate reading materials like textbooks, especially those containing technical terms (Carlisle, 2000; Qian, 2002). Addressing the influence of prior knowledge on reading comprehension, Nguyen (2007) highlighted that students with prior knowledge might comprehend content more easily, but when faced with unexpected readings, they struggle and have to read texts multiple times to fully understand them. The third factor, text cohesiveness, involves elements such as coordinating conjunctions, prepositional phrases, participial phrases, and nominalizations, making the writing more complex and challenging to comprehend (Anderson & Freebody, 1983; Nuttall, 2000). Lastly, inappropriate reading strategies contribute to reading difficulties, as poor readers approach various texts in the same way without actively seeking to learn through their reading practices, as Golinkoff (1975) noted. The research suggests that explicit training in foreign language reading approaches should be incorporated to address these challenges.

The benefits of strategy-based instruction teaching in students' reading comprehension

Effective EFL readers employ reading strategies to overcome their reading limitations and the constraints of their language proficiency when comprehending a text (Yang, 2006). Additionally, the utilization of reading comprehension tactics aids readers in concentrating on contextual information to enhance their understanding as they engage with the text. The enhancement of reading strategies is facilitated by qualities such as control, effective decision-making, and adaptability, fostering self-efficacy derived from both skill and effort. Readers who employ strategic approaches feel confident in their ability to monitor and enhance their reading skills, providing them with both the information and motivation needed for success (Afflerbach et al., 2008). As a result, the dual emphasis on explicit strategy training is reflected in comprehension. Reading instruction can follow a constant cycle of modeling, explaining, and directing (all of which are SBI features), leading to autonomous practice and fluency. It demonstrates that SBI can help L2 learners become more effective by teaching them reading skills that enhance their reading comprehension (Afflerbach et al., 2008).

Procedure for applying strategy-based instruction to teach reading

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) was inspired by Chamot and O'Malley's interest in the research of L2 learning approaches. As students become more strategic in their approach to learning, they also become more independent and less dependent on the instructor. The CALLA has three major components: content subjects, academic language improvement, and direct instruction of procedures for learning (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). Preparation, Presentation, Practice, Evaluation, and Expansion Activities are the five steps of each CALLA lesson. Because the CALLA paradigm is recursive rather than linear, teachers and students can always return to previous educational phases as needed (Chamot, 2005).

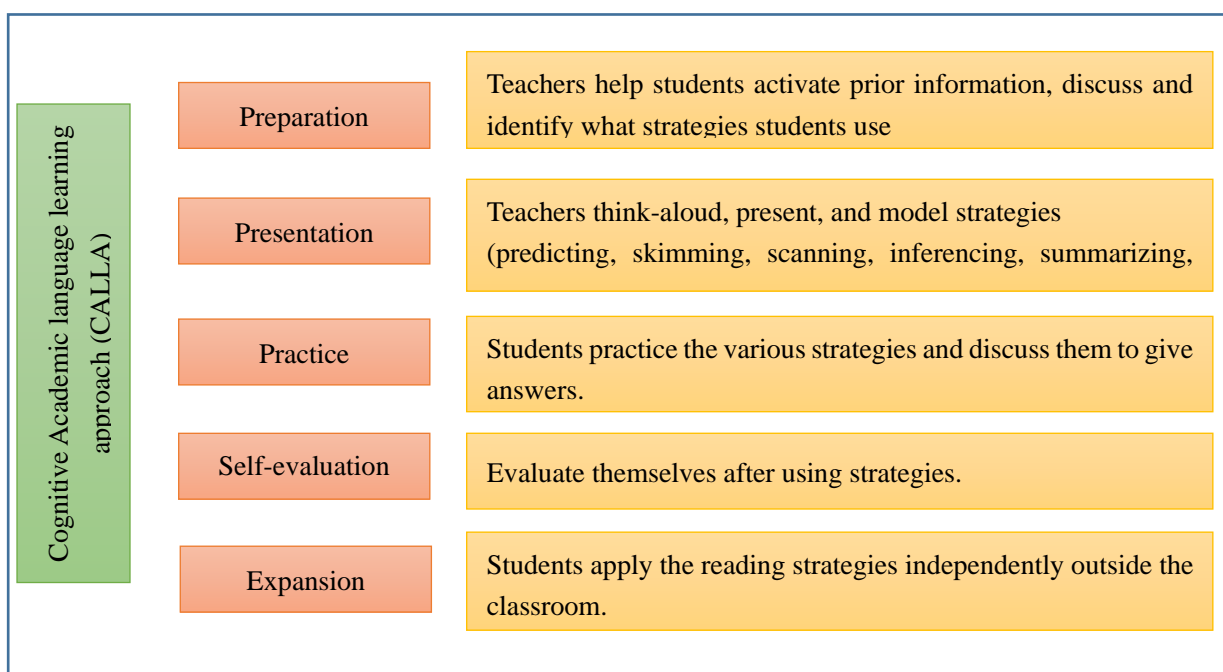
According to Chamot and O'Malley (1987), a CALLA lesson plan model consists of five stages of a reading lesson. To begin, during the preparation, the teacher assists students in activating prior information through group discussions on reading strategies. Learners articulate their thoughts regarding the reading techniques they plan to employ. Subsequently, the teacher vocalizes their thought process during the presentation while displaying a text on an overhead projector. Throughout the session, the teacher exemplifies the use of various techniques, including previewing, predicting content based on subtitles, leveraging photos to activate conceptual understanding of headings, giving special attention to subjects and highlighted material, self-evaluating comprehension, outlining how to identify the main idea, providing additional details, and organizing information to assess individual achievement in text comprehension. Following this, the instructor may prompt students to reflect on the observed approaches, offering further clarification by naming each method and explaining how a specific strategy can be applied more effectively. This serves as a form of modeling for students, aiding them in envisioning themselves successfully completing a particular reading task.

Third, learners practice using the predicting, scanning, skimming, referring, and summarizing skills with reading assignments with the supervision of the teacher. The level of assistance required will be determined by students' understanding and ability with the tactics, and the

teacher must ensure that it is used correctly. Fourth, students review their results in a whole-class discussion throughout the self-evaluation to evaluate the effectiveness of the reading strategies and to absorb what has been taught. They will be prompted to actively record their findings in a learning journal in order to handle and broaden their knowledge and use of reading skills.

In the final section of the expansion, students use what they have learned so far to apply newly acquired knowledge to new materials. When reading books outside the classroom, they can also use previously taught skills or create a special blend of reading techniques. When necessary, the teacher can provide scaffolding prompts to help students investigate various approaches for evaluating and comparing their work.

Figure 1. CALLA framework adapted from Chamot (2008)



Empirical studies

The effect of teaching cognitive reading strategies on the reading comprehension of EFL pupils at Hoa Minh Upper Secondary School in Tra Vinh Province, Vietnam, was examined by Huynh (2020). Seventy Hoa Minh Upper Secondary School students participated in this study; thirty-five were assigned to the experimental group (EG) and thirty-five to the control group (CG). While the CG received instruction through textbooks and conventional ways, the EG received instruction in cognitive reading skills. The students' excitement for learning to read, as well as their reading comprehension skills, were evaluated using reading comprehension exams and surveys. The results of the study showed that, in comparison to the CG, the EG's reading comprehension abilities and positive reading motivation greatly improved. In order to improve students' reading comprehension and maintain their interest in reading classes, the research strongly suggested that cognitive reading strategies be taught and applied.

Sukarni et al. (2017) studied the efficacy of strategy-based reading instruction in teaching

reading as well as students' perceptions of the implementation of reading instruction. The study was conducted with fifth-semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo's English Education Program. There were 63 pupils in this study, with 28 in the EG and 35 in the CG. The treatment consisted of 12 visits spread out over 12 weeks, each lasting 100 minutes. Two types of data collection equipment were tests and questionnaires. The findings of the study demonstrated that the student's reading skills increased. They discovered Strategy-based Reading Instruction to be advantageous and helpful in overcoming reading comprehension challenges.

Shorkaee and Talebi (2018) conducted a study to examine the impact of teaching reading strategies on both reading performance and attitudes toward reading strategies while engaging with texts of varying difficulty levels. A total of fifty-five university students majoring in Political Science and Basic Sciences were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (N = 24) or the control group (N = 24). The experimental group underwent Reading Strategy Instruction (RSI) using the CALLA paradigm, while the control group received reading instruction emphasizing vocabulary and grammar. Data for this experimental investigation were collected through exams and questionnaires. Results revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in both reading assessments, demonstrating superior reading performance and more positive attitudes toward reading strategies. Notably, when students engaged with texts at an appropriate difficulty level, the effectiveness of Reading Strategy Instruction in improving both reading performance and attitudes toward reading strategies was significantly enhanced. The study suggested that selecting materials better suited to the reader's skill level rather than ones considerably above it could enhance cognitive and emotional functioning.

Chinpakdee and Gu (2021) assessed the influence of explicit method training on the reading skills of EFL secondary school students in Thai secondary schools. The study involved 30 students in the treatment group and 32 students in the control group. Results from pre-, post-, and delayed reading tests, along with think-aloud reading sessions, indicated a notable improvement in the reading test scores and reading methods of the students in the intervention class. According to group interviews, learners had a positive attitude about English reading and were more confident in their skills to handle the procedure of reading independently. According to the authors, explicit strategy instruction can help language students build crucial strategic abilities for processing English texts. It also discusses how SBI can be efficiently employed in language schools.

A few research investigations on the effects of SBI on students' reading comprehension have been undertaken in Vietnam. In addition, past research has primarily concentrated on certain reading strategies, such as cognitive or metacognitive strategies, rather than employing a reading instruction model to evaluate all stages of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. As a result, this research aims to analyze the impact of SBI, specifically the reading framework model CALLA, on the reading comprehension of EFL college students.

Research Questions

The study's goal is to look into the impacts of SBI on EFL college students' reading comprehension as well as their views toward the effects of SBI. As a result, the study tries to answer the following two research questions:

1. To what extent does SBI affect EFL college students' reading comprehension?
2. What are students' attitudes towards SBI on EFL college students' reading comprehension?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study was carried out at Hau Giang Community College, which is located in Vi Thanh City, Hau Giang Province, Vietnam. This institution is the only one in the area, with 195 instructors, five of whom are English specialists. They each have over ten years of expertise in schooling. Because they believe that Communicative Language Teaching is intended to teach listening or speaking abilities, their pedagogy focuses on content or traditional methods of teaching reading. There are three English courses, each with one to two classes of roughly 30 students, comprising both male and female students aged 18 to 21. The students use the "Interactions 2 Reading" textbook set (Hartmann & Kim, 2007), which is aligned with the school's authorized curriculum. In all classes, the college provides modern teaching aids such as projectors and laptop computers.

Based on convenience sampling, 60 second-year students from two classes of English course 16 at HGCC were chosen to participate in this study (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The two classes were chosen because they shared demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and English level. Furthermore, the majority of participants were from Hau Giang province and had studied English in high school for seven years. In general, their backgrounds were not very different. The individuals in this sample were separated into two groups. The CG had 30 pupils, 8 (27%) of whom were males and 22 (73%) were females, while the EG had 30 students, 7 (23%) of whom were males and 23 (77%) were females. Their ages varied from 18 to 21.

Design of the Study

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. According to Fraenkel et al. (2012), this strategy entails gathering and analyzing both types of data. Quantitative data was utilized to establish general conclusions about the sample group, whereas qualitative data gave more comprehensive explanations for the quantitative results (Creswell, 2003). The design of this study was quasi-experimental, which implies that the participants were not picked at random, but other strategies (such as a pre-test and CG) were used to exert some control over extraneous factors (Ary et al., 2018).

Data was gathered using a pre-test, post-test, and interviews. The data was gathered in accordance with the experimental teaching's two stages: students' reading comprehension before and after the use of SBI was investigated through the administration of pre- and post-

tests, and their attitudes regarding SBI were disclosed through interviews.

The 14-week quasi-experimental study began in the first month of the fourth semester of the school year 2022-2023 in the English course of intake 16 and consisted of 5 reading lessons on various topics. Every week, the researcher got one lecture. Each lesson was 60 minutes long.

The pedagogies for teaching a reading text must be examined to perceive the variations and similarities in the CG and EG teaching procedures. The traditional method was used to teach students in the CG. It signifies that the teacher instructs students to complete textbook assignments. The CALLA framework paradigm was employed by the EG teacher. The reading skills were clearly taught, discussed, and imitated. She talked about tactics with the learners to help them understand the effects of techniques on their successful learning, confidence, and motivation. Students were given the opportunity to practice and self-assess their reading skills. They developed their own individual set of reading approaches and applied them in similar situations and reading courses. This enables individuals to have sufficient competence to utilize strategies autonomously, as well as the self-regulated capacity to take responsibility for their own reading.

Table 1.

Teaching process of the EG and CG

Control group	Experimental group
<i>Pre-reading</i> - Stimulating students' knowledge based on the reading title - Teaching vocabulary and some grammar structures	<i>Preparation</i> - Discussing with students the reading strategies to identify the strategies
	<i>Presentation</i> - Using the "think-aloud" technique to introduce, explain, and model the five reading strategies of predicting, scanning, skimming, inferencing, and summarizing - Asking students to reflect on the techniques they witnessed.
<i>While-reading</i> - Asking students to do tasks in groups - Giving feedback to the comprehension questions.	<i>Practice</i> - Asking students to practice in group work with peers utilizing the five strategies
<i>Post-reading</i> - Asking students to summarize the reading - Giving feedback to the comprehension questions	<i>Self-evaluation</i> - Asking students to work in groups for self-evaluation
	<i>Expansion</i> - Students employ reading techniques taught earlier or create their own distinct blend of reading strategies when reading books independently outside the classroom.

Data collection & analysis

Tests

Tests are vital tools to assess educational studies (Ary et al., 2018). They are a set of methods, processes, or things that require performance from the examinee (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). To assess students' achievement, a pre- and post-test of reading comprehension was adapted from the teacher's book. The pre- and post-test themes were associated with the reading passages in the students' textbook "Interaction 2 Reading." Students at the low intermediate level took the pre- and post-test. The reading assessments were divided into five sections, each with 25 questions to assess their ability to predict, skim, scan, infer, and summarize. The post-test followed the same pattern as the pre-test and was based on the test in the teacher's book.

