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A Note from the Editor-in-chief

Dear authors and colleagues,

We are delighted to inform you that the full issue of May 2022 has completed its mission. We acknowledged authors from Bangladesh, Taiwan, and Vietnam who contribute their intellects and experts to the quality of the issue.

To Bangladesh, we send our great thanks to the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Wahidul Islam, Saleh Ahmad, and Md. Didarul Islam employed a mixed-method to investigate the problems of speaking faced by the 88 undergraduate students and four teachers from four universities in Bangladesh.

To Taiwan, we acknowledge the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Taipei City, Taiwan. Nguyen Thi Mo and Huei-Chun Teng explored mobile devices' acceptance in EFL listening skills among Vietnamese high school learners by utilizing the updated Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT).

To Northern Vietnam, we send our big thanks to (1) the Academy of Journalism and Communication, Ha Noi. Nguyen Thi Hong Nhung and Nguyen Thi Thuy Hue employed Google Docs in teaching and learning English online to improve students' writing performance. (2) We acknowledge Hung Vuong University, Phu Tho Province, Vietnam. Ngo Thi Thanh Huyen investigated Vietnamese students' attitudes towards English listening learning after the two cycles of an action research project in which strategy instruction was employed as the intervention.

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To Southern Vietnam, we send our thanks to (1) the Foreign Trade University, Ho Chi Minh City Campus, Vietnam. Ngoc Hong Phuong Vu and Ha Thanh Le used a mixed-method approach to analyze the influence of six components in a CV writing process from a social-constructivist approach. (2) Pham Manh Tri et al. at the Faculty of Foreign languages, Van Lang University, investigate the concentration challenges that EFL students at Van Lang University are encountering while they are studying online. Particularly, (3) at Van Language University, Dinh Huynh Mai Tu employed the TBLT framework in technology-mediated environments to enhance students' vocabulary retention and interpreting skills.

To Western Vietnam, we send our thanks to the School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University, Can Tho, Vietnam. Le Xuan Mai and Le Thanh Thao employed a qualitative method to investigate the factors influencing Vietnamese students' attitudes toward

English learning in a tertiary institution in the Mekong region to help local educators enhance the quality of teaching and learning English in this region, considered a "low-land" in the education of Vietnam.

Finally, we really appreciate the hard-working of the editorial board and reviewers. Without their efforts and valuable time, the International Journal of TESOL & Education (ijte) could not achieve such qualified research articles on this issue.

Thanks be to God for everything!

Sincerely yours

Associate Professor Pham Vu Phi Ho, Ph.D.

Editor-in-chief

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University

EFL Students' Challenges of Online Courses at Van Lang University during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced most activities around the world, especially EFL education. Due to the pandemic, all schools and colleges must turn traditional education into online education through online learning platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and so forth. The research aims to investigate the concentration challenges that EFL students at Van Lang University are encountering while they are studying online. The paper used quantitative and qualitative methods by conducting questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews with 100 second-year, third-year, and four-year students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Van Lang University (VLU). Based on the data collection, the results of this research have demonstrated that most EFL students faced some common distractions like external noises, unstable internet connections, the harmful effects of too much screen time, and so on. After the investigation, this study suggests that lecturers at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Van Lang University look for numerous positive solutions to solve EFL students' trouble in order to enhance the quality of online courses.

1. Introduction

Over thousands of years, people have constantly been trying to learn and cultivate knowledge. And technology was born to meet educational needs that were insufficient. Any important event that occurs is the reason for any turning point in the field of invitation (Farrah & al-Bakry, 2020). At the same time, because of the influence of the pandemic, schools and colleges have been trying out the implementation of EFL online classes. It has helped online learning applications thrive, including the application of online classes. The only way in this serious situation is to

switch to online learning because of the COVID-19 epidemic (Mahyoob, 2020). E-learning is determined as classes conveying through the web to other places other than face-to-face classrooms where the teachers can teach in a virtual meeting and students can speak and interact with lecturers or other students (Farrah & al-Bakry, 2020). In the present time, online learning platforms play a very important role in education. Nevertheless, numerous teachers in schools and colleges do not use this education regime and do not know what is related to e-learning (Mahyoob, 2020). It is because of the newness in this teaching method that both teachers and students have many difficulties in communicating and absorbing knowledge.

A study conducted by Ahmad (2016) found the difficulties of foreign language students when learning online. In listening sessions, the ICT equipment used by teachers to train pupils who are indifferent and remote locations is frequently inefficient. When administering listening tests, teachers are also unable to provide the best possible supervision to their pupils. Students have difficulty mimicking their instructor's manner of speaking in speaking courses with distance or online learning, and the teacher cannot adequately train the students to talk in these circumstances. Moreover, according to Wahab and Iskandar (2020), they concluded that learners do not have smartphones, laptops, or computers. Lack of internet quota also becomes a problem for students. Providing an internet quota requires a high cost. This difficulty is felt by students and parents from middle-class economies and below. They do not have enough budget to use the Internet. Students often have trouble accessing the Internet due to the places they live. Nashruddin et al. (2020) indicated that some students live in distant rural regions where the Internet is not available. Their cellular network is usually unstable because of the geographical location, which is far from the signal coverage. This is often also an issue that happens in a lot of students who take online learning, so the implementation is less effective.
The research aims to explore EFL students' concentration difficulties in online courses by synthesizing and analyzing current evidence carried out through questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews with 100 second-year, third-year, and four-year students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Van Lang University (VLU). According to the information, EFL teachers can grasp what EFL undergraduates are experiencing and seek long-term solutions to tackle those problems in online courses during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The difficulties in accessing online learning have progressively been adapted to the teaching syllabus since both learners and teachers have had the wonderful chance of understanding and interacting with educational, technological devices such as smartphone learning, computer-based acquiring knowledge, and web-based learning (Pellegrini et al., 2020; Byun & Slavin, 2020). The emphasis of this study was on the challenges faced by EFL students, practically, EFL students in Van Lang University during the present worldwide pandemic, as well as the facilities and solutions that may be provided to address issues when taking online courses.

2. Literature review

2.1. Online courses

During the COVID-19 pandemic, turning face-to-face courses into online courses is one of the best solutions so that education will not be put off. Picciano and Seaman (2009) concluded that online learning is believed to be a type of distance education on the grounds that evaluations and instructions occur in digital classrooms with internet connections. Additionally, according to Gonzalez and Louis (2018), online learning is conducted from a distance with the assistance of electronic inventions, for example, smartphones, computers, laptops, etc. Some investigators described online learning as access to academic experiences by means of modern technologies (Benson, 2002; Conrad, 2002; Carliner, 2004). Furthermore, Benson (2002) and Conrad (2002) reported that online learning could be seen as a more recent version of distance learning that provides students with better access to educational chances. Online courses have played a vital role in education around the world (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

Tabiri et al. (2022) believed that learning and teaching online is the best option during the COVID-19 pandemic. Smedley (2010) agreed that online education ought to be applied in schools thanks to its flexibility, convenience, and personalized learning opportunities. As far as Tran (2021) was concerned, learners tend to access resources like videos, PowerPoint lecture slides, and so forth in order to learn many times at a lot of places, including at home, at a café, or even on the road. With online methods, teachers can meet learners who do not have the ability to attend classrooms because of time constraints and distance (Srichanyachon, 2014).

2.2. Challenges of online courses

Notwithstanding online courses' advantages, they may bring students various limitations. Numerous authors argued that there remain many factors that have impacts on learners' online learning experiences, including learning style (Eom et al., 2006), students' learning process (Paechter et al., 2010), self-regulated learning (Tichavsky et al., 2015), self-efficacy (Alhamami, 2019), lecturers, interaction, technologies, learning ability (Luu, 2022), and learners' quality (Selim, 2007; Baylor & Ritchie, 2002; Volery & Lord, 2000).

Sarvestani et al. (2019) investigated the difficulties experienced by Iranians taking online courses at the Virtual School of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences with qualitative methods and phenomenological analyses. The findings identified educational, organizational, ethical, technology, supporting, evaluation, management, and communication challenges as general categories. Most research on online education addressed the same difficulties in each area, such as negative impressions of e-learning, slow connections, lack of engagement with instructors, and inefficiency of instructional information. Based on the findings of this research, organizational challenges include the lack of diversity in online courses and a lack of online teaching expertise among the teaching staff. Ethical challenges include a lack of a proper culture for using this discipline, as well as a negative view of online education. Technical obstacles include inadequate internet connection and a loss of physical space. Managerial problems are related to ineffective instructional materials. Communication problems consist of a loss of

connection with professors and students and a lack of interaction.

Aboagye et al. (2020) explored the challenges of students in tertiary institutions, including internet connectivity, using compatible smartphones, laptops and participating in group-work. The results showed that challenges could be categorized into eight groups: social issues, faculty issues, outreach issues, learning dynamics, learning issues, general issues, learner intentions, and demographics. They revealed that the most critical challenge could be accessibility issues, followed by social, academic, and generic problems. Specifically, students were not prepared for a fully online experience, and they found it difficult to access course materials. Hijazi and AlNatour (2021) stated that the online learning challenges negatively impacted students studying English-101 and English-99 in an EFL context during the COVID-19 pandemic. An electronic survey with multiple analytical methods was sent to 1,200 selected students studying English-101 and English-99 courses at Yarmouk University in Jordan to collect data. The analysis of the questionnaire data demonstrated that the challenges encountered by the students are teaching methods, social aspects, infrastructures, computer skills, coordination, motivation & willingness, and assessment methods.