The researchers adopted the classification of students' reading ability from the Classification of Student Achievement (Arikunto, 2009, p. 245).

Table 2.

Classification of student achievement

Score	Grade	Level
80-100	A	Excellent
66-79	B	Good
56-65	C	Sufficient
40-55	D	Fairly-sufficient
30-39	E	Low

The researchers evaluated the data gathered from the students through a reading test using a sequential process. Initially, individual scores were categorized into excellent, good, sufficient, pretty sufficient, and low. Subsequently, the data was analyzed using SPSS 25.0, a statistical software for social science research. The frequency and percentage tests were then applied to identify any notable variations in the descriptive analysis. Finally, an independent samples t-test was conducted on the total scores of the students to ascertain whether a statistically significant difference existed in the overall mean score between the two groups in the pre- and post-tests.

Interviews

The interview is a conversation between a person and an interviewer with the objective of gathering information and equally influencing each other (Cohen & Manion, 1994). A semi-structured interview was used to obtain qualitative data for this study. Six EG students were chosen at random for the interviews. The real interviews were done after the post-test, in a quiet and isolated environment such as the after-school classroom. Each interview lasted 25 to 35 minutes. The interviews were taped with the permission of the interviewees. Most significantly, all interviewees and their responses were kept completely confidential.

The transcripts of all interviews were translated into English, comprehensively reviewed, and categorized using thematic analysis following Boyatzis' (1998) methodology. Subsequently,

participants' responses were organized into themes based on similarities and differences, facilitating the assessment of their perspectives on the influence of SBI on reading comprehension

Findings

Findings from the tests

Pre-Tests

The data for CG's and EG's reading tests were generated from the pre-test results prior to therapy. The following tables indicate the frequency and percentage of mean scores for each group.

Table 3.

Frequency and percentage of CG's and EG's pre-test score

Interval	Interpretation	Grade	CG		EG	
			Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
80-100	Excellent	A	3	10 %	4	13.3%
66-79	Good	B	17	56.7%	14	46.7%
56-65	Sufficient	C	9	30%	7	23.3%
40-55	Fairly Sufficient	D	1	3.3%	5	16.7%
Total			30	100%	30	100%

Table 3 displays the pre-test scores of 60 CG and EG students. The excellent group included 3 students from CG and 4 students from EG. The good group consisted of 17 CG pupils and 14 EG students. In the sufficient group, there were 9 students in CG and 7 others in EG, one student in CG and 5 others in EG in the reasonably sufficient group, and none in the low group.

According to the data above, the number of CG pupils was equivalent to EG in the excellent category, greater in the good and sufficient groups, and lower in the moderately sufficient group.

Table 4.

Descriptive statistics of pre-test in CG and EG

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CG	30	50.00	80.00	66.00	6.91
EG	30	50.00	80.00	65.70	9.35

Table 4 demonstrates that CG's and EG's scores are the same, with a minimum of 50 and a maximum of 80. CG has a mean score of 66.00, whereas EG has a score of 65.70. As a result, the scores of both groups were comparable.

The researchers employed Independent samples t-tests to investigate the reading comprehension levels of the two groups at the start of the study. The findings of the CG and EG between-tests (see Table 5) revealed that students' reading comprehension was similar at the time of the pre-test.

Table 5.

Independent samples t-test of pre-test

	Group	N	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Pre-test	EG	30	65.70	9.35	.158	58	.875
	CG	30	66.00	6.91			

Table 5 shows that the CG students scored slightly higher in the pre-test than the EG students (Mean = 65.7 vs. Mean = 66.0, respectively), but the EG ($t = .158$, $p = .875 > .05$) stated that the average score of these two groups did not differ. This indicated that the students' prior reading capacity in both groups was not different. The students' reading comprehension was rated equivalent. Thus, if there was a difference in reading comprehension between the two groups after the trial, the effects of SBI on the dependent variable in this study may be predicted.

Post-test

After the treatment, the data for the CG and EG tests were gathered. The tables below indicate each category's frequency and percentage of mean scores.

Table 6.

Frequency and percentage of CG's and EG's post-test score

Interval	Interpretation	Grade	CG		EG	
			Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
80-100	Excellent	A	5	16.7	14	46.7
66-79	Good	B	19	63.3	15	50.0
56-65	Sufficient	C	5	16.7	1	3.3
40-55	Fairly Sufficient	D	1	3.3	0	0
Total			30	100	30	100

Table 6 shows the post-test outcomes for the two groups of students. 5 students in CG and 14 students in EG received exceptional grades. The good one had 19 students in CG and 15 students in EG. There were 5 students in CG and one in EG in the sufficient group, one in CG and none in EG in the pretty sufficient group, and none in the low group.

Table 7.

Descriptive statistics of post-test in CG and EG

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CG	30	50.00	80.00	68.67	7.30
EG	30	60.00	90.00	76.33	8.50

Table 7 reveals that the CG has a minimum score of 50 and a maximum score of 80, but the EG

has a minimum score of 60 and a maximum score of 80. CG has a lower mean score of 68.7 than EG, which is 76.3. As a result, the scores of both groups differed significantly.

On the post-test, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the two groups in terms of reading comprehension and to see if students in the EG improved more than those in the CG as a result of the SBI intervention. The results of this test are shown in the table below.

Table 8.

Independent samples t-test of post-test

	Group	N	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Post-test	EG	30	76.33	8.50	-3.75	58	.000
	CG	30	68.67	7.30			

Table 8 compares the students' post-test reading comprehension to their mean scores. In the post-test, pupils in the EG did better in reading comprehension than those in the CG. In particular, the EG received an average of 76.3 for reading comprehension, compared to 68.7 for the CG. Furthermore, $t = -3.75$, $p = .001 < .05$ revealed a significant effect with a bigger size to the immediate post-test in the EG as compared to the CG.

Based on the statistics, the researcher can conclude that the students in CG did not make significant progress in their reading comprehension after 14 weeks of instruction without the use of SBI.

Findings from the interviews

The interview data showed the students' attitudes toward the effects of SBI on EFL college students' reading comprehension. Three themes identified include students' understanding, beliefs, and application of SBI in reading comprehension.

Insights into students' understanding of the SBI and its importance in reading comprehension

The interview data analysis revealed that the six participating EFL college students held a variety of attitudes that represented their understandings of SBI as teachers' explicit instruction in reading.

Students' understanding of the SBI in reading comprehension

Specifically, five students who were interviewed understood SBI as a kind of support teachers provide to instruct how to use reading strategies explicitly.

Strategy-based instruction is a kind of support teachers provide to instruct how to use reading strategies explicitly. (S1, interview extract)

Through strategy-based instruction, strategies are taught clearly. (S2, interview extract)

Strategy-based instruction focuses on teaching students specific strategies to improve their reading comprehension. (S3, interview extract)

Strategy-based instruction is a teaching practice that shows students how to read the text

through reading strategies. (S6, interview extract)

One other student, however, was unsure about SBI. She only felt familiar with reading strategies.

I'm not sure I comprehend strategy-based instruction completely. I'm solely familiar with reading strategies. (S5, interview extract)

The importance of SBI in reading comprehension

When asked about the importance of SBI in reading comprehension, all six students shared that SBI encouraged students to actively engage with the different texts by using appropriate strategies. That helped them have effective reading, confidence, and motivation, and they also used reading strategies independently. Their views were illustrated in the following comments.

Through strategy-based instruction, reading strategies are taught, discussed, and modeled explicitly; so, I understand how, when, and why to use those strategies. They help me have effective reading, confidence, and motivation, and I can use these strategies independently. (SV1, interview extract)

It can help students to read more effectively and become independent readers. (S2, interview extract)

By explicitly teaching reading strategies, students can approach different texts and reading situations. They select and apply appropriate strategies based on the text's purpose, complexity, and comprehension goals. (S3, interview extract)

Strategy-based instruction encourages students to actively engage with the text by using specific strategies. Instead of passively reading, they learn to interact with the content, make connections, and make predictions. This active engagement enhances their comprehension and deepens their understanding of the text. (S4, interview extract)

Strategy-based instruction enhances students' ability to comprehend and analyze texts. Strategies such as summarizing, scanning, and Inferencing help students extract essential information, identify main ideas, and understand text structures. (S5, interview extract)

It can help me feel confident, and it's easy for me to understand the text. (S6, interview extract)

Insights into the beliefs of students about SBI in reading comprehension

SBI in reading comprehension was believed by EFL college students as an approach to overcome the difficulty in reading text and improve their comprehension.

Two of six participants said that SBI helped them to understand the text better.

Yes, I think students will understand the text better. (S2, interview extract)

I believe students can understand the text clearly. For example, they will use strategy-based instruction to identify the gist and specific details. (S5, interview extract)

Three of six participants said that SBI helped them become more proficient readers, which led to improved reading comprehension.

Yes, I believe that strategy-based instruction affects students' reading comprehension. Thanks to strategy-based instruction, I can overcome the difficulty in reading text, and I can improve my reading comprehension. (S1, interview extract)

Yes, I believe that by learning and applying specific strategies, students become more active and strategic readers, which leads to improved reading comprehension. (S4, interview extract)

Yes, I believe that strategy-based instruction effect students' reading comprehension and helps them become more proficient readers. (S6, interview extract)

One participant reported that she developed a set of reading strategies that can approach various texts and reading tasks through SBI.

Yes, I do. When students are explicitly taught reading strategies and provided with opportunities to practice and apply them, they develop a set of reading strategies that they can use to approach various texts and reading tasks. (S3, interview extract)

Insights into applying strategy-based instruction at reading comprehension to students

The interview data showed the difficulties and results of applying SBI in reading comprehension.

The difficulties of applying SBI in reading comprehension

When asked about difficulties in applying strategy-based instruction in reading, one student shared that there were some reading strategies were difficult to understand. She didn't understand these strategies clearly if the teacher didn't instruct explicitly about them.

Some reading strategies are difficult to understand. Students will never understand these strategies if no one instructs explicitly about them. So, it's a good idea to have the instruction in class. (S5, interview extract)

Another student felt confused about transferring the strategies from one context to another reading.

I feel confused about transferring the strategies I learn in one context to other reading tasks or subjects. (S6, interview extract)

Another participant have difficulties following the stages the teacher instructs at first, but she could use strategies independently after some lessons.

At first, I had difficulties following the stages the teacher instructed; however, I could use strategies independently and had the self-regulated capacity for my own reading after 5 lessons. (S4, interview extract)

In contrast to those, three other participants didn't have any difficulties in applying SBI in reading.

I don't have a lot of difficulties because I am taught clear reading strategies. (S1, interview extract)

I think I do it well. (S3, interview extract)

Results of applying SBI in reading comprehension

Upon inquiry regarding the outcomes of the implementation of SBI in the context of reading, five out of six participants expressed that, attributable to SBI, they experienced heightened confidence and motivation in effectively comprehending diverse texts. Furthermore, they demonstrated the ability to apply these strategies beyond the confines of the classroom.

Yes, I do. Applying strategy-based instruction makes me read fast and understand the texts. In addition, I become more confident and motivated when I read difficult texts, and I also can employ strategies independently. (S1, interview extract)

I think that I will become a strategic reader. I can use appropriate strategies, self-evaluation, and expansion of my own strategies catalog. (S2, interview extract)

I can follow all the stages that the teacher instructs. In addition, I can apply strategy-based instruction independently outside the class. (S3, interview extract)

I feel the reading is interesting. When I read the materials at home, I can use my own reading strategies to help me absorb the content quickly and thoroughly. (S4, interview extract)

Yes, I do. I think that strategy-based instruction affects how much a reader is engaged in the reading experience as well as how much rehearsal and practice a reader does to become an effective reader. (S6, interview extract)

One student reported that she knew how to read and comprehend various texts, but she was unsure if she could become an effective reader. She also needed the teacher's instruction in using SBI.

I know how to read and comprehend various texts; nonetheless, I do not consider myself an effective reader. I need the teacher's instruction. (S5, interview extract)

Discussion

Effects of SBI on EFL college students' reading comprehension

The finding derived from the data analysis indicates that learners who utilized the SBI for reading showed significant improvement in various aspects of reading comprehension, including guessing text contents, grasping the main ideas and details, making inferences, and summarizing. Prior to the intervention, both groups exhibited similar levels of reading comprehension, employing conventional methods like using dictionaries. Statistical analysis, specifically the independent samples t-test, indicated no significant difference in pre-test scores between the EG and CG, suggesting similar reading comprehension abilities.

After the intervention, the EG utilizing SBI displayed a higher average score in the post-test compared to the CG. This indicates that students who were adept at employing reading strategies like predicting, skimming, scanning, inferencing, and summarization achieved a more profound understanding of the texts. Statistical analysis revealed a noteworthy disparity in post-test scores between the EG and CG, suggesting that students in the EG, following the

implementation of SBI, outperformed their counterparts in terms of reading comprehension. The study underscores the positive and substantial impact of SBI in enhancing students' reading comprehension skills, particularly in the context of EFL learning, positioning SBI as a promising pedagogical approach for addressing challenges in reading comprehension.

The present study's conclusions align with Sukarni et al.'s (2017) empirical research, reinforcing the positive impact of SBI on reading comprehension. This consistency in findings suggests that the benefits of SBI may be applicable across diverse educational contexts. The research further strengthens the case for SBI's effectiveness by demonstrating its positive influence on the reading comprehension of EFL learners who autonomously manage their reading process. This aligns with Chinpakdee and Gu's (2021) findings, emphasizing that reading strategy instruction improves EFL learners' reading comprehension and confidence in reading independently. The consistent results underscore the robust relationship between SBI and enhanced reading comprehension in EFL settings, emphasizing the significance of integrating such instructional strategies to support language learners in developing superior reading skills.

Students' attitudes towards the effects of SBI

Students' understanding of the SBI and its importance in reading comprehension

The results obtained from interviews indicated that Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) was perceived as valuable support provided by teachers to explicitly guide students on how to employ reading strategies for enhancing reading comprehension. Cohen et al. (1996) argue that strategy-based reading instruction involves teaching specific reading strategies, informing students about the procedures, providing reasons for utilizing the approach, demonstrating the techniques through instructor modeling, and offering opportunities for students to practice the strategies. This comprehensive approach facilitates students' understanding of texts, enabling them to evolve into proficient strategic readers (Akkakoson, 2013; Block & Pressley, 2002).