2.2.1. Physical and mental challenges

Muslimin and Harintama (2020) acknowledged that students feel nervous about online learning. Istifci (2016) confirmed that students found it boring during online courses since they could easily search for the answers to the assignments. During remote learning, students feel dizzy due to staring at screens of cell phones or laptops for too long (Ariyanti, 2020). According to Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020), one of the most significant hurdles to online learning generally seems to be the physical barrier. Students spend much time working at computers, as opposed to reading a printed page. This constitutes an outwardly visual activity for them. Smaller text and pixelated images are commonly used on digitally displayed pages, so they must strain their eyes to read. The study recommended that teachers should offer their pupils a break while enrolling in an E-Learning activity to overcome physical obstacles. In addition, many students have headaches every time they attend classes (Ariyanti, 2020). Talal Alodwan (2021) asserted that online learning causes social isolation among students.

Motivation is one of the most important elements influencing L2 learners' success and effectiveness in the language acquisition process. Meşe and Sevilen (2021) investigated students' perspectives of motivation in relation to online education. Factors that make students feel unmotivated when learning online include dissatisfaction with course content and materials, lack of self-discipline to participate in the course, lack of communication between teachers and students, and lack of private space to monitor the course.

Yuzulia (2021) discovered the challenges and problems faced by students during the implementation of online learning. Students prefer traditional learning to online learning due to some difficulties in implementing e-learning. The students complained about the techniques used by the teachers. They are asked to participate in Zoom meetings every day, which makes them feel uninterested. Furthermore, learners have some health issues such as eye strain and

headaches. Teachers ought to provide interesting methods and techniques in online teaching to boost student motivation and performance during this pandemic situation.

2.2.2. Language learning challenges

Sai et al. (2013) and Altunay (2019) claimed that some learners found it awkward to enhance their command of English via distance education. Similarly, Ja'ashan (2020) reported that the students did not improve their language skills like speaking skills with the implementation of blended learning. Moreover, Phan et al. (2022) reported that students studying online could not practice speaking English sufficiently because there are limited interactions among the students (p. 252). Mahyoob (2020) claimed that learners could not effectively interact with teachers in virtual English skills classes regarding language communication. In contrast, Khabbaz and Najjar (2015) investigated that combining foreign language learning with modern technologies may give rise to many difficulties which hinder students' independent learning.

Moreover, Sai et al. (2013) explored the challenges of online courses learners took. The research was carried out at the University Sains Malaysia's School of Distance Education with 512 participants. The participants faced challenges in taking online courses regarding language skills. The results showed that most learners had difficulties in the areas of speaking, vocabulary, and grammar when they were learning English through online education. The study recommended that lecturers need to pay attention to learners while teaching and learning online. Al-Shamsi et al. (2020) discovered the impacts of mobile learning on improving learners' listening skills. Most participants faced some problems associated with the suitability of listening material, the nature of mobile apps, cell phone screen sizes, and poor connections. Students had difficulties listening to audio materials and answering questions simultaneously, so they sometimes forgot what they listened to and could not grasp the meaning of the recordings.

2.2.3. Technology challenges

Studying online effectively requires learners to have a good technical knowledge base and a stable connection. Conversely, most students cannot have perfect online learning experiences due to technical problems, poor digital skills, etc. Kuama and Intharaksa (2016) specified that learners face technological and individual difficulties. For those taking online courses for a long time, unstable internet connections might be a primary reason that irritates them because they cannot grasp their knowledge of the lessons or follow what lecturers are teaching (Ariyanti, 2020, Muslimin & Harintama, 2020; Hijazi & AlNatour, 2021; Nguyen & Duong, 2021; Yuzulia, 2021). Moreover, Altunay (2019) pointed out that EFL students encountered some high-tech tools' absence and technical problems even though they were satisfied with online education thanks to its flexibility. Nugroho (2020) demonstrated that most students lacked technological knowledge, so turning the entire process of learning into online classrooms is not successful. Other studies' results also admitted that learners encountered technology problems (Islam et al., 2015; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Jhon et al., 2020; Alodwan, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, some underprivileged students living in remote areas are less likely to

access the Internet (Ariyanti, 2020; Adnan & Anwar, 2020).

In 2011, Tanveer conducted a study to focus on students' and instructors' perspectives on the use of e-learning pedagogical tools in language classrooms and the problems they confront and some solutions to improve the practical use of e-learning tools in classroom-based language education at Majan College. Common hurdles include technological illiteracy, certain students' severely restricted educational backgrounds, insufficient time and internet materials, a lack of confidence in using digital equipment, an inexperienced instructor. Lecturers and learners must be provided with support regarding training, equipment, and time resources.

Mahyoob (2020) conducted a study to focus on the challenges of e-learning, learners' interaction with information technology tools in e-learning, and learners' satisfaction with online learning at the University of Taibah, Saudi Arabia. The research showed that learners have difficulty accessing the Blackboard platform. About 30% of learners missed classes and other tasks while using the Blackboard. Technical issues are also a huge obstacle as some learners have difficulty connecting to the Internet, accessing classes, and downloading course materials. The level of satisfaction of EFL learners with online learning is low; less than 50% are satisfied with e-learning, while 14% of learners are not satisfied with e-learning and 43% of learners are not entirely in favour of long-term online education.

A similar study was carried out by Gulnaz et al. (2020). They investigated the effects of blended learning on the educational process as experienced by instructors and students using the Cambridge Learning Management System. The survey was conducted on 200 EFL students and 8 teachers. The EFL students filled out a questionnaire, and 8 teachers took part in a structured interview. They noticed that students were experiencing technical problems. To resolve the challenges, the university needed to hire professional instructors who could spend maximum time answering the students' queries and fixing the technical issues immediately. Ja'ashan (2020) found that the time required for exams and assignments was insufficient, and the digital platform resulted in problems accessing course content. Some students struggled with their home internet access and were dissatisfied with the software at home. Most students who had basic computer literacy skills could not utilize E-learning, so they should be equipped with E-learning skills through training courses so as to make successful use of E-learning.

Allo's research article (2020) looked into learners' perceptions of online learning in the middle of the COVID-19 epidemic. The learners of UKI Toraja's English study program are the focus of this study. The researcher interviewed the learners over the phone using the WhatsApp application. According to the findings, learners' perceptions of online learning are good and helpful. Students hoped that instructors would incorporate popular programs into the online learning system, such as free Messenger apps. They thought that it would be beneficial for lecturers to create learning groups on Messenger so that their friends who do not have access to the Internet might get knowledge. They also stated that individual activities helped them maintain the necessary physical distance due to the epidemic and that they needed group tasks to assist friends who did not yet have an internet connection. Also, they wished explanations had been provided before materials and homework were given. For this reason, they suggested

that Voice Note might be utilized successfully while delivering instructions. However, it was claimed that lecturers' online learning material and directions were difficult to use. The researcher also recommended that teachers need to observe their students' conditions with regard to financial ability, availability of Internet access, and choices of online learning applications that are effective and efficient to the implementation of online learning systems.

In 2020, Octaberlina and Muslimin concentrated on online courses and difficulties that students are facing and their solutions for overcoming them. Students experienced diverse challenges while learning online: unfamiliarity with e-learning and bad internet connection. Therefore, there is a gap between positive results and the obstacles faced by students who are very substantial in carrying out online learning. The major aspects function as obstacles to e-learning. The concept of E-Learning as a learning method was recognized as the most important component. This aspect includes general concerns about the validity and feasibility of E-Learning and the loss of "personal contact" in comparison to more traditional forms of learning and development. The second element is directly related to the use of technology and the Internet. This element takes into account both the pupils' technological proficiency and the speed accessible to them on the Internet. The combination of all of these unique characteristics might make it difficult to focus on studying in such an E-Learning platform. To overcome a loss of personal contact in E-Learning, the instructor must consider the overall academic objectives, as well as students' learning styles. Additionally, to address the shortage of networks and internet connections, the instructors should convert video content to audio and utilize texts.

2.3. Research gap

After examining the previous papers, most of the authors above highlighted that online courses had countless weaknesses that should be improved in the future despite giving EFL students many virtues. These studies have been well organized with awesome results; however, most were not looked into through qualitative and quantitative methods to have wider views. This is because EFL students' challenges need investigating by questionnaires and online or offline interviews to understand their perspectives of online learning fully. For this reason, our research plans to discover and clarify the challenges of online learning EFL students at VLU are experiencing via the two methods, including qualitative and quantitative methods. To accomplish superior online experiences as well as online courses' quality enhancement, it is suggested that those disadvantages are bound to be removed as fast as possible. All in all, in line with our paper's evidence, EFL educators at VLU can have obvious insights into EFL students' current problems of online courses in order to assist EFL students in coping with these problems.

2.4. Research Questions

1. What are the challenges of online courses that EFL students have to overcome?

2. What are the solutions to improve EFL students' academic performance?

3. Methods

3.1. Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Van Lang University, established in 1995, is considered one of the first private universities with great success in education. Based on Decision No.109/QĐ/VL-HĐT 18th, August 2020 of Chairman of the Van Lang University's Council about Educational Philosophy, the educational institution's philosophy of education includes a holistic, lifelong, ethical, and impactful learning experience. At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic first spread to Vietnam, which made VLU decide to change traditional courses to e-learning ones. According to Thuy (2021), the researcher confirmed that VLU offered adequate training and guides to assist both lecturers and learners in adapting to new online methods during the entire process of learning and teaching. Nevertheless, when online courses were applied to educate students at VLU, there were many challenges leading to negative effects on their academic achievement.

The research's participants are 100 second-year to four-year students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU. The paper was carried out during the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022 when the participants were taking online courses due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Because the investigators found it tough to research with all students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU, using a Simple Random Sampling (SRS) method is a suitable solution for gathering information, evaluating specific numbers, and determining the study sample. All 100 EFL students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU participated in the surveys. It was believed that the study would grasp co-existing challenges of online education based on the learners' opinions and experiences.

3.2. Design of the Study

The current research concentrated on investigating the challenges of the entire online learning process encountered by EFL students at VLU. The study integrated quantitative and qualitative methods to collect the data related to the research problem. The mixed-methods were gathered by questionnaires online. The researchers designed the questionnaires because it might be simple to analyze the information. Additionally, the researchers asked participants to provide their personal information like name, gender, age, and major before carrying out the interviews and surveys. The data from participants were only used to support the research. Those who took part in the study were willing to show their perspectives voluntarily. The paper's purpose was to understand EFL students' problems about online courses that they learned through their opinions. The mixed methods were used to answer the research questions.