Regarding the significance of Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) in reading comprehension, it was perceived as contributing to students' achievement in successful reading, bolstering their confidence and motivation, and fostering their ability to employ reading strategies autonomously. This observation aligns with prior research conducted by various scholars, such as Chinpakdee and Gu (2021), who assert that students exhibit a positive attitude toward English reading and feel more self-assured in managing their reading independently. Additionally, Huynh (2020) contends that SBI plays a role in generating positive motivation for reading.

According to Sukarni et al. (2017), the student's reading ability increases. Strategy-based reading instruction was deemed to be effective and practical in overcoming reading comprehension difficulties by the students. This was evident in the current study's findings, as teaching reading methods allows students to approach various texts and reading situations. They choose and use relevant strategies according to the purpose, complexity, and understanding goals of the material.

The beliefs of students about SBI in reading comprehension

The importance of students' self-perceptions, emotional attitudes toward reading, interest in specific subjects, and willingness to engage with texts and derive knowledge from them in the classroom learning setting is universally acknowledged, as noted by Grabe and Stoller (2002). This is evident in the current study where all of the students who took part believed that SBI may help them overcome the difficulties such as understanding the text better when reading material. This finding is congruent with the study of Yang (2006), who discovered that good EFL readers employ extra ways for comprehension in their reading; they use reading strategies to compensate for their reading deficiencies and restricted language abilities in comprehending a text and the study of Sukarni et al. (2017), who discovered that with strategy-based reading teaching, students can overcome difficulty in reading material and believe they can increase their reading comprehension.

Moreover, the students who took part in the study expressed the belief that SBI assisted them in cultivating a repertoire of reading strategies that can be applied to diverse texts, ultimately enhancing their reading comprehension. This observation aligns with the outcomes of earlier research conducted by Chinpakdee and Gu (2021), where it was found that students exhibit a positive attitude towards English reading and gain increased confidence in independently managing their reading process through the implementation of SBI.

Applying SBI to reading comprehension by students

According to the findings of the interviews, several of the participating students had no problems utilizing SBI because they were taught reading strategies. Through SBI, they had a sharper sense of strategy: what the concrete strategies are and how to organize and use them systematically and effectively.

Another point of view is that students were perplexed when transferring strategies from one context to another. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Chamot and O'Malley (1987), who discovered that efficient transfer of strategies to other contexts needs students to be aware of the methods they are using and to be able to express the conditions under which strategies can be utilized. Additionally, one participating student didn't understand reading strategies clearly if the teacher didn't instruct explicitly about them. The result lines up with the findings of Chamot (2005), who suggests that the instructor should carry out the instruction as well as the language of instruction, particularly among beginner-level learners and in foreign language environments. This is especially true for low-proficiency students who have not had enough opportunity to use their strategies in a variety of situations and may find it difficult to transmit their knowledge successfully in the absence of clear instructions.

Concerning the results of using SBI in reading comprehension, the majority of participants stated that thanks to SBI, they felt more confident and motivated while reading diverse texts efficiently, which is consistent with the findings of research done by Chinpakdee and Gu (2021) and Huynh (2020) which found that SBI has a major effect on students' motivation. Furthermore, the students might employ relevant strategies, self-evaluation, and the expansion of their strategy catalog. They could even independently use strategies to improve their reading skills outside of class. Such a finding lends support to previous studies that SBI can help second

language learners become more effective by teaching them how to use reading strategies to better regulate their reading comprehension (Afflerbach et al., 2008).

However, one of the participants was doubtful whether she could become an efficient reader, but she could absorb diverse texts effectively. She also needs SBI training from the teacher. This is especially true for low-proficiency learners with limited prior knowledge. They will not be able to become strategic readers after only five lessons, and they will need additional time to practice implementing SBI.

Conclusion

The study found that learners who were taught with SBI had significantly improved reading comprehension. Before the treatment, students in both groups exhibited comparable reading comprehension levels, using traditional means such as dictionaries to understand words and completing reading activities. After the SBI intervention, however, students in EG had a higher mean post-test score than those in CG, showing a better knowledge of texts through competent use of methods such as predicting, skimming, scanning, inferencing, and summarizing. These findings supported prior research showing SBI is beneficial in improving reading comprehension among EFL learners. As a result, SBI is a beneficial and practical way to treat reading comprehension challenges and develop reading comprehension so that students can become independent or effective readers.

The study revealed valuable insights into EFL college students' attitudes toward the effects of SBI on reading comprehension. Most interviewees expressed a favorable cognitive attitude, emphasizing the positive impact of SBI on their reading comprehension by making their reading more effective, successful, and faster. Emotionally, students exhibited mixed feelings, with some showing confidence, motivation, and interest due to the specific comprehension strategies learned. Students with positive reading attitudes demonstrated improved reader behavior, confidently employing strategies like predicting, skimming, scanning, inferencing, and summarizing to enhance language comprehension. The research aligns with previous studies asserting that SBI positively influences students' attitudes, confidence, and motivation in reading. Additionally, SBI is found effective in overcoming reading comprehension difficulties, as students develop a repertoire of strategies tailored to diverse texts. The students expressed belief in SBI's ability to enhance understanding, which is consistent with the previous research emphasizing its positive impact on comprehension. However, challenges arise in transferring strategies between contexts, emphasizing the need for explicit instruction, especially for low-proficiency learners. While most participants report increased confidence and motivation through SBI, some require additional training for sustained improvement, highlighting the importance of continued practice for developing strategic readers.

Despite the fact that the study met its aims, the main problem was sample limitations. Because the study had a small sample size (30 students for each group, the EG, and the CG), there may be some challenges with generalization because there are only 60 students enrolled in the English course this year. Another issue is that the treatment duration was most likely insufficient to determine whether the improvement was consistent and sustained over a longer period of

time.

Future studies are suggested to investigate the SBI on EFL college students' reading comprehension in larger groups. Furthermore, the treatment period should be extended to determine whether or not the improvement is consistent.

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Biodata

Nguyen Thi Lan Phuong was a Master's graduate student at Tra Vinh University. She has been teaching English at a Community College in Hau Giang province for more than 10 years. She wishes to apply the appropriate teaching methods that she had learned in her master's course to help her students learn foreign languages.

Nguyen Van Nhat is a physical education lecturer with a decade and a half of tenure at the Hau Giang Community College in Vi Thanh City, Vietnam. His passion lies in exploring innovative Teaching Methods. He uses the English language in his subject to contribute to enhancing language education and fostering effective learning experiences for students in Vietnam.


The Use of TED Talks to Enhance EFL Students' Public Speaking Skills: English-Majored Seniors' Practices and Perceptions

Tran Ngoc Kim Cuong¹, Nguyen Thi Thu Hang^{1*}

¹ Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*Corresponding author's email: hang.ntt@vlu.edu.vn

*  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7696-1882>

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: TED Talks, public speaking, perceptions, practices

The integration of technology in language education is now standard in the era of industry 4.0, with TED Talks aligning seamlessly with this trend. This study investigates how EFL students at Van Lang University use the TED Talks platform to enhance their public speaking. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods—online questionnaires and interviews—the study involved sixty-one senior EFL students. Results reveal that these students regularly turn to TED Talks as a learning tool to refine their speaking skills. Beyond aiding learning, students perceive TED Talks as crucial in enhancing their public speaking performance. The research suggests further exploration into EFL teachers' perspectives on integrating TED Talks, the platform's effectiveness in enhancing various language skills, and the factors contributing to its optimal use in EFL classrooms.

Introduction

It is undeniable that globalization entails the growing demand for effective communication in multiple languages. Consequently, speaking English fluently has rapidly become an indispensable skill for individuals (Graddol, 2006). Reportedly, speaking is a vital communication skill that students should acquire. Public speaking, which involves verbal and nonverbal signs, combines information arrangement and exchange (Chaney & Burk, 1998) and has been proven to give students a great advantage over their opponents in a competitive labor market. Public speaking abilities are valued not just by teachers and students (Zappa-Hollman, 2007), but also by employers and workers viewing these abilities as "very crucial" for job success (Gallo, 2014). Most businesses employ individuals with strong English communication abilities since being assertive and able to speak clearly in front of an audience impresses potential partners and employers (Robles, 2012). As mentioned above, the capacity for public speaking is essential for students' academic and professional success from an early age (Johnson & Szczupakiewicz, 1987).

According to Ahn and Lee (2016), speaking may be the most challenging ability for students.

Due to their lack of confidence, many students experienced fear when speaking in English. Students also have issues with body language, proper English letter pronunciation, intonation, beliefs, and word usage (Hamad et al., 2019). Additionally, they frequently check their grammar while speaking to ensure that it is proper or not, which reduces their fluency and causes them to lose their ideas. Additionally, Nguyen and Tong (2024) affirmed that students considered delivering a speech in front of the audience the most challenging task since they were afraid of making mistakes and being observed, which eroded their confidence. Skehan (1996) posited that in order to speak well, the speaker should not have pauses or hesitations. In essence, students' speaking skills still need improvement (Heriansyah, 2012). Consistently, the researcher found that the majority of EFL students at Van Lang University perceived speaking as a challenging skill. In addition, based on the Speaking 4 Course's Grade Point Average (GPA) in the academic year 2021-2022, it is clear that nearly sixty-five percent of English majors struggled with this subject. Consequently, an innovative learning approach is urgently needed to improve students' speaking abilities.

Technological advances have paved new avenues for second language learning and teaching. Accordingly, there have been varied learning methods and diverse applications or tools supporting speaking abilities. The utilization of smart platforms using videos such as TED Talks, Youtube, TikTok, and Instagram is perceived to impact students' emotions and their thinking processes (Berk, 2009). The research conducted by Nguyen and Pham (2022) concluded that students can enhance their speaking and listening skills by incorporating technological resources like films and YouTube into education. Specifically, TED Talks are beneficial to students and cover a wide range of topics, from entertainment to language instruction (Nurmukhamedov, 2017). Additionally, TED Talks allow viewers to regulate expressions such as images, gestures, voice, and space (Pinar & Aránzazu, 2019), focus on the emphasis, intonation, and rhythm of language, and simultaneously observe facial and body language (Bello, 1999).

In the current literature, various studies have explored the application of TED Talks in enhancing EFL students' language skills. However, there is a dearth of research examining students' experiences and perspectives regarding the incorporation of TED Talks in EFL classrooms. The topic of using this platform to improve students' speaking skills is even scarce. Therefore, the study has been carried out to discover how seniors utilize TED Talks to better their public speaking performance and how they perceive the effectiveness of this platform in improving their public speaking skills.

Literature review

What are TED Talks?

TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) was established in 1984 by American Richard Saul Wurman (History of TED, n.d.). The platform's official website describes TED as a non-profit media organization and a place where speakers can share insights. Moreover, there is a collection of TED lectures totaling more than 1800 speeches, along with a sizable library of 35,000 tracks that are widely accessible in many languages throughout the world (Taibi et al.,

2015). Therefore, it is a terrific option for people who are enthusiastic about learning many languages. In addition, the website is a great and incredibly insightful source of information, providing diverse topics for personalized demand. Nurmukhamedov (2017) asserted that TED Talk videos cover a wide range of topics, including technology, entertainment, design, business, science, and current world affairs, which offer specified knowledge of various subjects and help to enhance their social understanding.

Reportedly, TED Talks are 18-minute talks that are very lightly edited to avoid distorting the speaker's message (History of TED, n.d.). Furthermore, all TED Talks videos come with complete subtitles. Although they appear to be products that have not been content-tested by any of the manufacturers, the speakers in these videos have been explicitly instructed and urged to abide by the principles of presentation with optimal storyboards and accents that are strong in drawing viewers (Romanelli et al., 2015).

The diversity and popularity of TED Talks

TED Talks videos are increasingly spreading around the world, have been trending since 2007, and hit 1 billion views in 2012 (History of TED, n.d.). The TED website offers talks and presentations delivered by both native and non-native English speakers, whose transcripts are available for download in over 40 languages (Aleles & Hall, 2016), with a wide range of topics, such as sports, culture, fashion, politics, and technology. This diversity provides a valuable resource for English classes, as it exposes students to various accents, words, and expressions (Maria et al., 2018). Consequently, it is highly recommended that non-native English speakers utilize these talks to improve their listening and speaking skills, as well as to provide a contextual foundation for future presentations.

As mentioned above, the TED website offers a vast knowledge base, primarily in English, with high-quality information that is simple for students to access. These speeches serve as a resource for learning languages (Taibi et al., 2015). In addition, the majority of TED Talks videos have complete subtitles, preventing viewers from being confused if the speaker speaks too rapidly or with various accents. Al-Jarf (2021) asserted that students are motivated to study English when they view real videos with subtitles. Consistently, it could be the ideal choice for those who want to learn English as a foreign language. More importantly, TED Talks are an essential teaching tool for the four English skills since these videos could improve students' vocabulary and listening abilities (Rudneva et al., 2019), useful for reading skills (Borras & Lafayette, 1994; Winke et al., 2010), and developing oral skills (Kusuma, L.A., 2017).

Public speaking skills

Public speaking is defined as a speaking action used to instruct, persuade, or amuse an audience (Liu, 2011). Therefore, speakers must be aware of their tone, tempo, stress, pitch, and voice clarity (Lamerton, 2001). Besides, they also have to interact with the audience using body movement and keep an eye on any crowd indifference during the performance (O "Hair, Rubenstein, and Stewart 2010), which enables them to attract listeners' interest, arouse their attention, and hinder interruption. Hamilton (2012) strengthened the idea with a statement that the goal of language is to elicit feelings and a response from the listener.

Public speaking is perceived as one of the key abilities that necessitate success. Wang and Zou

(2018) posited that regardless of the style of speech, there were a lot of thought leaders and organizations influencing the world via the power of language and ideas. Additionally, Gunadi (1998) asserted that the goal of public speaking was to teach, educate, enlighten, and influence certain audiences in a particular setting.