3.2.1. The quantitative method

The researchers chose online questionnaires designed by Google Forms to analyze data. The surveys consisted of multiple-choice questions with the five-point Likert scale from "totally disagree" to "totally agree" (1 = totally disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = totally agree). The aim of the paper was to conduct the surveys with 100 second-year to four-year students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU. The online questionnaire list was

designed and posted to Facebook groups of the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU. Participants were given about five to ten minutes to fill out the survey. It took about two weeks to gather sufficient answers for the paper. About the benefits of this method, Wright (2005) found that utilizing questionnaire surveys saves investigators' efforts and time thanks to supplying automated data collection. Instead of asking participants to fill in traditional surveys like paper-and-pencil questionnaires, they could submit data through the Internet. The researcher concluded that online surveys allowed research group members to share information and results when participants submitted the data to the researchers. Moreover, the questionnaire list was divided into many parts with regard to types of challenges of online education: technology challenges, physical and mental challenges, and learning environment challenges.

3.2.2. The qualitative method

The researchers selected 15 EFL students randomly and asked them to express their ideas and perspectives about online courses that they had learned via 4 interview questions. As a result of the pandemic, online interviews were conducted rather than in-person ones. The investigators invited the participants to join meetings on Microsoft Teams or Zoom applications to make semi-structured interviews successful. Each Zoom or Microsoft Teams interview lasted at least ten minutes and was video-recorded. Furthermore, the researchers carried out interviews, including two parts. The first one consisted of name, gender, age, and major. Second, online interviews contained some questions associated with the challenges of learning English skills via online education. When it comes to the advantage of this method, Fox (2009) reported that exploiting semi-structured interviews was effective for researchers to collect data regarding perspectives, attitudes, and personal feelings because interviewees can express their opinions exactly about what they experienced.

3.3. Data collection & analysis

With the quantitative method, the questions were made to collect data in terms of EFL learners' challenges of online learning and their opinions about e-learning courses. The participants were asked to choose one of the options (1 = totally disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = totally agree) upon filling in the questionnaire list. Each part of the questionnaire list focused on sorts of challenges of online courses such as technology challenges, physical and mental challenges, and learning environment challenges. After participants had filled in the surveys, the researchers evaluated those results. Each kind of challenge was demonstrated through specific numbers and percentages (%). In order to make the process of estimation in statistics simple, the study applied a software called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Based on the results, the study could estimate common challenges during EFL students' online learning process to help EFL teachers understand what their students faced. In addition, the researchers chose 15 EFL students randomly and gave them an interview question list including 4 questions. The interview questions focused on the participants' challenges and comments about online courses, particularly the challenges of learning English skills during the COVID-19 pandemic. These participants were encouraged to express their feelings in their own words with detailed explanations and supporting ideas. They were allowed to use Vietnamese so long

as they had difficulties in expressing their opinions in the English language. The investigators could translate Vietnamese answers into English ones if necessary. The researchers made the data peer-reviewed to ensure that the study had logical information. In other words, unreliable and incomplete answers were ignored. After finishing the surveys, the researchers designed tables to demonstrate the results. Additionally, all interview answers were shown and analyzed in this study.

4. Results/Findings and discussion

The results of this research were data from using the two methods, which are quantitative and qualitative. Collecting and analyzing the data played a pivotal role in answering the two questions of the paper. The researchers used statistics and percentages (%) to describe the options from "totally disagree" to "totally agree" (1 = totally disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = totally agree) for quantitative data. Furthermore, the research showed participants' answers regarding their opinions about online courses and discovered the common challenges of learning English skills online for qualitative data.

4.1. Quantitative analysis

Table 1. Technology challenges

Questionnaires	1	2	3	4	5
You have poor computer skills.	18%	11%	40%	26%	5%
You find it difficult to use applications such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Classroom, etc.	16%	16%	47%	11%	10%
The poor network connection is one of the common problems that make you face a lot of difficulties in learning online.	6%	10%	12%	42%	30%
You have to be trained to enhance your computer skills.	7%	9%	12%	42%	30%
You have sufficient equipment such as smartphones, laptops, or computers to study online.	31%	46%	12%	3%	8%

Table 1 shows the percentages of the participant's answers to the items regarding technology challenges. Five items in this table indicated that students have problems with technology on a regular basis. All of these five mean ratings had significant impacts on joining the online courses of students at Van Lang University. Items 1 and Item 4 reported that students had trouble using the required computer skills. Of the respondents, just 31% of students thought that they had poor computer skills (as shown by the sample's responses on item 1), but 72% wanted to be trained to enhance their computer skills (as shown by the sample's responses on item 4). This meant that the students desired to improve their computer skills. Participants did not have too many difficulties in using the applications such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Classroom, and so on. The answers to item 5 in the equipment showed that 77% of the students

disagreed that they had sufficient equipment such as smartphones, laptops, or computers. Item 3 demonstrated that the students faced a lot of difficulties in learning online because of poor network connection (72%).

Table 2. Learning environment challenges

Questionnaires	1	2	3	4	5
Noise pollution prevents you from focusing on the lesson; that is, you do not have a quiet space to concentrate on your learning.	3%	7%	20%	32%	38%
Working in online groups is hard since the interaction between students is limited.	7%	9%	19%	24%	41%
When learning online, you cannot avoid using social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.	6%	11%	23%	30%	30%
You cannot develop social skills because of the independent learning environment.	5%	3%	15%	42%	35%

Students had different attitudes towards the challenges of their learning environment, as shown in Table 2 above. Items 1 and Item 2 reported that students had difficulty with the e-learning environment. 70% of the students agreed that noise pollution could prevent them from focusing on the lesson. Only 16% of e-learning students disagreed that online learning affected their teamwork, while 65% of students claimed that e-learning had negative influences on relationships between students because of the lack of interaction and discussion. Until now, students had not been trained to have essential skills for online learning. For this reason, when they transferred to this form of learning, they found it very difficult to adapt. Item 3 showed that 60% of students agreed that the comfortable home school environment made them easily distracted from learning by using social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and so forth. The university played a key role in developing social skills for young adults, but the results had shown that 77% of students agreed that online learning also lacked the time needed for students to develop appropriate social skills (as shown by the sample's responses on item 4).

Table 3. Physical and mental challenges

Questionnaires	1	2	3	4	5
Online learning causes a lack of learning motivation because it is too complicated to follow.	2%	14%	11%	63%	10%
Online learning is too boring to continue your learning.	9%	52%	23%	11%	5%
You feel isolated during online courses because of the independent learning environment.	7%	3%	8%	4%	78%
You feel exhausted due to sitting in front of computers too long.	3%	10%	12%	71%	4%
Online learning has negative effects on your physical health such as obesity, eye strain, and so on.	4%	9%	13%	68%	6%

As can be seen, Table 3 showed the results as regards physical and mental challenges of 100 second-year to four-year students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU. When studying through e-learning, most people (73%) agreed that they had a lack of learning motivation. Many students (52%) confirmed that online learning was not boring, and they felt that it was joyful and satisfactory. With regard to the question about whether you felt isolated during online

courses, the majority of the answers (78%) confirmed that feeling isolated might happen to all, especially when learning was challenging. Numerous individuals (71%) also agreed that learning through e-learning might be exhausting due to sitting in front of computers for many hours. 68% of the respondents agreed that online learning also had negative effects on their physical health like eye strain or obesity, and their bodies did not receive the necessary energy.

4.2. Qualitative analysis

Table 4. Challenges of online writing courses

Students	*Interview question 1: Did you have any challenges in online writing courses? Why and why not?*
Student 1 (Hanh)	*"In my opinion, online writing courses might not be challenging because lecturers gave coursebooks and references that were good enough for me to improve my writing skills."*
Student 2 (Mai)	*"Yes, I did. Because some teachers' online methods are too complicated to absorb. Writing is one of the hard subjects, so students need devoted lecturers to help them advance this skill."*
Student 3 (Anh)	*"In my Writing 5 course, I faced many challenges regarding looking for correct references to support my ideas when I was writing an academic essay due to my lecturer's ineffective teaching method."*
Student 4 (Dat)	*"I had some trouble with the lessons that were too sophisticated, and the teachers didn't have any effort in guiding us to understand the lessons."*
Student 5 (Chi)	*"The lack of interaction between teachers and students is the most significant barrier to learning online through Microsoft Teams for a difficult subject like Writing 5. Because communication is limited, it is difficult to absorb new knowledge."*
Student 6 (Tu)	*"I think that learning writing with online courses is not challenging because this skill requires interaction between learners and instructors. In other words, students only need to have feedback from their teachers about their essays and self-correct their mistakes."*
Student 7 (Quynh)	*"Coherence was my barrier in writing, every word seemed to be fit but made no sense. I spent more than 12 weeks recognizing what was irrelevant. There should be teachers to correct students appropriately."*
Student 8 (Tien)	*"During the pandemic, I had done my Writing 5 and had some challenges. The first challenge associated with the devices for learning is that my family is poor in the countryside, so my parents cannot buy a laptop or good mobile phone for my study immediately. The second one about the coursebook is that files sent by the teacher were very hard to see while I was studying. As a result, I could not study without printed books."*
Student 9 (Van)	*"I'm currently studying online Writing 5 and generally I think my online writing course is fine. But there are also some disadvantages. I don't have many opportunities or enough time to practice writing in online classes. I can't receive any feedback about my writing from my teacher. For example, in my previous offline classroom, teachers would pick random writings from the students and check errors in those writings in front of the class. All students can look at and realize errors in writing. As a result, they can avoid those errors in the future. In contrast, in the online course, the teacher is less likely to do that. Instead, I find that the teacher often does a one-way talking teaching style over the course while students listen passively. Usually, I don't know if my writings are right or wrong and how many grades my essays are. There's not much time for checking and giving feedback in online courses. In addition, in offline classes, teachers*

	usually give students homework to do after class. So in the next class, teachers will give back the exercise which they have already commented on and graded on. Teachers wrote their detailed comments about the errors and pointed out what needs to be improved on the exercise. From that, I can fix my errors quickly. However, teachers in online courses give the exercise back to students quite late and without any comment on the essay. The exercise hasn't been sent back to students soon during the course but is being sent back on the last few days of it. Besides, I also have difficulty when I do the online exam since I often lack time. So when I submit the test, I often have the computer lagging and it makes me submit it late. But my teacher supported me on that.”
Student 10 (Thang)	*“I think that it is not challenging for the writing section due to my quite good typing skills. However, the data collecting process took me a ton of time to analyze the assignment which I'm not good at (this section is more on the reading side).”*
Student 11 (Duy)	*“Yes, I did. When studying online, the subject had too many small details that I missed because I was careless and didn't pay attention to the online classes.”*
Student 12 (Bao)	*“I did have problems with my online writing course, mainly because of how the teachers from the last two semesters conveyed the lessons. Since we study online, the interaction between teachers and students isn't as good as offline. It's either the internet connection is weak or just the teacher rushing the lessons, so students can barely learn anything.”*
Student 13 (My)	*“I did not have any challenges. I think online learning has the same quality as offline learning.”*
Student 14 (Trinh)	*“In Writing 5, I had a hard time finding sources because the teacher asked for reputable sources. There are recent topics such as health or COVID-19 but there seems to be no research paper for me to refer to.”*
Student 15 (Nhu)	*“I did not have any challenges because I usually watched recordings after class to understand obviously about the new lesson.”*

In Table 4, most students agreed that writing is a difficult subject, so learners need devoted lecturers to help them enhance this skill. When learning Writing, some students had some trouble with the lessons that were too sophisticated, and the teachers didn't have any effort in guiding us to understand the lessons. Another issue that students confronted was relaying the teacher's lesson, teachers had to deliver lessons straightforwardly and understandably. Students faced many challenges regarding looking for correct references to support their ideas when writing an academic essay due to the lecturer's ineffective teaching method. The interaction between students and teachers when learning online was limited. And internet connection was also a cause of lack of communication. It is either the internet connection is weak or just the teacher rushing the lessons, so students can barely learn anything. Besides, some students were not satisfied with the teacher's response speed when learning online. They could not receive any feedback about writings from the teacher. For example, teachers did not have much time to check and give feedback in online courses, so students hardly noticed the mistakes they made.

Table 5: Challenges of online listening courses

Students	*Interview question 2: Did you have any challenges in online listening courses? Why and why not?*
Student 1	*“I think that taking online listening courses is so boring because lecturers only ask students to*

(Hanh)	*turn on and listen to audio with some instructions. In offline courses, there are some activities making classrooms more interesting."*
Student 2 (Mai)	*"Yes, I did. Because I am not good at listening to English. I can understand dialogues if I have a transcript. In contrast, I listen without a transcript, which makes it difficult during listening."*
Student 3 (Anh)	*"Learning listening online is quite easy because I'm familiar with online methods"*
Student 4 (Dat)	*"I have some difficulty in understanding the lessons because sometimes the wifi connection is unstable and the voice gets a pause or a long silence without hearing anything."*
Student 5 (Chi)	*"Vocabulary is not enough to understand the listening tasks, in addition, the teacher also does not let students practice in order from easy to difficult which makes me cope with trouble in gauging how far my skills have progressed and what I can do to improve better."*
Student 6 (Tu)	*"Listening courses were boring. The unstable internet connection might have influences on practicing listening and taking online tests."*
Student 7 (Quynh)	*"It is up to everyone's strengths. To me, listening is the hardest skill to master, so online listening courses provide me with a more comfortable and advantageous zone than in traditional classes. It is also easy to search for what is unclearly heard."*
Student 8 (Tien)	*"I often missed some parts of lectures and the knowledge lecturers were teaching due to the unstable internet connection. Sometimes I couldn't finish my listening assignments early because my device's software was too old to turn on audio on modern applications."*
Student 9 (Van)	*"No. We study listening from audio whether in offline or online courses. So, there are no differences between online and offline methods. I have to spend most of my time listening to audio. Moreover, being at home seems to be a little better because I am not dependent on teachers. I can actively learn by listening more during class or sometimes I can listen to the part repeatedly several times if I find it hard to understand. In sum, I can actively learn without any limit from the teacher."*
Student 10 (Thang)	*"Yes, I did. It mostly depends on the lecturer whether they make a clear speech or not (accent can also contribute to the impact of the quality of the online course)."*
Student 11 (Duy)	*"No, I didn't. I don't have any difficulties when it comes to listening. I have good listening skills because I have watched a lot of foreigners' YouTube videos."*
Student 12 (Bao)	*"I didn't have any problem with my Listening course online. This is mainly because listening itself is a self-studying subject, students just need to practice it by listening to audio clips from the lessons and some instructions from teachers."*
Student 13 (My)	*"Learning this skill via online methods is so convenient because lecturers who teach online or offline only allow students to listen to audio from lessons and practice listening through assignments. And this skill doesn't require interaction between instructors and students so much."*
Student 14 (Trinh)	*"Yes, because I am a bad speaker, I find it difficult to understand English when there is unclear sound."*
Student 15 (Nhu)	*"No, I didn't. Learning listening online helps me listen more clearly than in class."*

According to Table 5, when it comes to online listening classes, Student 4 (Dat), Student 6 (Tu),

and Student 8 (Tien) complained that they faced unstable internet connections which made their online learning experiences more complicated. For example, Student 4 (Dat) and Student 8 (Tien) could not listen clearly to their lecturer's entire lessons or lectures, and Student 6 (Tu) encountered difficulties in taking exams or practicing listening skills. Student 14 (Trinh) described herself as a bad English learner, so practicing listening online was so hard when some sounds were unclear. Furthermore, Hanh said that learning listening online without any activities was boring because online classrooms were difficult for teachers to design activities. Student 5 (Chi) reported that her lecturer did not permit students to practice in order from easy to difficult, which made her deal with trouble in gauging how far her listening skills had progressed and what she could do to improve better. She thought that teachers should make their classes comfortable with easiest to hardest levels to assist students in improving listening skills when teaching listening online.

Table 6: Challenges of online reading courses

Students	*Interview question 3: Did you have any challenges in online reading courses? Why and why not?*
Student 1 (Hanh)	*"Reading skills may not be difficult to learn, so online or offline methods are suitable for me. During online or offline courses, the lecturer gives students vocabulary based on topics of coursebooks and trains them to have reading skills like skimming, scanning, and other tips. Students improve their reading skills through reading as much as possible, which means that they don't depend on their lecturer."*
Student 2 (Mai)	*"Yes, I did. Because Reading is limited by time, sometimes I feel worried about assignments or tests while doing them. For example, lecturers often give 5-8 minutes to finish a task, but it contains numerous new words. As a result, I cannot complete on time."*
Student 3 (Anh)	*"Learning this skill is tough if I don't remember a large number of academic words. In my opinion, studying hard helped me to get high scores despite studying online."*
Student 4 (Dat)	*"I can't focus well because the lessons drag on for too lòng without any motivation to push myself harder through the learning process."*
Student 5 (Chi)	*"Reading, in my opinion, is a subject that can be studied independently. I used to struggle with Reading because I lacked an effective method for dealing with it. So, in order to excel in this subject, I think we need to devote time to practicing a variety of reading tests at various levels. Online learning may not have any impact on my reading skills."*
Student 6 (Tu)	*"Topics in reading courses are quite dull to read. Moreover, there are too many words on my computer screen to read, leading to eyestrain."*
Student 7 (Quynh)	*"The barrier in online reading courses was that there was poor interaction with teachers when I encountered incomprehensible paragraphs. Because we lacked eye contact and body language, it took more time to understand than normal. It was time-consuming."*
Student 8 (Tien)	*"I didn't face many challenges because this skill is quite simple to learn independently. I only felt that I had to turn on many tabs on my computer to read files, which made me annoyed to follow what my lecturer was teaching."*
Student 9 (Van)	*"In online reading courses, I had to use ebooks instead of print textbooks for studying and I think it was a little bit uneasy to note or mark something when I read the text online. But in general, I*

	didn't have any difficulties because if I was in an offline class I would just read texts and spend time listening to teachers, exactly what I would do when I learn online. Sometimes, I think learning online is much more convenient because it not only delivers exactly the knowledge that can be learned offline but it also helps me to easily access the learning platform despite where I am. I can save my time and energy and don't need to spend hours going to school."
Student 10 (Thang)	*"This case is actually quite big, I'm not a good reader, in fact, when it comes to reading, even for online or offline classes, I perform extremely badly. The reason is that I always lose my concentration (laziness is the easier way to explain) and I would like to see the video with that information instead."*
Student 11 (Duy)	*"No, I didn't. The subject is kinda easy for me to comprehend."*
Student 12 (Bao)	*"Just like Listening courses, I personally don't have any problem with studying it online, so far I don't. Since it mainly depends on how well the students do the reading and research by themselves."*
Student 13 (My)	*"I can learn this skill autonomously, so I don't have any challenges."*
Student 14 (Trinh)	*"No. Because I use online materials, I can search for new vocabulary faster than in class to read."*
Student 15 (Nhu)	*"Yes, I had some problems when learning reading online. For example, I have several questions I could not do by myself, and I could not ask my lecturer because we did not have many times in online class."*

As shown in Table 6, the students had the perception of disagreeing in online reading courses. Student 2 (Mai) had problems with vocabulary; for instance, Mai complained that doing reading assignments and taking tests that contained numerous new words were challenging, but lecturers just gave 5-8 minutes to finish. In addition to the vocabulary, Student 7 (Quynh) and Student 15 (Nhu) encountered difficulties in interacting with lecturers. For example, they had several questions which they wanted to ask, but lecturers did not have much time in online classes like offline ones. Furthermore, Quynh reported that students and teachers lacked eye contact and body language, which made the lesson more difficult to understand than normal. The motivation was another barrier, and Student 4 (Dat) reported that he could not focus well because the lessons lasted so long. Remarkably, reading too many words as well as studying on computer screens for too long led to eyestrain, which was complained about by Student 6 (Tu). Additionally, Tu also felt bored because topics in reading courses were quite dull to read. Student 9 (Van) argued that it was difficult to note or mark something important because students had to use online materials.