The importance of public speaking skills in today's society

Speaking is considered an ability that EFL learners need to master (Ur, 1996; Khamkhien, 2010). Supporting this view, Chollet et al. (2015) affirmed that effective communication skills had several advantages, including personal development, job progress, and great leadership. Since one's initial impression of someone is formed by how they present themselves, most people believe that individuals who are good at public speaking are often those who speak English well. Shyam and Joy (2016) stated that people with good public speaking skills were constantly in demand for job possibilities and higher career prospects. In addition, numerous organizations utilize speaking in front of other people during speeches and other forms of presentations. As people grow at work, they are certainly more likely to advance in their careers thanks to public speaking skills since they are more likely to express their thoughts at meetings, seminars, and conferences (Raja, 2017).

Factors that contribute to good public speaking skills

Speaking encompasses a wide range of communication-related aspects and categories, as noted by Harmer (2007), emphasizing the significance of using accurate grammar and pronunciation. In support of this notion, Penny (2006) suggests that individuals aspiring to become fluent and effective speakers engage in six key elements of speaking ability: comprehension, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and intonation. This can be attributed to the fact that frequent mispronunciation of words by the speaker can result in the audience either missing the intended message or experiencing unnecessary confusion.

Effective public speaking necessitates simultaneous planning and organizing of the subject or materials. This is because public speaking is a process that involves thoughtful preparation and delivery of the message to the audience, as highlighted by Wrench et al. (2012). Ivanova, T., Gubanova, N., Shakirova, and Masitoh (2020) further explained that a speaker must thoroughly prepare, completely understand the topic, anticipate potential audience questions, and provide supporting arguments. This allows the speaker to anticipate and plan for potential scenarios that may arise during their presentation.

Secondly, confidence plays a crucial role in effective communication, particularly in the realm of public speaking. This entails adopting a pragmatic perspective, maintaining a robust belief in one's capabilities, and self-evaluating one's work (Indrawati et al., 2018). Confidence enables a speaker to adeptly handle potential challenges on the stage, fostering trust in the audience regarding the conveyed message. Corroborating this viewpoint, Salim (2015) contended that students endowed with articulate and assured speaking skills fulfill assessment criteria and exhibit enhanced performance in various speaking assignments within their academic coursework.

Thirdly, speakers are expected to utilize a combination of verbal and nonverbal strategies when addressing an audience. Attentiveness to verbal communication is crucial as students might

experience nervousness, leading to unclear and confusing speech characterized by ambiguous words or sentences (Mandal, 2014). Conversely, nonverbal communication significantly enhances the impact of a speech. Gestures, such as eye contact and body language, hold significant value when someone is delivering a speech in front of an audience. According to Hilbram Dunar's work, maintaining eye contact is imperative to engage the audience and retain their focus on the speaker, as highlighted by Mandal (2014). Hence, incorporating nonverbal cues is essential for enhancing the appeal of a speech. Shay McConnon (2002) posited that our gestures, appearance, tone of voice, and attire collectively contributed to our success, emphasizing that we did not have a second chance to create a first impression in front of others.

The advantages of using TED Talks in the learning process

It is not a new practice to utilize TED Talks as a supplementary tool in second language acquisition (Salaberry, 2001; Stempleski, 1992). The platform's popularity lies in its ability to provide a valuable resource (Ziebell, 2019) that covers a wide range of themes, from entertainment to language instruction (Nurmukhamedov, 2017). Consequently, students have opportunities to comprehend diverse topics and gain insights into various cultures, traditions, and English language usage in different countries. Furthermore, according to Hsu (2020), TED Talks emphasize the development of skills and language, particularly vocabulary acquisition.

Reportedly, the diverse array of lexical items found in TED Talks successfully facilitates vocabulary acquisition and retention (Nguyen & Boers, 2019). Accordingly, when utilizing TED Talks, students can opt for talks that incorporate a wide range of lexis. If a video includes terms that students may not comprehend, there is no need for concern since most TED Talks videos provide transcripts (History of TED, n.d.). Moreover, Anderson (2016) discovered that listening is the most effective approach for improving speaking skills compared to other strategies. Consequently, incorporating videos as a learning approach can be beneficial in aiding students' speaking proficiency.

Additionally, using TED Talks as instructional materials can support students in refining their opinions on a range of subjects and boost their confidence and willingness to speak in public in the future. The videos give students various advantages, including knowledge of effective communication techniques, critical thinking, accent and dialect, pronunciation, fluency, and other topics (Choirunnisa & Sari, 2021). Obviously, TED Talks are a fantastic learning resource that should be implemented in public speaking courses (Nursafira, 2020).

Related Research

Numerous investigations have been carried out to explore students' viewpoints regarding the utilization of TED Talks in public speaking courses. Li, Gao, and Zhang (2016) conducted a study on incorporating TED videos as learning resources in an English public speaking course in China with 100 students. The findings revealed that this innovative method of training was well-received by the students, who expressed satisfaction with the progress they made in improving their English language proficiency. Instead of simply being passive learners, they began actively engaging in the learning process. Their ability to listen comprehensively and think critically showed significant growth. As a result, their cognitive functions improved, enabling them to reason logically and ultimately enhance their fluency in speaking.

Another research by Farid (2019) demonstrated that students held positive attitudes toward using TED Talks in public speaking courses, and TED Talks Videos were useful in enhancing students' public speaking skills. The findings were obtained from the detailed analysis of the data collected through a one-group pre-test and post-test and a questionnaire administered to 34 high school students. Reportedly, the participants voiced agreement on the implementation of TED Talks videos in public speaking classes since they found the approach practical, easy to use, and helpful in improving their public speaking. However, students also expressed concerns about comprehending certain kinds of videos. In addition, the results from the pre-test and post-test proved substantial progress in students' public speaking skills.

The study conducted by Adeles and Hall (2016) concluded that the implication of TED Talks videos in public speaking learning could increase students' enthusiasm and self-assurance, cultivate soft skills, and strengthen their presentational abilities. TED Talks videos boost students' critical thinking abilities (Taibi et al., 2015). Furthermore, the study's findings by Utami & Noviana (2021) showed that most of the students favored the implementation of TED Talks videos in speaking lessons. The results gathered from the survey revealed that students enjoyed watching TED Talks in speaking classes and perceived these videos as highly effective in supporting their English language learning.

Numerous well-organized studies have examined students' perspectives on the use of TED Talks videos in speaking classes. However, these studies have not delved deeply and comprehensively into this notion. There is a notable gap in exploring students' opinions regarding their motivation for learning, improvement in comprehension, and challenges encountered during the integration of TED Talks. Additionally, most researchers have not employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. This is because students' explanations for their views on using TED Talks videos in public speaking courses require investigation through questionnaires and interviews for thorough comprehension. Consequently, the present study was undertaken to uncover and clarify the patterns of using TED Talks in the speaking learning of senior EFL students at Van Lang University and to ascertain how they assess the effectiveness of these videos in enhancing their public speaking skills. Based on the research findings, EFL teachers at Van Lang University can gain clear insights into the impact of TED Talks videos on students' speaking performance, potentially leading them to consider developing plans for integrating these videos into their speaking classes.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the above purposes, the study focuses on these research notions:

1. What are EFL university seniors' practices in using TED Talks to enhance their public speaking skills?
2. What are EFL university seniors' perceptions of using TED Talks to enhance their public speaking skills?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Van Lang University, which was founded in 1995, has accomplished many educational achievements and has become one of the leading private universities in Vietnam to be acknowledged internationally for its academic research. In accordance with Decision No.109/QĐ/VL-HĐT on August 18, 2020, which was released by the Chairman of the Van Lang University's Council about Educational Philosophy, the educational institution's philosophy of education consists of a holistic, lifelong, ethical, and impactful learning experience.

The Purposive Sampling method was used to choose samples for the research since it could attain the goal of investigating the perspectives of students who have used TED Talks videos to improve their speaking skills and have finished all speaking courses in the curriculum. The research was conducted in the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year with the participation of sixty-one EFL students who had completed Speaking 4 and Public Speaking courses at Van Lang University and had already employed TED Talks videos in learning speaking. The samples were supposed to have sufficient literacy related to TED Talks and possess intensive experience gained from different speaking classes. Sixty-one EFL seniors completed an online questionnaire on Google Forms. Subsequently, eight out of sixty-one participants were chosen to attend a structured interview based on the total scores gained in the Advanced Public Speaking Course that the participants studied in the previous semester. Eight samples in which two achieved excellent, two got good, three got mediocre, and one had poor scores, were asked to share experiences using TED Talks videos in speaking classes and express their attitudes towards its efficacy in enhancing public speaking skills.

Design of the Study

This study employed a mixed method, which implies that both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered and analyzed to achieve the study's goals. Combining these approaches is preferable since it may highlight each approach's advantages and balance out its disadvantages (Spratt et al., 2004). To gather quantitative data, an online questionnaire was given to EFL students to investigate their practices and perceptions towards using TED Talks to enhance their public speaking skills. In order to acquire qualitative data, eight participants were selected to attend a structured interview to further clarify their opinions on preferences, effectiveness, and challenges encountered using TED Talks videos and especially their notions of applying this platform to Advanced Public Speaking courses at Van Lang University.

Data collection & analysis

Questionnaire

An online survey created on Google Forms and distributed to sixty-one EFL seniors at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Van Lang University served as the initial step in the data-gathering process. The questionnaire consists of 32 questions that are divided into three parts. The first part, with two questions, explores the participant's genders and speaking abilities. The second part, consisting of fourteen questions (1 – 14), investigates students' experiences

utilizing TED Talks videos to hone their public speaking abilities. The third section has sixteen questions (15 –30) that address students' perspectives on the effectiveness of using TED Talks to enhance public speaking skills in three aspects: feelings, skill improvement, and comprehension enhancement. The questionnaire items were adapted from Abdulrahman (2017), who had already tested and affirmed the validity of these question items.

The online survey was accessible to participants for a week via the Faculty of Foreign Languages Facebook group, and it took them roughly five minutes to answer all the questions. In an attempt to maintain the confidentiality of the collected data, participants may choose to use pseudonyms or omit their identities when responding. Hinchey (2008) states that the quantitative approach is valuable because it is "an effective means of obtaining larger volumes of data". Besides, Wright (2005) also emphasizes that conducting a survey saves the researcher time and effort because the data is collected automatically and continuously.

Thirty online survey questions, including two multiple-choice questions and twenty-eight five-point Likert scale questions, were administered to gather data for two research questions. The five-point Likert scale was employed to examine how totally students disagree or agree (1 = totally disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = totally agree) with each questionnaire item. Subsequently, the researcher applied a program called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 20 (SPSS 20) to analyze the collected data. The results were then presented through figures and percentages (%).

Reliability Statistics

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha (N=61)

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.814	.827	28
Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Participants' experiences	.823	12
Participants' perspectives	.871	16

The reliability of the Likert Scale used to collect data for two research questions was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that the overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is .814, indicating the consistency in participants' responses across the twenty-eight-question survey. Each section of the survey demonstrated Cronbach's Alpha higher than .7, which is a recognized benchmark for determining response reliability. Specifically, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the participants' perspectives variable, comprising 16 items, is .871. The second highest reliability score is observed for the participants' practices variable, which consists of twelve items, with a Cronbach's Alpha of .823. Overall, these Cronbach's Alpha results affirm the high reliability of the questionnaire items for practical research purposes, falling within the range of 0.6 to 1.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were obtained through a structured interview with eight participants chosen in accordance with their speaking abilities. The eight samples, in which two achieved excellent, two had good, three got mediocre, and one had poor scores, were asked six questions regarding the use of TED Talks videos in their learning process and their perceptions on the efficacy of these videos in enhancing their Public Speaking skills. Every student was personally invited to participate in a 10-minute online interview via Microsoft Teams. They were clearly informed that the interviews would be recorded, but the recordings were exclusively used for research purposes and were not shared or divulged to anyone outside of the study environment. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the native language of both the participants and the researcher, to ensure accurate and comprehensive information and to prevent any potential misunderstandings during the interview process. Subsequently, the ideas expressed during the interviews were translated into English for analysis purposes.

The qualitative data collected from the interviews underwent thematic analysis, which involved the use of open coding and axial coding (Ary et al., 2010). The writer utilized open coding to identify prominent patterns relating to the participants' experiences and perspectives on using TED Talks videos to improve public speaking skills. Subsequently, axial coding was employed to establish connections between these patterns, develop themes, and generalize key points pertaining to these matters.

Results/Findings

Results of the online questionnaire

The quantitative data acquired from the online questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics from SPSS 20 for the mean, minimum, maximum, frequency, percentages, and standard deviation. The findings were organized under the following headings: demographic information, participants' practices, and participants' perspectives.

Demographic information

Table 2. Demographic information (SPSS 20)

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Genders	Male	13	21.3
	Female	48	78.7
English speaking ability	Low	2	3.3
	Average	38	62.3
	Good	18	29.5
	Excellent	3	4.9

The data collected in Table 2 demonstrates that most of the participants were female (N=48, 78.7%) compared with 21.3% of male students (N=13). Additionally, the table revealed that more than half of the surveyed students (62.3%) rated their speaking ability at an average level (N=38) while the proportion of seniors who had good speaking ability made up 29.5% of the total samples (N=18). Only three students excelled at speaking skills, accounting for 4.9% of the total responses. The percentage of under-average respondents was the lowest, contributing

3.3% to the total responses. In a nutshell, most seniors participating in the research had average speaking ability.

Students practice on using TED Talks to learn public speaking

The collected data investigated the participants' practices of using TED Talks videos in their learning into four aspects: frequency, purposes, popular topics, and time spent on this platform.

Table 3. Seniors' frequency of using the TED Talks platform

1. How often do you use the TED Talks platform to enhance your public speaking?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	2	3.3
Twice a week	8	13.1
Once a week	19	31.1
Once a month	24	39.3
Once a year	8	13.1

As shown in Table 3, nearly half of the participants (47.5%) frequently utilized TED Talks as a supporting tool for learning public speaking. Specifically, more than 30% of the EFL students watched TED Talks videos weekly, compared with 13.1% of the total responses that confirmed they used TED Talks to learn public speaking two times a week. Two students viewed TED Talks videos on a daily basis, contributing 3.3% to the total sample. The percentage of participants who watched TED Talks monthly was the highest, approximately 40%, while there were eight students (13.1%) who showed reluctance in implementing TED Talks in their learning when admitting that they only watched these videos rarely, just once a year.