Table 7: Challenges of online speaking courses

Students	**Interview question 4: Did you have any challenges in online speaking courses? Why and why not?*
Student 1 (Hanh)	*"Speaking is one of the most challenging skills to learn online for many reasons. First, students facing unstable internet connections cannot communicate with others. Second, students who*

	practice speaking or take online exams are more likely to use transcripts. These transcripts are created to cheat in exams in case they forget what they need to speak. The dishonest way cannot help those students to improve their speaking skills although they can get good scores. Third, when the teacher asks students to turn on their camera to practice speaking, some of them cannot do it because their devices are out of order, which causes inconvenience and influences the quality of their communication experience. I think turning on cameras to practice speaking with partners in online classes is boring. I love offline classes and their communication environment because I can meet my classmates and teacher and interact with them naturally."
Student 2 (Mai)	*"Yes, I did. I recognized that I really need to have face-to-face interaction with my partner."*
Student 3 (Anh)	*"My pronunciation and speaking skills are poor, so learning online caused many challenges. I want to improve this skill through offline courses."*
Student 4 (Dat)	*"I can't communicate with others, maybe because students' competitiveness with one another and voice lag in online learning can be a handful to understand."*
Student 5 (Chi)	*"I think the major challenge is interaction. It's difficult to have a conversation fully when I'm speaking without feeling, I mean without seeing my friends' emotions. That's kinda boring."*
Student 6 (Tu)	*"Yes, because I want to talk to people in person, not through online classes."*
Student 7 (Quynh)	*"No, after 2 online speaking courses, I gained proficient speaking skills. For the teacher's demand that all of us have to turn on the camera and microphone, we do not lack interaction but have more effective space to think carefully."*
Student 8 (Tien)	*"Online classes don't allow me to meet my classmates as well as my lecturer to discuss with them and practice speaking face-to-face. Speaking through my computer screen makes me feel safe and comfortable to speak if I make mistakes, but speaking in online courses may lead to unconfidence when I interact with others in person."*
Student 9 (Van)	*"I didn't have any difficulty in speaking in online courses. I still could acquire all the knowledge and had chances to practice speaking through answers and questions with teachers. Through online courses, I'm more confident to volunteer to speak."*
Student 10 (Thang)	*"No, I don't think I had any challenge with my speaking skills in online courses. It's just me speaking through my laptop instead of speaking in person."*
Student 11 (Duy)	*"Yes, I did. Sometimes I had a poor internet connection, so I couldn't actively communicate with others during speaking courses."*
Student 12 (Bao)	*"Yes, I did have difficulties in studying Speaking online. Due to the lack of face-to-face interactions between students and teachers, I didn't really have the chance to actually practice speaking English to each other. So when students make mistakes in pronunciation, gestures or body language, there's no one to fix them."*
Student 13 (My)	*"There are many challenges in speaking courses. Unlike offline courses, there is a lack of interaction between my classmates and teacher. When it comes to Speaking 4, the Faculty of Foreign Languages shouldn't apply e-learning to this subject for some reasons. This subject trains EFL students to have good presentation skills in English. When presenting online, the students can use transcripts to read instead of speaking what they remember. Therefore, the students cannot improve their speaking skills as well as presentation skills. And they cannot speak confidently in public in the future."*

Student 14 (Trinh)	*"Well, I think the teacher will not be able to correct students' pronunciation through online methods."*
Student 15 (Nhu)	*"Of course. Because when I presented my presentation, I was extremely worried about the problems regarding unstable connection and device.``*

Regarding Table 7, almost all students had many challenges in online speaking courses. Through the collected answers, most of the participants said the most difficult aspect of e-learning was the interaction between lecturers and classmates while studying online (Mai, Chi, Tien, Dat, Tu, Hanh, Bao, & My). Remarkably, the same number of students have technological difficulties as a result of unstable Internet connections (Hanh, Nhu, & Duy). In addition to the Internet connection, Student 1 (Hanh) and Student 15 (Nhu) also encountered problems related to laptop errors and system errors. Next, Student 3 (Anh) and Student 14 (Trinh) argued that it is difficult to speak English because of limited pronunciation and not being able to correct pronunciation through online methods. Furthermore, Student 12 (Bao) reported that the teacher in his Speaking 4 class could not see students' bodies, so it was difficult to recognize their mistakes regarding body language, gestures, and so on. The issues related to learning online were also widely commented on. According to Student 1 (Hanh) and Student 13 (My), instead of saying what students remembered, they might utilize transcripts to read to have great performances.

4.3. Discussion

The present study's results are the same as the literature regarding common challenges of online courses. According to Hijazi and AlNatour (2021), students had difficulties attending online classes due to unstable connections. Students had yet to be trained to have good computer skills, so they sometimes had problems with using educational applications such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom (p. 387). Furthermore, it was hard for students to explain problems to lecturers, which meant that there was limited interaction between learners and instructors (p. 388). In terms of online teaching methods, teachers failed to assess learners owing to their inappropriate methods. More and more students cheat when taking online exams (p. 390). In addition, there existed a limited personalized connection with lecturers, as well as limited discussions between learners regarding assignments, homework, or social communication (p. 390). The study of Nguyen and Duong (2021) also agreed with the points mentioned above; they reported that the common challenges are poor internet connections and learning equipment (p. 26). They also confirmed that interacting effectively with lecturers and classmates via online methods is another challenge (p. 26). When it comes to language learning challenges, Hijazi and AlNatour (2021) concluded that most learners could not improve their speaking and writing skills; the courses only concentrated on listening skills. One of the reasons that caused the challenges is because of the lack of lecturers' knowledge, time, or training on how to make online courses become interactive (p. 388).

When it comes to the impacts of online courses on learners' academic performance, Erickson and Wattiaux (2021) said that turning traditional methods into online methods led to negative

beliefs about satisfaction and engagement in some learners. Moreover, Hidalgo-Camacho et al. (2021) claimed that online methods during the COVID-19 pandemic caused experience anxiety and other affective states for teachers and students. In order to improve EFL students' academic performance during their online learning process, EFL lecturers should make their online courses more active and attractive. For example, they can use Edpuzzle (https://edpuzzle.com) to observe their students' learning process. About Edpuzzle's benefits, Ramos (2015) found that learners can view lecturers' lessons and have embed assignments. Through Edpuzzle, learners must focus mainly on what teachers are instructing, which prevents students from using social media or ignoring lecture slides from teachers. Furthermore, Edpuzzle helps lecturers to control their online classes and lead to interesting classes. For EFL students who cannot improve their language skills via online education, EFL teachers had better pay more attention to students' problems. For instance, for writing courses, they can spend more time checking students' mistakes in academic essays through Google Docs. Google Docs is useful for teaching online because everyone can access one online destination where teachers highlight or give feedback for students, and students can see comments or feedback from teachers, even they can interact with their teachers at Google Docs. For speaking courses, teachers can ask learners to turn on their camera to practice speaking with everyone, as well as increase interaction between students and lecturers. Moreover, lecturers should create supportive environments where everyone gives feedback for students' speaking performance. For listening courses, lecturers should create more activities to make learners get motivated.

5. Conclusion

Based on the quantitative and qualitative results above, there were a large number of challenges of online courses when e-learning was applied to train EFL students at VLU. Some participants found that e-learning did not have many negative impacts on their learning experiences. However, most students participating in the research complained that online learning was actually ineffective and annoying. The current research confirmed that EFL students gave a lot of negative feedback and were not ready for the virtual environment.

5.1. Challenges of online courses in terms of physicality and mentality, technology, and learning environments

Students had difficulty in applying computer skills and wanted to be trained to improve the skills. Moreover, they encountered unstable internet connections, which caused inconvenience while following lessons, and most of them did not have enough devices to have good learning experiences. Online education was challenging to adapt due to external, social, and individual factors. First, students could not get on well with others when working in online groups. Second, using social media made learners pay less attention to their online learning process. Third, because of studying individually from home, students' social skills might not be enhanced. Finally, noises and sounds from students' houses stopped students from concentrating on learning. The online environment made them isolated from others, so they felt bored and lost

their learning motivation gradually. In addition, online education forces human beings to work and study from home through computer screens for a long time, which might lead to poor physical health, eye strain, or obesity.

5.2. Challenges of learning English skills via the Internet

Writing might be a skill that was challenging to learn online. Online teaching was hard for teachers to help their learners to fully understand the content of the lessons. To improve students' writing skills, lecturers must make a lot of effort to give feedback and correct their mistakes. However, participants in this study complained that their instructors rarely gave feedback and corrected their mistakes. Some people said that there was poor communication between lecturers and students for various reasons like unstable connections. Teachers only taught the content of the lesson without guiding students to understand the lessons. For example, in Writing 5 courses, students could not grasp methods that teachers taught to look for perfect references for their essays due to the fact that teaching online made both lectures and learners difficult to discuss together. Regarding listening skills, the major challenge was that activities in listening classes were limited, which could not motivate students to learn listening. Besides, another challenge was the unstable internet connections which made students pay no attention to lessons, face trouble in practising listening and taking online listening exams. Students faced difficulties in doing reading assignments and taking online exams with limited time because there were too many new words to read. It was challenging to note something important because students had to use online materials. Besides, reading too many words as well as studying on computer screens for too long led to eyestrain. Some students had trouble communicating with teachers in online classrooms. Furthermore, the lack of eye contact and body language was a challenge to help learners to understand the lessons fully. Most participants could not improve their speaking skills via online education for some reason. The first difficulty was the interaction between lecturers and classmates in speaking classes due to poor network connections. Some students faced technological problems such as laptop errors and system errors that prevented them from communicating with others. Additionally, some learners had poor speaking skills (bad pronunciation, body language, gestures, and so on) that were compulsory in speaking classes, but lecturers did not have the ability to correct their mistakes due to online methods fully. Using transcripts to read upon giving presentations was not a good idea because this was an unfair way and could not enhance students' speaking skills, as well as presentation skills. In conclusion, with quantitative and qualitative methods, the researchers explored numerous challenges about technology, physicality and mentality, learning environments, and learning the four language skills that most EFL students met when they were taking online courses.

5.3. Limitations

There remained some limitations of the present study. The COVID-19 pandemic made the research have limited participants, so the results could not prove that the challenges of the participants were similar to the whole population's ones. The researchers could not invite EFL freshmen to take part in the study because contacting them was hard. Some participants answering the interview questions had unclear answers, so those answers were neglected.

5.4. Suggestions

Research papers in the future should investigate the challenges of EFL freshmen because they were still trying to be accustomed to online methods in their first online learning experience at their university. Compared with second-year to four-year students, the researchers thought that first-year students would be more likely to face more challenges to investigate. According to the results of the study, EFL educators can be aware of some main challenges of students. The lecturers can ask their learners to provide comments on online courses to discover the challenges of online learning. After that, the lecturers look for suitable solutions for students' unforeseen situations. Receiving feedback from learners tends to improve the quality of online courses and assist instructors in changing their teaching methods in order that students with challenges can adapt to the online learning environment. It is true to say that the challenges of online education can be removed if the university gives students a hand with solving the problems, although some complex challenges may be hard to tackle in the present. EFL lecturers need to observe their students' entire online learning process.

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Biodata

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The Reality of English Presentation Skills of English-majored Students in Vietnam: A Case Study at Van Lang University

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: presentation, presentation skills, speaking skills, oral communication skills, English-majored students

Presentation skills play an indispensable role in undergraduates' education and developing their future careers because this skill assists college students in accomplishing a superior knowledge base and enhancing their public speaking. The study aims to measure English-majored students' reality at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Van Lang University in Vietnam about speaking skills, especially presentation skills. The quantitative study has been carried out among 600 second-year, third-year, and four-year students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Van Lang University in Vietnam. The results of the research paper demonstrated that most students were not confident about their presentation skills because of making mistakes about vocabulary usage, grammar, fluency, and so on when giving presentations. EFL lecturers can consider the results to improve their teaching methods regarding speaking skills and find out more strategies to solve students' speaking challenges.

1. Introduction

The most popular speaking genre is the oral presentation for English learners in academic environments and workplaces (Chang & Huang, 2015). Presentation skills are considered successful communicative goals (Kim, 2006; Evans, 2013). Speaking skill is essential but challenging for the students when they study English (Brown, 1994; Ur, 2012). Guidelines for preparing effective presentations to attract audiences include the presenters' formal look, good intonation, and language fluency (Dung, 2021). Moreover, a good presentation is based on knowledge, preparation skills, and a good process of practicing before doing presentations.

The research indicates that speaking English-majored students at Van Lang University (VLU) in Vietnam often encounter problems. Many studies have been performed in linguistic settings to clarify how learners' speaking skills could be improved remarkably (Yashima, 2002; Nakatani, 2010; Lu & Hsu, 2008; Lam, 2007). At all faculties at VLU, English learning

programs applied to fit with learners' levels consisted of textbooks, syllabus, E-learning site, and MS Teams application. Specifically, EFL students take FOLA club's activities, international certifications, and intensive courses. Regardless of all learning aids provided, the Speaking 4 Course's Grade Point Average (GPA) declared the offensive insight gaps in their presentation ability and conversational deficiency, which Albino (2017) also concerned. Leaners claimed that practicing communicating initially is the goal of oral expertise (Osterman, 2014). Because VLU's students confined connection to English, there have been more adversities to absorb it adequately than those reaching the English system easily (Chen et al., 2021).

The course, namely Speaking 4, is an essential course that helps develop EFL students' presentation skills and speaking skills. Based on the VLU's Speaking 4 GPA in the academic year 2020-2021, many undergraduates still got bad scores. Specifically, Table 1 demonstrated that 14% of the students had average marks (5 to 6.4), and 28.3% of them got high marks (8 to 10). Remarkably, 12.8% of the learners could not pass the course. Thus, the students need to be trained with more suitable methods and strategies, and instructors should focus on students' mistakes, as well as give more comments or feedback.

The study aims to analyze factors influencing EFL students' speaking skills at VLU, so survey questionnaires have been detailed for solutions to problems regarding oral communication skills and presentation skills. Students' speaking skills should be applied in working environments (Gray, 2010). English-majored students at VLU must have solid speaking skills with the ability to interact effectively with native speakers and give presentations in front of a crowd, namely, symposia, conferences, and meetings. Furthermore, students must be supplied with public speaking techniques to meet employers' requirements (Russ, 2009). Students need to advance their soft skills like communication skills to develop their future careers instead of only having their understanding of the major theories (Fallows & Steven, 2000). Nowadays, learners worry about presenting in public (Girard et al., 2011). Presentation skills will bring students benefits like lifelong learning skills and a learning experience to help them to learn effectively in their learning process if they are trained professionally (King, 2002).

In theory, research provides a reference for those to self-assess and improve presentation skills and helps educators understand learners' problems (Nguyen, 2014). In practice, research provides crucial suggestions about presentation and oral aspects, minimizes negligible mistakes, and advances essential elements for an effective presentation (Nguyen, 2014). The previous studies associated with presentation skills were successful, but they also had many limitations. The first was insufficient participants, the second was the failure to control nerves during presenting, and the third was the unsolved weaknesses related to oral and digital practice. The paper can be successful in grasping current EFL students' reality.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of Oral Communication

Kumar (2021) defined oral communication as using the mouth to express opinions and transfer information via virtual and actual conversation, including speeches, discussions, and presentations. To build rapport and trust, people need to exploit in-person communication such as meetings, conferences, interviews, etc. To be clear, oral communication is talking and expressing information, and it is described as speech communication. Kumar (2021) also showed ways to improve oral communication skill**s**: clear pronunciation, brevity, precision, conviction, logical sequence, appropriate word choice, using natural voice, communicating with the right person, now getting guided by assumptions, looking for feedback, allowing to ask questions.

2.2. Definition of Presentations

Rosenzweig (2021) described presentations as the tool to relay topics to audiences through a slide show, a demonstration, a lecture, or speech where presenters use words and pictures. In the technological era, presenters use PowerPoint to communicate information or media via slides with flexible presentation styles (Donohoe, 2020). Donohoe also mentioned that the slides could include various kinds of content like tables, images, drawings, charts, links, word art, videos, audio, and even embedded add-ins. Therefore, presenters can utilize essential things to make their presentations more creative thanks to modern technologies.

2.3. Linguistic and nonlinguistic factors were influencing oral and presentation skills.

Compared to other primary skills, speaking skill is the most challenging due to students' language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Pabro-Maquidato (2021) asserted that students tend to be afraid of using English to express themselves. Additionally, anxious learners are unwilling to participate in speaking activities (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Due to speaking anxiety, students cannot enhance their speaking performance (Pabro-Maquidato, 2021). One of the biggest challenges for EFL learners is speaking in front of a crowd (Rumiyati & Seftika, 2018). Other factors influencing learners' speaking skills are pronunciation, fear of making mistakes, unattractive evaluation, lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, lack of preparedness, and even teachers' attitude (Dornyei & Clement, 2001; Mukminin et al., 2015). Regarding vocabulary usage, collocations play an important part in speaking performance because successful speakers have to know how to use collocations correctly. However, Bui (2021) asserted that Vietnamese students are more likely to use wrong collocations. In other words, they usually translate Vietnamese collocations into English collocations, although the collocations that they create look unnatural compared with the English language. As a result, most Vietnamese learners fail to master speaking skills if they are not well-trained.

2.4. Previous studies

Nguyen (2019) claimed that most students' presentation skills were not good due to their unawareness of this skill's importance. Melvina and Alicia (2016) believed presentations are the method of speaking practice. It

was demonstrated that they had difficulties in providing presentations content for audiences, so teachers should spend more time introducing students to a wide variety of skills that students must have when giving presentations. Nevertheless, the case study has not solved some students' anxiety in front of a crowd and their bad delivery of presentations.

Whai and Mei (2015) pointed out that though most students have high grades in their studies, they are unable to effectively convey their thoughts in English. Psychological factors, a lack of practice, and the roles of the teachers led to the problem statement regarding the disparities between Engineering and Commerce students. Salem (2019) described presentation skills as a technique of obtaining academic and professional success. The study involved forty-nine 23 to 24-year-old business students from two entire classes, who were placed into two groups (experimental group and control group). There were weaknesses in students' presentations regarding preparation and presenters themselves. The outcomes were well-displayed and understandable in the three tables. The comparison and explanations between two treatment conditions (TED Talks and traditional teaching classroom) answered the research questions.

According to Al-Nouh et al. (2015), this study proved that oral presentation is essential for students in their studies and future. The researcher used the quantitative method to find out that all of them are not good at presentation skills because they cannot face the fears that make them uncomfortable when giving presentations. Furthermore, this study showed that the Ministry of Education and Training should have some enhancements to improve presentation skills, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Therefore, traditional teaching methods should be abandoned instead of focusing on developing communication skills and motivating them to speak a language fluently.