Table 4. Participants' purposes of watching TED Talks videos (SPSS 20)

Items	Questionnaire	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
2	I watch TED Talks videos to refresh myself.	61	2	5	3.79	.755
3	I watch TED Talks videos to acquire social knowledge.	61	2	5	4.18	.785
4	I watch TED Talks videos to widen my lexical resources and learn phrases and idioms.	61	3	5	4.20	.654
5	I watch TED Talks videos to understand other people's viewpoints.	61	1	5	3.87	.957
6	I watch TED Talks videos to improve my listening and speaking skills.	61	2	5	4.28	.710

As shown in Table 4, the majority of participants asserted that they were obliged to utilize TED Talks in their speaking learning because of the benefits they provided ($M=3.79 - 4.28$). The primary purpose of most students' watching TED Talks videos was to improve their listening and speaking skills ($M=4.28$). They also agreed with the purpose of using the platform to expand their lexical resources ($M=4.20$) and widen their social knowledge ($M=4.18$). Subsequent purposes of their practices included understanding the other person's point of view and renewing themselves at 3.87 and 3.79, respectively.

Table 5. Participants’ popular topics for TED Talks videos (SPSS 20)

Items	Questionnaire	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
7	I'm more interested in TED Talks videos in English than in videos in other languages.	61	2	5	3.70	.989
8	I would rather listen to TED Talks videos than other audio materials.	61	1	5	3.18	.940
9	I prefer to watch educational videos rather than natural ones.	61	1	5	3.07	1.047
10	I prefer to watch entertaining videos more than the environment.	61	1	5	3.52	.976

Statistics in Table 5 illustrate the favorable topics that the participants regularly searched on TED Talks videos. The seniors participating in the survey agreed that they preferred watching TED Talks videos in English over videos in other languages (M=3.70). The respondents were also in agreement that they had a preference for watching entertaining videos rather than those of the environment (M=3.52). With a mean score of 3.18, the participants were neutral about being more interested in listening to TED Talks videos than other audio materials. The respondents also held a neutral idea that education-related topics were favored more than natural ones (M=3.07).

Table 6. Participants’ time spent watching TED Talks (SPSS 20)

Items	Questionnaire	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
11	I watch TED Talks for 30 minutes to 1 hour every day.	61	1	5	3.65	1.067
12	I watch TED Talks for 1 hour to 2 hours every day.	61	1	5	2.51	1.135
13	I watch TED Talks for 2 hours to 3 hours every day.	61	1	5	2.30	1.188

The results in Table 6 demonstrate that most EFL seniors are willing to spend half an hour to an hour watching TED Talks videos on a daily basis (M=3.65) while they remain neutral about spending longer time watching daily. With a mean score of 2.51, the participants expressed their neutral ideas about spending one to two hours on TED Talks videos. The lowest mean score of item 12 (M=2.30) determined that students rarely spent more than 2 hours a day watching this platform.

Table 7. Participants’ frequency of studying Public Speaking courses with TED Talks.

14. How often does your teacher use TED Talks videos to teach Advanced Public Speaking?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Every lesson	1	1.6
Most lessons	11	18
A few lessons	17	27.9
Only 1-2 lessons	16	26.2
Never	16	26.2

Table 7 shows how often the participants’ teachers utilized TED Talks in their Advanced Public Speaking classrooms. As shown in the table, nearly 20% of the respondents were frequently allowed to watch TED Talks videos in Public Speaking lessons. The percentage of students who confirmed that their teachers had implemented TED Talks in teaching several lessons of the course Public Speaking was the highest, at nearly 28%. In addition, sixteen participants admitted that their teachers seldom applied TED Talks in the class of public speaking,

contributing 26.2% of the total responses, which equals the number of students who never watched TED Talks videos in Public Speaking classes.

Students' perceptions towards using TED Talks to enhance public speaking skills

Table 8. Participants' feelings when using TED Talks (SPSS 20)

Items	Questionnaire	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
15	TED Talks videos are interesting and useful.	61	2	5	3.87	.806
16	I enjoy public speaking, thanks to TED Talks videos.	61	1	5	3.8	.865
17	I feel more confident when I present my opinion in public speaking, thanks to the TED Talks video.	61	1	5	3.64	.932
18	Thanks to TED Talks videos, I confidently make eye contact with people when speaking in public.	61	1	5	3.70	.972
19	I can be flexible about the time I spend watching TED Talks videos.	61	3	5	4.11	.798

As Table 8 displayed, a vast number of participants agreed that they could watch TED Talks videos whenever they wanted because of its convenience ($M=4.11$). They also expressed their agreement that this platform was interesting and excessively useful ($M=3.87$) since this platform could enhance their learning motivation, enabling them to enjoy the lesson of the Public Speaking course ($M=3.8$). Additionally, the students asserted that TED Talks videos were effective in helping them easily make eye contact with their audience ($M=3.70$) and felt extremely confident when presenting their point of view in front of a crowd ($M=3.64$).

Table 9. Participants' opinions on their public speaking skills improvement (SPSS 20)

Items	Questionnaire	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
20	I pronounce words more accurately, thanks to watching TED Talks videos.	61	1	5	3.64	.895
21	I can increase my critical thinking via enjoying TED Talks videos.	61	1	5	3.70	.901
22	I can speak more fluently via watching TED Talks videos.	61	1	5	3.62	1.003
23	I can learn about posture, gesture, and movement via TED Talks videos.	61	2	5	3.89	1.018
24	I can introduce my speech with interesting stories to engage the audience thanks to watching TED Talks videos.	61	1	5	3.67	1.012
25	I can imitate the speaker's accent to increase my ability to speak naturally like a native by watching TED Talks videos.	61	2	5	3.72	.951

The statistics in Table 9 demonstrated most of the participants agreed that their public speaking skills were improved through the use of TED Talks videos ($M=3.89-3.72$). Particularly, a large number of seniors showed their agreement that TED Talks benefited them in learning about posture, gestures, and movement ($M=3.89$) when delivering a speech in front of an audience. They were also in favor of the idea that they could more readily mimic the accents of native speakers ($M=3.72$) and simultaneously develop critical thinking skills ($M=3.70$) by frequently watching TED Talks videos. With mean scores of 3.67 and 3.64, respectively, the respondents firmly agreed that they could acquire the technique of attracting the audience's attention to their talks by utilizing compelling stories and could have accurate pronunciation through watching

TED Talks videos. Additionally, the vast majority of the population (75%) affirmed their strong consensus on the role of TED Talks videos in improving their speaking fluency (M=3.62).

It can be seen clearly in Table 10 that a huge number of students agreed that they could learn numerous new sentences and vocabulary words (M=3.87) via watching TED Talks videos. The respondents continued to show their agreement with the idea that they could grasp the information that speakers wanted to convey and recognized various English accents with scores of 3.75 and 3.62, respectively. However, the seniors expressed their neutral ideas by mentioning that they still fully caught up with the speakers even when they swallowed or linked sounds (M=3.43).

Table 10. Participants' opinions on their English comprehension enhancement (SPSS 20)

Items	Questionnaire	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
26	I can distinguish different types of English accents via TED Talks videos.	61	1	5	3.62	1.003
27	I can learn a lot of new sentence patterns and vocabulary to support my speaking skills via TED Talks videos.	61	1	5	3.87	.846
28	I can understand the information that the speaker wants to convey via TED Talks videos in English.	61	1	5	3.75	.830
29	I can understand when the speakers swallow or connect sounds via TED Talks videos.	61	1	5	3.43	.884
30	I can keep up with the speakers' speaking speed via TED Talks videos.	61	1	5	3.43	.921

Qualitative analysis

Results of the structured interview

Interview question 1: Why are you interested in watching TED Talks?

Reportedly, most interviewed seniors (around 90%) prefer to learn public speaking through TED Talks since these videos offer them considerable benefits. They explained that TED Talks videos inspired knowledge to viewers by providing diverse topics through concise content and vivid demonstration. As a result, watching TED Talks could broaden their access to knowledge sources. The second merit of watching these videos was that students could acquire and master public speaking techniques. The interviewer affirmed that this platform taught them how to become more professional by showing a vivid demonstration of using postures and gestures and keeping eye contact while delivering speeches. Moreover, by watching TED Talks videos, the seniors could acquire effective techniques to keep an audience's attention and to get them to engage in their talks. Another plus point of TED Talks videos that was raised in the interviews was that TED Talks videos were handy and available whenever they needed.

I am fond of learning public speaking through TED Talks because I can improve my knowledge following topical subjects at an appropriate pace. (Student 1, 2, interview extract)

I like it for a reason: the performances are all very professional and realistic by qualified public speakers. (Student 3, 4, interview extract)

The videos are interesting and informative. Presenters are professional and good

speakers, making learning less boring. Presenters are inspiring; that's why I love TED Talks. (Student 5, 6, interview extract)

Interview question 2: What topics are you interested in when watching videos on TED Talks? Why?

The collected data reported that 50% of the respondents prefer TED Talks videos on educational issues rather than other topics. They contended that instructional films aided in their quest to increase their knowledge of the subject matter relating to their studies. Twenty-five percent of the interviewees have a preference for videos on motivational subjects. They explained that these videos could help to enhance their spirits and inspire them to be positive learners. The remaining 25% of the responses were for videos concerning scientific and technological issues. The seniors supported these videos since they were interested in specified knowledge.

Most of the time, I will focus on educational topics as I major in teaching English. Those videos with topics relating to education can help me widen my horizon in this field. (Student 1, 2, interview extract)

Most of my attention will be directed towards educational content since my major is teaching English. Videos related to education, in my view, have the potential to broaden my understanding of this field. (Student 3, 4)

When I watch videos on Ted Talk, I often like to watch about motivational and self-development topics because the content of these videos is very close, mainly from the experiences and lessons that experts have gained and every time I watch their videos, not only do I learn English, but I also get great inspiration to help me study and work better. (Student 5, 6, 7, 8 interview extract)

Interview question 3: If you were busy with other activities, would you make time to watch TED Talks every day? Why?

When asked about their willingness to watch TED Talks videos in a hectic learning schedule, five interviewees (65.5%) firmly agreed that they would make time to enjoy TED Talks every day even though they were busy with other learning tasks. They explained that watching TED Talks had become their daily routine, which helped to broaden their knowledge and served as a spiritual food for their refreshment. The other 25% of respondents stated that when they were busy preparing for tests and exams, they just had time to watch TED Talks on the weekends. They asserted that they watched these videos to search for topics related to the exams. Additionally, if they had some intermission break, they would view TED Talks for updated news or relaxation. One interviewed senior (12.5%) admitted that he would not be willing to watch TED Talks if he was busy. He explained that they needed time to focus on more important things and would spend the rest of their day using other social networks.

Of course, I would. Ted talks have a large number of videos and topics I'm interested in, so it's like a way for me to entertain and learn simultaneously. Thus, I would spend time watching at least 1 video a day. (Student 1, interview extract)

Sure, I'd be up for it. Ted talks cover a bunch of videos and topics I'm into, making it a way for me to have fun and learn together. So, I plan to spend some time watching at least

one video every day. (Student 2, 3)

If I were busy doing other activities, I wouldn't spend my time watching TED Talks every day. Instead of watching TED Talks, I prefer watching TikTok and programs on Netflix and YouTube that are visible and attractive to me (animations, actors, actresses). Moreover, the content on TikTok and YouTube varies, such as cartoons, science fiction films, documentaries, etc., while the content on TED Talks makes me bored, except for the content on education and languages. (Students 4, 5, 6)

If I had a lot going on with other stuff, I wouldn't dedicate my time to watching TED Talks daily. I'd rather go for TikTok. Plus, TikTok and YouTube offer diverse content, like cartoons, sci-fi movies, documentaries, etc. I find TED Talks a bit dull, except for the ones about education and languages. (students 7, 8)

Interview question 4: Do you think lecturers should use TED Talks in Public Speaking courses? Why?

The researcher surveyed students' perspectives on the usage of TED Talks as a teaching aid to determine if it is suggested that lecturers offer a reference to develop an innovative teaching model for public speaking skills teaching. Interestingly, the majority of participants (100%) concurred that lecturers at Van Lang University should use this strategy in conjunction with Public Speaking Courses. Seventy-five percent of respondents affirmed that they concurred with implementing these videos in public speaking courses since they could acquire useful skills for speaking performance from speakers. Furthermore, the interviewees expressed their favorable impressions about the use of TED Talks in public speaking classes with a statement that these videos could greatly facilitate their learning due to the advantages of time savings, strength, and a practical approach (12.5%). Last but not least, the other 12.5% of the participants agreed that the application of TED Talks videos in speaking classes would increase their perceptual skills and cultural awareness. They believed that they gained a deeper understanding of cultures from around the world that are not included in textbooks.

Yes, I do. Video TED Talks will make the lesson more interesting, make it easier to attract students' attention, or help students have more choices in acquiring knowledge in different ways. (Students 3, 4)

Absolutely! TED Talks videos add an interesting twist to lessons, making them more captivating and drawing students' attention. It also provides students with diverse options to acquire knowledge through different approaches. (Students 5, 6)

Coursework should integrate TED talks into speaking courses because learners can broaden their horizons about (1) perceptual ability: what conversations in the real world are like, what terms are often used, and what taboos they should avoid; (2) body language, postures and gestures, facial expressions...; (3) cultural awareness from different countries that are hardly instructed in the syllabus fully. (Students 7,8 interview extract)

Interview question 5: What challenges do you face when learning Public Speaking through TED Talks?

Despite the evident advantages of TED Talks, students still encounter many difficulties while learning public speaking through these videos. The collected data showed that nearly 70% of the respondents admitted that sometimes it was hard for them to comprehend video content completely. Seniors claimed that when confronted with videos whose speakers talk too quickly or the videos are currently inappropriate for their level; it was difficult for them to comprehend what they were hearing. Besides, over 30% of the remainder believed that distraction was their main issue. Some students confirmed that many of the presentations were too long, which distracted them and made them unable to concentrate on viewing. Also, respondents said that the lack of face-to-face connection left them bored while viewing TED Talks videos.

Sometimes, because of my own preferences, choosing a video is not suitable for my English level, so I have many difficulties and take a long time to fully understand that video. (Student 3)

Sometimes, I cannot understand what speakers want to convey information because they speak too fast or their accents so strange that I can't understand (Student 8)

Some speeches may be too long, so I cannot fully pay attention to them. (Student 2)

Interview question 6: Have you found using TED Talks videos to improve public speaking skills effectively, and if so, what specific skills have you improved and why?

Interestingly, 100% of students agreed that TED Talks are effective for improving their public speaking skills. Specifically, fifty percent of the interviewed seniors affirmed that TED Talks efficiently developed their listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary skills. They explained that TED Talks videos feature numerous presenters from various nations with diverse accents, allowing them to become accustomed to a range of dialects from all over the world. Moreover, they claimed that well-known speakers had strongly influenced them in the way they pronounce words and how they deliver speeches. They also could widen their lexical resources by watching videos on varied topics ranging from education to entertainment. The other 25% of the interviewees believed that they had learned how to use their postures and gestures effectively by imitating influential speakers, while the remaining 25% said that watching TED Talks has given them more confidence when speaking in front of groups.

I have improved my public speaking skills through the TED Talks video, especially my gestures. I imitate the way the speakers stand and use their hands and facial expressions while presenting. Different presenters use body language in many ways, and I can notice them clearly through videos. (Students 1, 2)

Yes, I've definitely noticed an improvement in my public speaking skills through the use of TED Talks videos. One key aspect that has improved is my ability to articulate ideas clearly. Watching skilled speakers on TED Talks has helped me understand how to structure and express my thoughts effectively. Additionally, I've become more aware of nonverbal communication, such as body language and eye contact, by observing how proficient speakers utilize these techniques. Overall, TED Talks have been a valuable

resource in honing my public speaking skills by providing real-life examples and insights from accomplished speakers. (Students 3, 4)

Yes, using TED Talks has been effective in enhancing my public speaking skills. I've improved my clarity in expressing ideas and learned valuable insights into nonverbal communication from skilled speakers. (Students 5, 6)

Of course, yes. Most TED talkers are fluent in English, so I can improve my pronunciation a lot. Listening to their talks can help me realize some sounds that I usually pronounce incorrectly. They may have many accents, but they surely have good pronunciation. (Students 7,8)

Discussion

RQ 1: What are EFL university seniors' practices in using TED Talks to enhance their public speaking skills?

The present study discovered how EFL students at Van Lang University utilized TED Talks videos to improve their public speaking skills in four aspects: viewers' purposes, popular topics, frequency of the integration, and time spent on these videos. The research findings revealed that EFL students' primary goal when watching TED Talks was to enhance their speaking and listening abilities (M=4.28). Additionally, the aims of widening lexical resources and learning more expressions and idioms were also the common purposes of watching TED Talks (M=4.20). From the interview data, the respondents asserted that watching TED Talks videos had increased their access to information resources and provided them with practical instructions on how to deliver speeches in public. EFL seniors also have the goal of viewing TED Talks videos to increase their social awareness (M=4.18). The findings of this research completely match the results of the study by Farid (2019), who asserted that the primary purpose of watching TED Talks videos was to enhance public speaking performance, improve listening skills, and gain ideas for topic development.

Regarding the favored topics in TED Talks videos, the findings presented that EFL students at Van Lang University preferred watching English-language TED Talks videos to those in other languages (M=3.70). In addition, 50% of interviewees said they were more interested in TED Talks on educational subjects than those on other subjects, while the other 25% of the seniors had a preference for entertaining videos. They explained that these videos helped them better understand the subject matter related to their studies and inspired them to be positive. The findings of the recent study were supported by the conclusion of the research by Rohmah (2022), which confirmed that education topics were the most popular, followed by culture, entertainment, and others.

Relating to the frequency of utilizing TED Talks in learning public speaking skills, the findings of the research revealed that nearly half of the sixty-one participants watched TED Talks regularly to improve their public speaking performance. From the interview data, the students gave detailed explanations for the frequency of watching these videos. They mentioned that viewing TED Talks had become a daily practice for them, which helped them increase their

knowledge and acted as spiritual nourishment for their rejuvenation. The other 39.3 % of the respondents watched TED Talks monthly since they were stuck with assignments and exams. Students were also in favor of the idea that lectures should integrate TED Talks in teaching public speaking classes. Most of the respondents affirmed that the use of TED Talks was efficient in helping them improve their speaking performance since they could acquire useful skills from speakers. Additionally, these videos provided them with ideas and lexis for topics. The research findings matched the study's conclusion by Abdulrahman (2016), who stated that TED Talks videos were efficient in stimulating critical thinking and questions in classroom discussions and eliciting ideas for topic elaboration.

In terms of time spent on TED Talks videos, the survey discovered that fourth-year students frequently spend 30 to 1 hour every day watching videos on TED Talks. Supporting the survey data, the interview results demonstrated that five out of eight respondents claimed that despite their hectic schedules, they still find time each day to watch TED Talks since these videos became their acquaintance, providing them with knowledge and inspiring them to be more positive.

RQ 2. What are EFL university seniors' perceptions of using TED Talks to enhance their public speaking skills?

The current study investigated how fourth-year students perceived utilizing TED Talks to improve their public speaking abilities in three areas: students' learning motivations, skills improvement, and listening comprehension. Discussing how students felt when watching TED Talks to learn public speaking, the findings of the research confirmed that most EFL students considered watching TED Talks videos as an interesting and useful activity ($M=3.87$). They explained that these videos could efficiently increase their learning motivation, making them interested in the public speaking course classes ($M=3.8$). Additionally, the students affirmed that watching TED Talks videos considerably increased their confidence in delivering speeches in public ($M=3.64$) since they could imitate speakers' gestures, postures, and how to make eye contact with the audience ($M=3.7$). These findings confirmed the conclusion in the study by Ahluwalia (2018), which presented that TED Talks could be utilized to spice up and make language education more fun.

In terms of public speaking skills enhancement, the students asserted that watching TED Talks improved the way they used their body language and eye contact ($M=3.89$) when presenting topics in public. In addition, their pronunciation was better since they were affected by native speakers ($M=3.72$). They also affirmed that they could elaborate ideas more easily and deliver speeches more fluently ($M=3.62$) because their critical thinking skills were developed ($M=3.7$). The results of the interview supported the findings of the online survey. Fifty percent of the interviewed students posited that watching TED Talks videos frequently made them familiar with various speakers, acquiring their styles in presenting topics. Therefore, they could be confident in using posture, gestures, and eye contact when delivering speeches. Furthermore, the interviewees confirmed their vocabulary and listening skills were enhanced since they were absorbed in a wide range of topics, including education, science, and entertainment. The finding of the study was consistent with that of a study by Li (2015), who agreed that TED Talks may be used to teach students how to interact with an audience, how to deliver a formal speech, and

how to hone their public speaking skills.

Regarding the impact of frequently watching TED Talks videos on listening comprehension, the participants consistently expressed their agreement with the notion that they could comprehend the information conveyed by speakers ($M=3.75$) and identified different English accents ($M=3.62$). Watching TED Talks videos regularly could enable them to become well acquainted with English sounds, and consequently, they could grasp the contents of these videos effortlessly. The results of the research aligned with those of a study conducted by Nur (2022), who affirmed the efficiency of watching TED Talks in improving students' listening comprehension.

Conclusion

The study examining the experiences and perceptions of EFL students at Van Lang University towards the use of TED Talks videos to improve their public speaking abilities involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis obtained through an online survey and a structured interview. The study findings demonstrate that nearly half of the participants frequently (47%) watched TED Talks videos to enhance their speaking performance. They also affirmed that their primary purpose of viewing TED Talks videos was to enhance their speaking and listening abilities ($M=4.28$) since these videos provided them with a wide range of lexical resources, a good demonstration of how to deliver speeches, and a variety of accents from different parts of the world. The respondents also asserted that watching TED Talks videos became their daily routine, which could increase their spirit status and inspire them to be more positive. Additionally, participants showed greater interest in English language TED Talks videos ($M=3.70$) discussing educational and entertainment topics.

The results derived from the thorough examination of data gathered through the online questionnaire and the structured interview indicate that EFL students at Van Lang University hold a favorable view regarding the implementation of TED Talks in public speaking classes. The participants found watching these videos both intriguing and valuable ($M= 3.87$) since they effectively enhanced their learning motivation and generated interest in the public speaking course ($M= 3.8$). Additionally, students confirmed that watching TED Talks substantially increased their confidence in delivering public speeches ($M=3.64$) as they could mimic speakers' gestures, postures, and manners for keeping eye contact with the audience ($M = 3.7$). The beneficial effect of TED Talks videos led to a strong consensus among the participants that lecturers should implement these videos in public speaking classes. The interviewed students posited that TED Talks could significantly enhance their learning by offering benefits such as time efficiency, effectiveness, and hands-on practice. Furthermore, the application of TED Talks videos in speaking classes would increase their perceptual skills and cultural awareness, which helped them gain extensive knowledge of the world that is not included in textbooks.

Implications/Recommendations for practical solutions

Further investigation can examine educators' viewpoints regarding the incorporation of TED Talks in speaking classes to gain deeper insights into their experiences, viewpoints, and recommendations for enhancement. This information can contribute to refining the utilization

of TED Talks in classrooms and identifying potential challenges hindering their effective implementation. The findings can also inform the development of best practices and guidelines for integrating TED Talks into speaking lessons. Moreover, comprehending instructors' perspectives on TED Talks usage is crucial for ongoing efforts to improve language teaching and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, given students' current inadequacy in listening skills, upcoming research should focus on assessing the efficacy of TED Talks in enhancing listening skills. It is essential to explore diverse listening approaches, enabling educators to employ effective strategies that aid students in developing proficient listening skills. Additionally, future studies should delve into the factors contributing to students' poor listening skills, paving the way for more targeted and effective interventions to enhance this crucial ability.

Limitations

The current investigation still has some existing constraints. Firstly, the sample only included sixty-one EFL seniors at Van Lang University who had already finished the advanced public speaking course and had used TED Talks for their learning, leading to a limited number of participants. As a result, the findings cannot definitively generalize the experiences and perceptions regarding the utilization of TED Talks to improve speaking skills to the broader population. Secondly, the participants came from different majors and took speaking courses with many different teachers, so to some extent, a small number of participants could have biases towards the integration of TED Talks in speaking classes.

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Ziebell, B. (2019, June 6). Teaching English with TED talks: Create your own ESL materials (full guide). *Connections*. Retrieved from <https://eltabjournal.com/teaching-english-with-ted-talks> skills effectively, and if so, what specific skills have you improved and why?

Biodata

Ms. Nguyen Thi Thu Hang, M.A. is a lecturer at Van Lang University, Ho Chi Minh City. She has had more than 10 years of teaching English-majored students. Her main interests include Language Teaching Methodology, Learner Autonomy, and Language Assessment.

Ms. Tran Ngoc Kim Cuong is a senior at Van Lang University's Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. She is majoring in the English teaching. As a curious and detail-oriented individual, she enjoys conducting research and analyzing various topics related to English language and literature.


Benefits of Teaching English to Children in Virtual Classes: Teachers' Perspectives from Khanh Hoa Province, Viet Nam

Nguyen Thi Nhu Ngoc^{1*}, Nguyen Tran Tu Uyen¹

¹University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*Corresponding author's email: nhungoc@hcmussh.edu.vn

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5015-2841>

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: teaching English, children, virtual classrooms, teachers' perspectives, benefits

Over the past decade, technological advancements have greatly impacted the education industry, leading to the rise of online teaching and learning as a promising trend worldwide. However, in Viet Nam, research on virtual classrooms for young learners has been relatively limited. As a result, a recent study sought to examine English teachers' perspectives on the benefits of teaching English to children virtually. This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to collect data through an online questionnaire distributed to 52 English teachers in Khanh Hoa Province, Central Viet Nam, who had at least one-year experience in teaching English to children online and in-depth interviews with 15 of them. The findings revealed that virtual classrooms offer numerous benefits for teachers, such as integrating all four language skills, enhancing teaching and learning performance, improving their digital skills, keeping up with educational technology trends, accessing a wealth of resources on educational websites, and fostering creativity in developing activities that enhance children's engagement and motivation in English lessons. Overall, this study highlights the valuable benefits of teaching the English language to children in virtual settings. The findings hold relevance for other stakeholders involved in the development of virtual language education in Viet Nam and similar contexts.

Introduction

Online learning has become popular due to technological advancements. It allows students to attend classes and complete courses through distance learning and virtual classrooms, making it an unconventional pathway to learning (Ko & Rossen, 2017). The traditional classroom can now be virtualized, leading to the fact that virtual classrooms are increasingly used in different levels of education, representing a significant evolution in how education is delivered (Martin & Parker, 2014); these virtual classrooms are anticipated to be the future of the education

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system in the high-tech era due to their popularity and usefulness (Alhat, 2020). In today's post-pandemic world, EFL teachers have been continually eager to access flexible online education systems coming with new technologies and teaching models (Fran, 2022). As a result, the rise of hybrid or blended learning presents a practical and engaging approach by merging conventional in-person instruction with the advanced digital features of online learning environments (Singh et al., 2021).

English language education is a major concern for educators, teachers, and parents worldwide, especially in virtual classrooms for students of all types, especially children. Thus, it is worth noting that introducing and maintaining English language education for children at a young age is crucial for their progress in acquiring a second language and developing a strong foundation for learning English in the future (Hummel, 2014).

Viet Nam's education system actively promotes using technology in classrooms. The widespread availability of the Internet and online educational platforms has made this integration easier. As a result, virtual classrooms have become increasingly popular as a modern teaching approach (Le & Pham, 2023). Therefore, teachers, particularly English teachers, are expected to have perceptive insights into online/ virtual teaching or blended learning so that both teachers and students can keep up with rapid technological changes in education. In the post-Covid-19, educational institutions in Viet Nam, particularly in Khanh Hoa Province, have adapted to a "new normal" period. This period is characterized by a mix of traditional and blended teaching approaches, with an increased reliance on technology in the process of teaching and learning. Assessing the effectiveness of online learning in English language instruction is crucial to maximize its benefits and mitigate any drawbacks.