Riadil (2020) confirmed that communication is a very important skill in our lives. It is a tool for communicating with other people to express opinions, ideas, and feelings through language. So, in Indonesia, they study English as a foreign language, and it becomes a subject in the curriculum with four skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. The researcher applied the qualitative method to discover the influences of presentations on EFL students' speaking skills and their challenges of giving presentations in higher education. As Riadil said, speaking is a difficult skill because it is connected to vocabulary, grammar, many ideas, pronunciation, and listening. Therefore, the teacher should choose the appropriate methods that help the students in their studies, encourage them to speak as much as possible in class, and make them feel no shame when they use English to communicate or give a presentation.

Radzuan and Kaur (2011) conducted a research paper using the qualitative method with 44 students at Universiti Malaysia Pahang, Malaysia. The study demonstrated that students had limited technical knowledge and barriers in their English language skills, and they felt anxious when doing English presentations. According to Vitasari et al. (2010), the researcher conducted the study with the quantitative method to find out students' experiences, feelings, and opinions regarding anxiety during their learning process. The results showed that learners faced class presentation anxiety, language anxiety, and social anxiety.

Chuyen et al. (2020) described TED Talks as a new classroom learning technique. They highlighted several aspects of students' presentation skills, such as experience, self-evaluation, obstacles, and characteristics, in-depth in the findings and discussions. Students lacked soft presentation skills, their strength was still the theory, and they did not have many chances to practice. Listing TED Talks beneficial strategies, the recommendations for individuals (TED Talks users, Department, teaching staff) are quite objective. In addition, Panggabean & Triassanti (2020) and Chandren & Yaacob (2016) suggested learners have skills including thoughtful minds, strategies, following tasks, and appraising the quality that provides them feelings reflection and self-assessment.

Although they had an impressive command of other subjects, there was a psychological obstruction from grasping a foreign language. Yu et al. (2021) found that although many consistent foreign speech examinations were conducted, few could explore which assessment activities or kind of speaking teaching method were advantageous for active English application. Twenty-four learners cooperated with five linguistic educators in a hundred days of observation. They confirmed that learners' products based on standard points in textbooks were replaced for individual requirements. However, all admitted that the indoor English system was different from their daily correspondence, so students attempted to speak English in many situations as academic performance or real communication, and teachers adapted their English evaluation activities to support students' specific tasks complement. Educators should separate the difference from actual conversation in English to the classroom speaking ability evaluation.

In 2016, a study of Nakhalah analyzed some burning speaking issues and their cause that attract foreign language students at the Al Quds Open University attention. The first one-was fluency, about 72.5%, the next one was grammar, and the final one was pronunciation. The contrast errors were comparatively rated as in pronunciation, grammar, and fluency at the end. Those following high influences on their low oral performance listed: fear of imperfection, objection, lack motivation and confidence, being unfamiliar with the new language system, being short of topical knowledge, vocabulary box, and actual practice. The teachers tried to correct all the verbal and non-verbal students' mistakes, but they were not supposed to correct all the common students' errors who were stocked in the meaning translation. In case they had, it was better for teachers to contribute the comments in private for embarrassing avoidance.

The study of Indriani (2020) looked into the usage of recorded video to assess students' speaking and presentation skills in language learning and how they perceive the benefit of incorporating technology into the learning process. By surveying 34 students who learned fundamental grammar in English class and employed a qualitative research style, the information was acquired via the students' recording videos, e-google form responses, etc. Thanks to video recordings, students can replay video lots of times, so they can appraise what they have planned and accomplished well, and their friends give them a lot of advice. Students become passionate about using the video camera to express their thoughts. Presentation qualities like eye contact, body posture, and voice were discovered to be further characteristics that aided the pre-service teachers' English speaking abilities. However, judging student presentations properly is difficult,

especially regarding practical assessment administration. Sometimes students still catch basic mistakes, including grammar, vocabulary, etc.

2.5. Research Questions

Research question 1: *What are English-majored students' attitudes towards speaking courses and presentation skills?*

Research question 2: *What are the difficulties that English-majored students encounter when speaking and presenting in English?*

3. Methods

3.1. Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Van Lang University, set up in 1995, is described as a private university with awesome success. Based on Decision No.109/QĐ/VL-HĐT 18th, August 2020 of 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. Students must pass speaking courses at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, including *Speaking 4*. In *Speaking 4* courses, students use a book called *Speaking 4. Selected and Compiled. For Internal Use Only. 2019*. The course provides students with skills to analyze their audience and critical thinking to provide the audience with information tailored to their current needs as well as to persuade the audience to change their orientation, thoughts, and behaviors in a positive way that is beneficial.

The research examined about 600 English-majored undergraduates in the academic year 2021-2022 at VLU who were between the ages of 20 and 22 (second-year to four-year). At the time of the study, they were in the first semester of their new school year and had previously approached the surface or studied the presentation course (Speaking 4). The students who took the course to learn theoretically and practically about presentation abilities were required to give oral presentations in the midterm and final examinations to evaluate the ability to apply what they learned in class into their speeches. A questionnaire about several aspects of academic oral presentation skills was provided to second years, third years, and four years to get an overview of their ability on presentation skills.

3.2. Design of the Study

This research paper was built by the quantitative research method so that it was easy to find the core of the problem in the current student presentation and come up with the most appropriate measures. By creating a question list based on Google Forms and presenting it to 600 students aged 20 to 22, specifically students currently in their second year to four years of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at VLU, this study helped to clarify the main difficulties that most students were facing, helping students realize their problems. Taking students' answers via a list of survey questions and synthesizing key difficulties helped results be more realistic, stick to

the problem, give appropriate measures that are best for students, help students have a more practical view to avoid difficulties, and develop soft skills.

The surveys included 38 questions with the five-point Likert scale from "totally disagree" to "totally agree" (1 = totally disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = totally agree) and 4 multiple-choice questions regarding students' self-assessment of speaking proficiency. The online questionnaire list posted on Facebook groups of the Faculty of Foreign Languages of VLU took participants five minutes to fill in and three weeks to collect them all. Regarding the advantages of the quantitative method, Wright (2005) reported that using questionnaire surveys saves efforts and time owing to providing automated data collection. In the technological development, the survey was conducted via the internet, which permitted researchers to collect data simultaneously

3.3. Data collection & analysis

A quantitative method was chosen by doing a survey. This method helped students find strengths and weaknesses in their abilities. The third phase tended to be a survey for participants using the quantitative method with approximately 600 English-majored students who were between the ages of 20 and 22 (second-year to four-year). The last part was an expectant phase, including procedure and data analysis.

4. Results/Findings and discussion

4.1. Results/Findings

Research question 1: *What are English-majored students' attitudes towards speaking courses and presentation skills?*

Collected data in the following table and figure will be analyzed for percentages to respond to the first research question to explore the students' attitudes.

Table 1. English-majored students' attitudes towards speaking courses and presentation skills

Items	Questionnaires	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
1	Presentation skills play a vital role in your future careers.	1.9%	1.3%	7.1%	34.6%	55.1%
2	Having superior abilities to give a presentation is necessary for EFL students.	3.2%	1.3%	5.1%	34%	56.4%
3	Presenting assists you in improving communication skills	2.6%	3.8%	4.5%	41.7%	47.4%
4	Giving a presentation in front of a crowd helps master your thoughts and improve your speaking ability comprehensively.	2.6%	0.6%	6.4%	38.5%	51.9%
5	Presentation skills bring you confidence in studies and work.	2.6%	2.6%	6.4%	46.2%	42.3%
6	Presentation skills bring you a great creative mind	3.2%	5.8%	18.6%	42.9%	29.5%
7	Presentation skills help you connect with	3.8%	1.3%	13.5%	50.6%	30.8%

	success.					
8	To prepare well for your presentation, you have to spend a large amount of time practicing.	1.3%	4.5%	6.4%	55.1%	32.7%
9	Most students prefer to learn by presentation methods	5.1%	26.9%	45.5%	13.5%	9%
10	It is very difficult to have good presentation skills	1.9%	9.6%	11.5%	49.4%	27.6%
11	In your opinion, we just need to look at the slides of the PowerPoint and prepare content on the paper, then read out loud without using body language	41.7%	42.3%	5.8%	7.1%	3.2%
12	In order to present a topic, we need to have its solid knowledge	1.3%	4.5%	4.5%	44.9%	44.9%
13	During presentations, we need to have interaction between speakers and listeners	1.9%	3.2%	9.6%	39.1%	46.2%
14	A presentation needs to be creative to attract listeners.	1.3%	3.2%	5.1%	44.2%	46.2%
15	Presentation skills are only appropriate for those who believe in their ability to interpret in front of a crowd.	4.5%	29.5%	23.7%	30.1%	12.2%
16	A presentation is appealing when audiences discuss and express their opinions about it.	1.3%	3.2%	16%	51.3%	28.2%
17	To have a perfect presentation, we should practice regularly.	1.9%	2.6%	9.6%	49.4%	36.5%
18	Presentation skills are just one of the skills, so we do not need to be excellent or focus too much on the skill.	8.3%	28.8%	26.9%	26.3%	9.6%
19	A good presentation should focus on the main content	2.6%	16.7%	22.4%	42.9%	15.4%
20	Body Language is a special skill that helps your presentation skills in catching listeners' attention.	0.6%	2.6%	5.1%	49.4%	42.3%
21	Your attitude or reaction is a very significant matter when listeners question your presentation.	1.9%	0.6%	13.5%	56.4%	27.6%
22	Rhythm, voice, accent, volume, and speed decide the attraction of your presentation.	0%	1.9%	7.1%	42.9%	48.1%
23	Creativity and patience help your presentation become perfect.	0.6%	0%	10.3%	47.4%	41.7%
24	You should insert many visual aids in your presentation.	3.8%	15.4%	37.2%	30.1%	13.5%
25	Your presentations are good or bad, which depends on your favorite subjects or topics.	3.8%	26.9%	34%	23.7%	11.5%

Most students believe that presentation skill plays a vital role in various aspects of life because it brings numerous advantages. Most participants agreed that presentation skills could influence their future performance. In item 8, 32.7% to 55.1% of people agree they take plenty of time to prepare their presentation well. Some students may struggle to get ready what they need for their presentation, such as the material, slides, scripts, and so on. In item 10, 49.4% believed that good presentation abilities are challenging. This is logical because presentation is a skill that most students struggle with, and it is not trained in schools or by middle or high school teachers. As a result, practically every student considers presentation skills to be difficult when

they enter the university. Presenting is considered the communication and interpretation of content to the listeners, so failing to use nonverbal language throughout the speaking process is an omission causing boredom, inattentiveness, and failure to impart material to the listener. In item 12, 89.8% of students believe that a good presentation requires the presenter to understand what they deliver to the audience thoroughly. The presenter must take the time to research, prepare, and have a broad understanding of the issue before doing presentations and attracting the audience. It is because their ultimate focus is to convey information to the audience in a way that is both sufficient and concise.