The research is driven by our firsthand experience teaching English online in Khanh Hoa Province during the pandemic and thereafter. Many language centers and EFL teachers in the region have continued online instruction as a viable method, especially when traditional classroom settings are not feasible. This study pinpoints the perspectives of local English teachers who have taught children online for at least three years. Its aim is to identify the benefits of virtual classrooms and then stimulate ways to enhance teaching and learning outcomes in similar contexts.

Research question

To fulfill the aim, the research was then conducted to answer this question: *What are the teachers' perspectives on the benefits of virtual classrooms in teaching English to children in Khanh Hoa Province?*

Theoretically, based on the benefits reaped by English teachers in Khanh Hoa Province to leverage virtual learning platforms to maintain and enrich children's English learning, the study will provide a valuable reference for teachers, both in Viet Nam and globally, who are focused on enhancing teaching and learning quality at the elementary level during the digital transition, then contribute to future scholarly work in this field, offering insights in online English education. Practically, the study offers guidance and recommendations for English teachers in Khanh Hoa Province and beyond with a focus on optimizing the benefits of online English language education for young learners and developing greater confidence and flexibility in employing technology-based teaching strategies in upcoming EFL classes.

Literature review

Virtual classroom in language education

A virtual classroom is a form of electronic classroom in which students can interact, show their presentations, use various learning resources, and collaborate with groups (Joan, 2018). Virtual classrooms are part of a virtual learning environment, also known as a learning management or online delivery system that supports distance learning (JISC, 2010; Ko & Rossen, 2017). Put differently, learners engage with a curriculum that is delivered digitally, with teachers providing lessons through online videos or audio. This teaching can occur in either a self-directed (asynchronous) format or a live (synchronous) environment. In this current study, we totally focus on the synchronous environment when mentioning virtual classrooms.

Teachers create online classes and enroll students in such classes; inside the courses, teachers can easily combine a number of resources to design interactive learning activities (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007). The online classroom creates a dynamic learning space through the use of internet technology, allowing students and educators to work together, interact, share their thoughts, and communicate within a framework that is both educationally and technically organized (Elfeky & Elbyaly, 2023). Additionally, virtual learning can be adapted and merged with conventional education to create a hybrid learning model, which incorporates technology and digital media alongside traditional classroom teaching led by instructors (Jamilah & Fahyuni, 2022). Virtual platforms are increasingly popular for language teaching, allowing for greater student-teacher interaction and personalized learning.

Teaching English to children in virtual classrooms

Understanding children's learning characteristics

Children are receptive to activities centered on real-life experiences and draw knowledge from their surroundings; thus, visual, auditory, and tactile experiences are just as crucial for comprehension as the explanations provided by teachers (Harmer, 2007). Also, children learn English best through play and other physical activities, but they cannot decide what to learn by themselves and concentrate on the same thing for a long time (Harmer, 2015). In addition, due to their short attention span, children can easily get bored by activities that are slow-spaced, theoretical, and not exciting; children love discovering things, so they can be well engaged in physical movements or games requiring imagination and creation, and they are easily attracted to resources equipped with technology. Thus, to keep children's enthusiasm during a lesson, teachers should praise and acknowledge them whenever they have good performances. When learning a new language, their comprehension is primarily facilitated through their seeing, moving, and hearing, which makes the physical world a constant dominant factor (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990).

Unlike face-to-face classrooms, virtual classrooms permit students and teachers to see, communicate, and interact with each other through the screen of digital devices that are installed with communication software (e.g., Skype, Zoom, Messenger, Zalo, etc.), so using webcams, microphones, or live chat, students can pose questions in real-time, resulting in a more interactive learning experience. Overall, the virtual classroom offers an engaging learning atmosphere through the use of internet technology, enabling students and teachers to work together, interact, share their thoughts, and communicate within a framework of well-organized

educational and technical processes (Elfeky & Elbyaly, 2023).

As mentioned in the previous section, thanks to its features, the virtual learning environment is quite applicable for children. Therefore, in virtual classrooms, teachers can and should encourage and mentor the children, model the language, and create suitable settings for them to learn the new language better.

Building an effective virtual learning environment

A lot of research findings concur that the primary school setting enhances children's self-confidence, self-discipline, cooperative behavior, gender awareness, symbolic communication, logical reasoning, creativity, ability to solve problems, concentration, and engagement with tasks (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). It is the classroom that plays an important role in children's acquiring the target language. It can be created from successful interactions between children and the teacher, as well as among the children in a classroom. When children feel safe and happy in their classroom, they can be motivated to become independent and explore new territories in their educational journey (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990).

Furthermore, flexibility in grouping can create an effective working atmosphere for children to practice the language and enhance their face-to-face communication. These setups are effective methods for increasing the duration of student speech while reducing the amount of time teachers spend talking (Harmer, 2015). Following this, children can actively generate learning motivation for each other and regulate the pleasant atmosphere in the classroom.

Thus, to teach English effectively to children, teachers should create an engaging virtual learning environment. By using colorful displays and English content, children are more likely to be motivated and excited about learning. This helps them gain more exposure to the target language naturally, leading to a more effective learning method.

Benefits of virtual classrooms in teaching English

Developing teachers' digital skills

Virtual classrooms provide substantial opportunities to enhance teachers' information and computer technology (competence relating to digital skills in the twenty-first century) (Omboto & Kanga, 2022). With online teaching, teachers spend much time using computers and the Internet to administrate virtual classes, prepare lessons, design activities, and update trends in education. Put differently, adept use of ICT by teachers in virtual classrooms can lead to successful outcomes in language education, especially through the use of email, blogs, and video conferencing. These tools enhance students' interactions and communications with native speakers and various communities, allowing them to apply the language in genuine contexts and for actual purposes. This, in turn, enhances teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward digital technology, opening numerous possibilities for their creativity in teaching the English language (Karsenti et al., 2020; Paudel, 2021).

Employing materials and online resources

A virtual classroom is beneficial for teachers to access a wide range of online materials that serve English language teaching and learning. Indeed, online courses provide teachers with authentic and huge resources of materials required for designing lessons, administrating students and virtual classes, and allowing adjustments to subjects and content needs (Paudel, 2021). Effective materials ought to cover topics that are relevant, captivating, and significant to students. They should feature language both contextual and authentic and prioritize the understanding of meaning over the structure of language. Additionally, there should be an integration of skills and a repetition of concepts for reinforcement (Amato, 1988, as cited in Garton & Copland, 2019).

Although many technology tools can be beneficial for online learning, primary school teachers seem to be familiar with the course management system or learning management system (LMS), an e-learning platform that provides an integrated toolset (including tools such as chat box, discussion board, grade book, e-mail, and content storage such as a digital dropbox) to the online teachers and students (Dawley, 2007; Boettcher & Conrad, 2010), and a software tool designed for administrating, documenting, monitoring, and reporting on training initiatives, including both classroom and online activities, e-learning courses, and educational materials (Nedeva & Dimova, 2010). Generally, as a web-based technology, the LMS is popular for planning, implementing, and assessing a specific learning process. By using such kinds of tools, teachers can share the screen and documents while presenting their lessons or build Web page classrooms for storing course content. Depending on the nature of the class and lesson content, teachers can flexibly choose appropriate materials and platforms to design activities to help students get involved in the lesson.

Increasing students' interest and engagement in learning

The virtual classroom, equipped with audio and video capabilities, enabled two-way communication among students, allowing them to clarify questions and offer immediate feedback while participating in the activity (Gedera, 2014). In synchronous learning environments, immediate feedback and engagement with both peers and the instructor appear to boost motivation and enhance students' learning (Schullo et al., 2007). Besides, the graphical richness of the world and the liberty provided to students to digitally rebuild and witness their imaginative creations come to life enhance the appeal of the learning material and facilitate experiential knowledge acquisition. This leads to a rise in students' eagerness to interact with the learning content and engage in their educational journey (Christopoulos et al., 2018). It is a fact that students today are completely accustomed to the digital environment. As a result, many find features like interactive online whiteboards, messaging, breakout rooms, instant messaging, and games in virtual classrooms enjoyable, making online education more entertaining and engaging (Arden, 2021).

Thus, multimedia in virtual classrooms can enhance children's learning experience. Audios and videos, online whiteboards, interactive games, etc., help increase their engagement and communication. Children today are more adaptable to digital tools, and their use can boost motivation and participation. Teachers should make use of dynamic technology in virtual environments to improve their students' learning.

Previous related studies

Many studies have been conducted on the benefits of the virtual classroom teaching system in contemporary English language teaching and learning worldwide. Meena (2019) found that virtual classrooms can be successful if teachers use technology and pay attention to pedagogic and educational matters. Dash (2022) showed that students were more enthusiastic and excited to learn in this new way and suggested that teachers should welcome technology and use it to support teaching and learning. Lo (2023) investigated teachers' perspectives on EFL virtual classrooms during the COVID-19 emergency in Hong Kong using interviews and contributed to emphasize how digital technologies can enhance education and language learning.

In Viet Nam's educational setting, concerns over online English teaching and learning have been aroused in light of research whose context can vary from primary to higher education. Pham's (2018) research discovered that students benefit from easy access to a wide array of engaging learning resources, including complimentary online materials. This accessibility boosts their motivation and involvement in both self-directed study and face-to-face learning activities. Additionally, students gain increased chances to enhance their communication abilities and English language proficiency. In a subsequent study, Pham (2020) examined the perspectives of undergraduate EFL students on the impact of virtual learning and discovered that online platforms like Edmodo, Moodle, MyELT, and Google Classroom can increasingly foster autonomy and interest among students in online or hybrid English intensive courses. Vo & Le's (2023) research on university teachers' perceptions of online teaching found that most lecturers felt gratified by teaching virtual classes and satisfied with their lesson contents during the COVID-19 outbreak and perceived that both face-to-face traditional teaching and online teaching are effective. There has also been a surge of interest in exploring teachers' perceptions (Luu, 2021; Vo, 2022; Dau, 2022; Le et.al, 2022; Cao, 2023). Despite using different research methods to answer specific research questions and connecting with teachers at different school levels, most of these studies concluded that EFL teachers show enthusiasm for using online learning systems and tools, express a willingness to improve their ICT expertise to enhance the effectiveness of remote teaching, and agree that virtual instruction provides numerous advantages for EFL teachers and students, such as efficient organization and management of courses, a variety of instructional approaches, flexibility in learning and teaching activities, and improved student engagement and autonomy.

Although various studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of virtual classrooms in different contexts, they all suggest similar findings about the benefits of virtual classrooms in teaching and learning English online. While there is a significant amount of research conducted in foreign contexts, there is limited research on the perspectives of primary school teachers in Viet Nam regarding teaching English to children in virtual classrooms. Therefore, there is a research gap that needs to be addressed in this area.

Methodology

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The research was conducted in Khanh Hoa Province. The English program for children here, i.e., primary students, is aligned with Viet Nam's National English curriculum framework, of

which online learning is an important part. Also, this locality is a popular tourist destination in Central Viet Nam for international visitors. Thus, the children's demand to learn English is on the increase. The teacher participants are those currently working for different public and private schools and language centers, and some are freelancers. All the participants had experience in teaching English to children for at least one year or three online courses, which helped to make sure that their feedback was based on their real teaching practice and experience. They were contacted through Khanh Hoa Province's English teacher groups and English teacher communities on Zalo and Facebook. The study collected convenient samples. There were 52 teachers, including 45 females (86.5%) and 7 males (13.5%). Their demographics can be seen as follows.

Table 1

Demographics of the participants

Age	≤ 25	11 (21.2%)	Working place	Public schools	25 (48.1%)
	26 – 34	38 (73.1%)		Private schools	6 (11.5%)
	35 – 44	2 (3.8%)		Language centers	13 (25%)
	≥ 45	1 (1.9%)		Other places	8 (15.4%)
Years of teaching English to children	1 – 5	34 (65.4%)	Years of teaching English online to children	≤ 1	35 (67.3%)
	6 – 15	14 (26.9%)		1.5 – 2	12 (23.1%)
	16 – 25	1 (1.9%)		2.5 – 3	1 (1.9%)
	≥ 26	0 (0%)		> 3	4 (7.7%)

Table 1 shows that the vast majority of participants have ample experience teaching English in virtual classrooms for at least one year. We can confidently assume that they have explored the benefits of teaching English to children in virtual classrooms and have found ways to maximize such benefits. Therefore, their responses are highly reliable and applicable.

Design of the Study

The research is a case study investigating the perspectives of local teachers in Khanh Hoa Province on the benefits of virtual classrooms in teaching English to children. The research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods via an online questionnaire and interviews to address its objectives, as outlined in the introduction. For the quantitative data, the first part of the questionnaire consisted of 16 items to explore the possible benefits of teaching English to children online. In terms of choosing options, the participants select the ones that describe their agreement or disagreement corresponding to the 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree). For the qualitative one, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with 15 of 52 participants based on their agreement to share deeper insights into the benefits of teaching English in virtual classrooms and their acceptance to talk via Zoom to ensure a private and comfortable setting to express their ideas conveniently. In detail, there were two questions in the interview section: the former was about the benefits of teaching English to children in virtual classrooms, and the latter was about the easiest skills to teach English to children in virtual classrooms.

Data collection and analysis

The formal process of data gathering commenced following a thorough examination of the pilot study and the execution of Cronbach's Alpha to test the reliability of the pilot questionnaire. In fact, English teachers in Khanh Hoa Province have an official community via the Zalo group, so the process of delivering the questionnaire was approved and carried out after the selected teacher participants were contacted. The teachers had two weeks to think and complete the questionnaires at their ease and convenience. The data was then synthesized and analyzed with SPSS version 22.0 in the form of descriptive statistics.

The interviews were carried out a month later so that the researchers had enough time to process the data collected from the questionnaire and find common benefits. Thus, the interviews would be conducted effectively and relevantly to the questionnaire. The researcher conducted 5-20-minute interviews with the participants via Zoom. Communication was in Vietnamese to ensure that the participants felt relaxed in their responses and explanations. To analyze the qualitative data, the recordings were first transcribed into English using the Microsoft online transcript tool. After that, the transcripts were sent back to the interviewees for their checking to maintain the accuracy of their opinions, and all of them accepted the transcripts. All the data obtained were tabulated and coded. The names of 15 interviewees were coded into T1-T15. The researcher the transcripts were analyzed with thematic and comparative approaches, and key elements were categorized into groups to better match the questionnaire data.

As previously stated, this paper employed a mixed-method research approach with a quantitative survey followed by in-depth interviews. To certify the legitimacy and reliability of the research findings, the author implemented methodological triangulation, effectively minimizing any potential research biases that may have been present.

Findings and discussion

Teaching English language skills in virtual classrooms

Table 2

<i>Teaching language skills to children in virtual classrooms</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. I can teach listening to children easily and effectively.	3.4	1.07
2. I can teach reading to children is easy and effectively.	3.42	1.09
3. I can teach speaking to children is easy and effectively.	3.62	1.12
4. I can teach writing to children easily and effectively.	3.28	.96
5. I can teach integrated skills in online lessons.	3.69	.85
6. I can provide opportunities for children to practice all four language skills.	3.9	.77
Total	3.55	.98

The average scores for teaching English language skills in virtual classrooms ranged from 3.28 to 3.9, with an overall average of 3.55. This means the teachers agreed on using virtual classrooms for teaching English language skills and showed positive attitudes towards teaching integrated skills and providing opportunities for students to practice. Thus, virtual classrooms can be effective in teaching language skills to children, as demonstrated in Table 2.

The results in the table are relatively in line with the findings from the responses from the 15 teacher interviews. They agreed it is acceptable to teach language skills in virtual classrooms: oral skills are easiest, followed by listening, with reading and writing more challenging. The majority of them find teaching speaking straightforward due to direct interaction and abundant online resources (T1, T2, T6, T7, T8, T10, T13, T14), and some effectively combine speaking and listening instruction using interactive methods and digital tools (T3, T6, T7, T8, T10). Reading, easier than writing but harder than listening, benefits from engaging methods and visual aids for better vocabulary retention (T2, T3, T7, T8, T13, T4, T9, T11, T15). Overall, virtual classrooms allow for innovative use of digital resources to enhance lesson engagement and student interest (T1, T7, T8, T12, T15).

The scores from the table and the consensus among the 15 interviewed teachers indicate that virtual environments foster an environment conducive to teaching language skills, though they might have varying degrees of effectiveness across different skill areas. Overall, the teachers view the leveraging of digital resources and interactive methods positively as a means to teach English language skills effectively. In addition, they recognize the need for further exploration of strategies to overcome certain limitations of virtual classrooms, particularly when teaching complex skills such as writing, to fully harness the potential of online education. The insights gleaned from their feedback underscore the importance of a nuanced understanding of the opportunities for teaching English language skills in virtual classrooms.

The results of this study align with prior research demonstrating the efficacy of virtual classrooms in facilitating English language instruction. Hamouda (2020) found that most of the students highlight the benefits of oral skills, while Soliman (2014) and Khoshshima and Sayadi (2016) noted improvements across all language skills, thanks to diverse online resources and interactive strategies. Hossain (2021) revealed the majority of teachers appreciate the ease of teaching speaking virtually, enhancing teacher-student interactions, and they prefer using audio-visual aids online for better educational outcomes. Bazo and Cabrera (2002) emphasized primary students' engagement with English through music and visuals and suggested that success in virtual English teaching relies on the creative and flexible use of digital tools.

Teaching and learning performance in virtual classrooms

Table 3

<i>Teaching and learning performance in virtual classrooms</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
7. I can help children to attain their lessons' learning outcomes in virtual classrooms.	3.45	.87
8. I can upload lessons in virtual classrooms for children to revise them conveniently at home.	3.89	1.00
9. I can conduct written exams and oral exams for language skills in virtual classrooms.	3.49	.81
Total	3.61	.89

According to Table 3, the average mean of items 7-9, which ranges from 3.45 to 3.89, indisputably reflects the overwhelmingly positive perception of teachers regarding their competence and effectiveness in conducting virtual classrooms.

As per the feedback from the teacher interviews, they found that employing online assessment tools featuring automated grading systems helped them evaluate their students' learning outcomes with ease, and it not only saved them ample time in grading but also provided prompt feedback to their students (T1, T5, and T7). Moreover, a few interviewees opined that introducing online exams to children at an early age could increase their familiarity with digital tools and technology, thereby preparing them for the digital demands of higher education (T3, T5, and T10).

The feedback from the teacher questionnaire responses and interviews shows that incorporating online assessment tools with automated grading into virtual classrooms can provide numerous benefits, both operationally and pedagogically. By streamlining the assessment process, teachers can save valuable time while immediately providing actionable feedback to children. Additionally, this proactive measure equips children with crucial digital literacy skills that are essential for success in today's increasingly digital world. Teacher interviews support the widespread adoption and integration of digital assessment tools in educational settings, emphasizing their role in improving the efficiency of the teaching and learning process while also preparing children for the future.

In previous studies, most teachers agree that using virtual classrooms brings convenience for their student assessment in both summative and formative forms during the COVID-19, and students' learning outcomes are maintained positively (Le et al., 2022). Similarly, Luu (2021) points out a result that online teaching is effective in both course content and assessment; and it is convenient for teachers to provide learning materials using learning management systems. The results are aligned with the findings of the current research in terms of teaching and learning performance in virtual classrooms.

Developing digital skills through virtual classrooms

Table 4

<i>Teachers' developing digital skills in virtual classrooms</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
10. I can explore many effective online platforms to design teaching activities.	4.09	1.05
11. I can improve my information and communication technology competence when I conduct online classes.	4.04	1.12
12. I can receive technical support and training from schools and language centers where I am currently working.	3.67	1.00
Total	3.93	1.05

According to the data, the scores for items 10-12 had a range of 3.67 to 4.09, with an average mean of 3.93. These results suggest that teaching online has played a vital role in enhancing the digital proficiency of teachers.

In interviews, many teachers shared favorable opinions about incorporating technology into their online instruction. For some, virtual classrooms presented the chance to explore innovative teaching methods by embracing digital tools and technologies, which allows the development of digital skills of both teachers and children (T4, T7, T8, T11, and T15). However, a few teachers felt the need for more comprehensive professional development and ongoing support to effectively integrate technology into their teaching methodologies (T4, T8, and T10).

Teachers are using interactive tools, multimedia content, and gamified learning platforms to make English lessons in virtual classrooms more engaging (T1, T5, T7, T8, T11, T12, and T14). However, some have concerns about equitable access to technology and resources (T2, T3, T9). In short, their attitudes towards developing digital skills range from excitement about innovation to concerns about equitable access and the need for support and training.

The findings provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of online teaching on digital proficiency and the integration of technology in educational settings. In the teachers' view, the shift towards virtual classrooms has necessitated and facilitated a deeper engagement with digital tools and platforms, leading to improved digital skills among them. While there is clear enthusiasm for these innovations, the discussions also highlight critical areas for further development, including the need for comprehensive training and support for teachers and the imperative to ensure equitable access to digital resources for all children.

The current findings are relevant to those of previous studies that examined the beneficial impact of employing virtual classrooms on enhancing teachers' digital competencies. Most of the interviewees in Zhang's (2020) research consider it crucial and necessary to enhance their capability to utilize digital tools for teaching English and to achieve proficiency in employing these tools within a professional setting, coupled with effective teaching methodologies. Minea-Pic (2020) also claims that virtual classrooms are vital in developing teachers' digital skills. Specifically, the author highlights that teachers possessing greater digital skills or the ability to swiftly explore and critically apply online resources tend to be more effective in their teaching, achieving their objectives in a shorter period. Moreover, teachers with advanced skills are better at selecting their online educational materials, opting for higher-quality courses or resources, and employing these resources in more sophisticated ways.

This research is relevant to previous studies on virtual classrooms and teachers' digital skills. Zhang (2020) found that it is pivotal for teachers' improvement of their digital tools proficiency for teaching English in a professional context. Minea-Pic (2020) highlights that virtual classrooms are essential to develop teachers' digital competence. Teachers with higher digital skills can navigate online resources efficiently, enhance their teaching effectiveness, and select better-quality courses. Also, the findings in this study support the argument that technology can help teachers create high-quality teaching materials, increase their ICT competencies, and improve the teaching process, which has been proven by Le et al. (2022), who affirmed that the use of technology in online classrooms can enhance teacher participation and efficiency, particularly for primary school students in complex epidemic situations, and in Elfeky and Elbyaly (2023), who supported the impact of online classrooms on enhancing teachers' digital competencies.

*Classroom management and engagement in virtual classrooms***Table 5**

<i>Classroom management and engagement in virtual classrooms</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
13. I can engage my students in classroom activities.	3.71	.82
14. I can manage collaborative activities (pair work/group work) in online lessons.	2.87	1.03
15. I can maintain interaction with different types of students during an online lesson.	3.51	.77
16. I can make my students feel excited to take part in classroom activities.	3.54	.95
Total	3.41	.89

This table shows that participants were able to manage and engage children in virtual classrooms, except for item 14. The means of the items ranged from 2.87 to 3.71, with an average mean value of 3.41. Although most teachers agreed that children were excited to join classroom activities, collaborative activities may not be an advantage of teaching English in virtual classrooms. That's why item 14 has the lowest score of 2.87.

The teacher interviewees shared their views on the results in the table above. Digital tools and resources offer diverse learning experiences, enhance engagement, and aid in classroom management (T1, T2, T7, T8, and T11). Digital platforms are an effective solution for teachers to manage their classrooms seamlessly, offering a comprehensive set of features such as organizing materials, assigning tasks, tracking progress, and regulating student behavior (T4, T8, and T14). Virtual classrooms provide adaptive learning tools that personalize content and pace for individual students, catering to their specific learning requirements (T10 and T15). Online platforms provide real-time feedback, fostering interactive learning and helping students stay on track (T2, T9, T10, and T13). Interestingly, all 15 interviewees agreed that multimedia elements like videos, simulations, games, and interactive quizzes make learning engaging, leading to increased student participation and attentiveness.

The combination of table data and teacher interviews provides a comprehensive examination of classroom management and engagement. The statistics demonstrate numerous benefits of virtual classrooms, with the exception of fostering effective collaboration among students. Every one of the fifteen interviewees agreed on this point. While virtual classrooms prove effective in areas such as classroom management, engagement, and individualized learning, facilitating successful collaborative activities remains a challenge. The insights gathered suggest that while technology provides a strong foundation for managing and improving learning, continued innovation and support are necessary to overcome the obstacles to collaborative learning.

These discoveries align with those outlined in a recent study conducted by Le et al. (2022), who found over half of the 70 primary school English teachers agree that technology helps them manage their classrooms and design activities that capture children's attention in virtual classrooms. Likewise, Suleiman and other researchers (2022) highlighted the benefits of virtual classrooms, including student-centered approaches, increased diversity and creativity, accommodation of various learning styles, and greater student participation in lessons. In

addition, the viewpoints of educators on utilizing multimedia elements like videos, simulations, games, and interactive quizzes to foster interaction in virtual classrooms align with the findings of Sri and Krishna's (2014) research. This study highlighted the importance of tailoring instruction to accommodate three primary learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Consequently, incorporating captivating graphics and interactive features, as seen on platforms like Kahoot, Quizizz, and Booklet, can effectively sustain children's interest and involvement in the lesson. By leveraging technology, virtual classrooms offer numerous benefits that improve classroom management, boost student engagement, and provide personalized learning experiences to cater to individual needs.

Conclusion

In short, the findings are grouped into four sub-themes, showing the great benefits of virtual classrooms for teaching English to children at primary schools and highlighting that most of the teachers found virtual classrooms to be an effective tool for teaching English to children.

First, EFL teachers can teach children all the four language skills. In detail, teaching the speaking skill was the least challenging, followed by listening, reading, and writing skills. The integration of these skills was identified as a successful approach to teaching English in virtual classrooms, as it provided children with more opportunities to practice the language. However, it is remarkable that teaching the English language to children in virtual classrooms should focus more on speaking skills rather than writing skills. While listening and reading skills remain important aspects of online teaching, prioritizing speaking skills is essential for effective language learning.

Second, teachers conveyed positive views regarding the utilization of virtual classrooms for enhancing teaching and learning performance. This encompassed tasks such as uploading learning materials, assessing children's progress, and preserving their educational achievements.

Third, teaching English through virtual classrooms offers immense benefits for teachers, including the development of digital skills, keeping abreast of technological advancements in education, accessing a vast array of teaching resources on educational websites, and fostering creativity in designing activities that increase children's motivation and engagement in English lessons. Many teachers admit that using virtual classrooms in teaching English was a great way to help them develop their digital skills. Importantly, they had opportunities to innovate and enhance their teaching methods by embracing technologies, applying interactive tools, multimedia content, and gamified learning platforms in order to make English lessons more engaging and enjoyable, which is extremely effective in teaching English to children.

Fourth, virtual classrooms offer numerous advantages, including the promotion of teachers' familiarity with evolving technology trends in education, access to an extensive pool of teaching resources on educational websites, and the stimulation of their ingenuity in designing activities. As a consequence, virtual classrooms can significantly boost children's motivation, interaction, and engagement while learning English.

The current study sheds light on teachers' perspectives on virtual classrooms, but it has

unavoidable limitations. The sample size is small, and the research design may not control for all variables. Further investigation should involve broader and more varied participant groups, employ diverse research methodologies, and extend the study's scope. Hopefully, the research has provided a general picture of the benefits of teaching English to children in virtual classrooms and can be a useful reference for educators interested in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning at the primary level amid the shift to digital platforms in Viet Nam and similar contexts.

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Biodata

Dr. Nguyen Thi Nhu Ngoc is currently Vice-dean cum Chair of the Department of Translation and Interpreting at the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, University of Social Sciences & Humanities, VNUHCM. She has been an English teacher and a part-time translator since 1997. She was also a co-author of some ESP internal-used textbooks. Her main research interests are English Teaching, Translation Studies, Comparative Linguistics, and Intercultural Communication.

Nguyen Tran Tu Uyen is an MA student in the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. She has been an English teacher since 2018. She is currently teaching English in a primary school in Khanh Hoa Province. Her main research interests are English Teaching and Linguistics.

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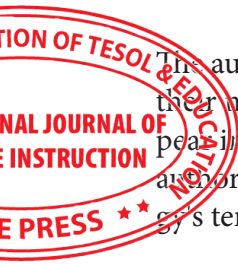
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