In item 13, 85.3% agreed that speakers must interact with listeners during the presentation by using eye contact, asking questions, and taking opinions from the audience. It not only makes the presentation more interesting, but it also makes it easier for the audience to absorb the information, allowing them to retain it for a longer period of time. According to item 15, 42.3% believed they had to have confidence in their presentations to provide a better and more fluid presentation than others. This is because poor presentations will lead to failure if there is simply belief and vice versa. In item 20, most of the participants (91.7%) agreed that body language is eye captivating and can attract every bit of attention through a simple movement; it can make a significant difference when giving a presentation. According to item 22, almost every participant agrees with the statement because when a person with great flow and amazing accent does a presentation. It is bound to captivate the audience's attention. Compared to the one who disagrees, imagine if a person with a low voice, disrupting speed, and bad accent does a presentation, it will always be plain and guaranteed to lose their audiences. In fact, everyone is fond of having a presentation with carefulness and investment, so they are really concerned about their performance.
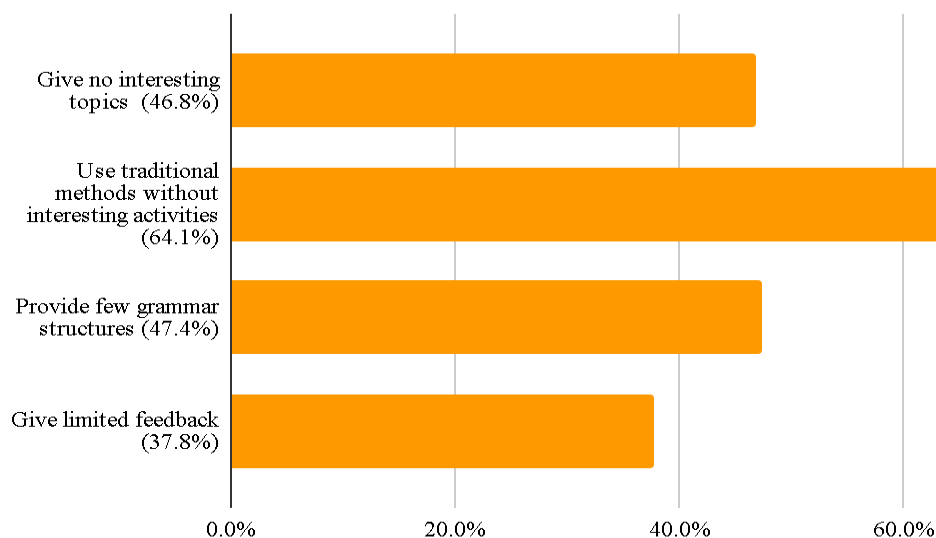
Figure 1. English-majored students' attitudes towards lecturers' teaching methods in speaking courses

Based on fig. 1, the use of traditional methods without organizing interesting activities was the highest percentage, specifically at 64.1%. The generally definitely same figure of teachers'

provision of few grammatical rules was high next at 47.4%, which is contrary to popular belief. The third rate of methods with no exciting topics that have bad influences on their learning process is about 46.8%. The percentage of support that new correct feedback would adversely impact was the lowest at 37.8%, which literally is significant.

Research question 2: *What are the difficulties that English-majored students encounter when speaking and presenting in English?*

In order to respond to the 2nd research question, data from Table 2 and figures 2,3, & 4 will be analyzed.

Table 2. The difficulties that English-majored students encounter when speaking and presenting in English

Items	Questionnaires	1 (TD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (TA)
1	You present in Vietnamese better than in English	1.8%	9%	24.4%	40.4%	24.4%
2	Your computer skills are not good, which has a negative impact on your presentations	6.4%	17.9%	23.7%	44.9%	7.1%
3	You are afraid of presenting upon standing in front of a crowd	4.5%	14.7%	23.7%	34%	23.1%
4	You do not know how to make a presentation interesting	3.8%	9.6%	25%	41.7%	19.9%
5	You have difficulty in conveying content to the audience	3.2%	16.7%	25%	39.7%	15.4%
6	After finishing "Speaking 4", you feel more confident about presenting, especially in English	17.9%	3.3%	33.3%	34.6%	10.9%
7	"Speaking 4" gives you enough basic knowledge about presentation skills	17.9%	3.9%	22.4%	44.3%	11.5%
8	After having finished the subject "Speaking 4", the lecturer brought you very valuable experiences to have a perfect and great presentation	19.2%	2.6%	21.8%	41.7%	14.7%
9	Thanks to "Speaking 4" courses, your presentation skills are improved, which helps you not only with your speaking skills but also with many other subjects - the subjects that require presentations	3.8%	1.9%	14.7%	51.4%	28.2%

As can be seen in Table 2, Item 1 demonstrated that the participants had the ability to present in their first language (the Vietnamese language) better than in their second language (the English language), although they are English-majored students. This reality also appeared in many different countries where the English language is not the primary language. Regarding Item 3, most students (57.1%) are worried about standing in front of a large crowd. A speaker may not be good at presenting topics, but a successful speaker must be confident and get on well with their audience. For this reason, students need to be trained to be more confident. Item 6, 7, 8, and 9 focused on English-majored students' feelings and opinions about the Speaking 4

courses they have passed. In particular, item 6 revealed that 45.5% of the participants described "Speaking 4" courses as ideal courses which make them more confident when presenting in English in front of a crowd.

On the other hand, 21.1% of the learners still faced anxiety, depression, and shyness in giving English presentations despite passing Speaking 4 courses. Item 7, 8, and 9 demonstrated that some learners had yet to enhance the quality of their presentations in courses. However, a large number of the students had good presentation skills after having completed the Speaking 4 courses. Moreover, they had awesome learning experiences in the courses. It was proved that Speaking 4 courses play a crucial role in providing sufficient basic knowledge about presentation skills for EFL students. The knowledge that lecturers convey is useful for most students to develop their presentation skills and oral communication skills. In contrast, most of the participants might not apply the knowledge to their presentations. Perhaps EFL instructors were less likely to give students helpful information and necessary feedback for their mistakes upon doing presentations. Other factors influencing students' learning experience in Speaking 4 courses might be limited time, the classroom with a large number of learners, etc.
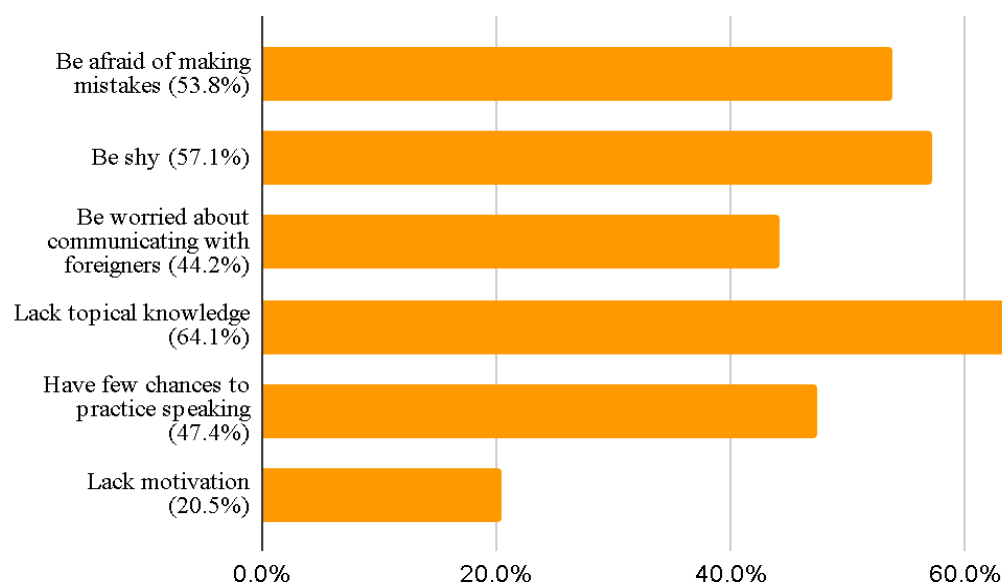
Figure 2. Problems faced by English-majored students when they learn speaking skills

According to fig. 2, most participants faced some challenges, such as the fear of making mistakes (53.8%), shyness (57.1%), and the lack of topical knowledge (64.1%). These are three types of difficulties English-majored students sometimes have during their learning process. Making many mistakes always happens when students practice speaking or using the language in daily conversation. However, they might think that they had to make everything perfect. They should learn from their past mistakes to improve their speaking performance. Another challenge is related to topical knowledge for speech topics. For example, students feel more excited about their favorite topics because they know many things about the topics. Therefore, there is no doubt that their speaking performance will become smooth with their confidence. On the other hand, their speaking performance may be worse if they are given some weird or

boring topics. To have good speaking performance for the strange topics. Students need to familiarize themselves with new things about the topics, namely new words, new knowledge, etc. Finally, students have many different characteristics. In particular, there are two main kinds of characteristics: confidence and shyness. Perhaps shyness negatively impacts students' speaking performance because they are less likely to speak English or participate in speaking activities. Conversely, confident learners are more likely to speak the second language in spite of their bad speaking skills.
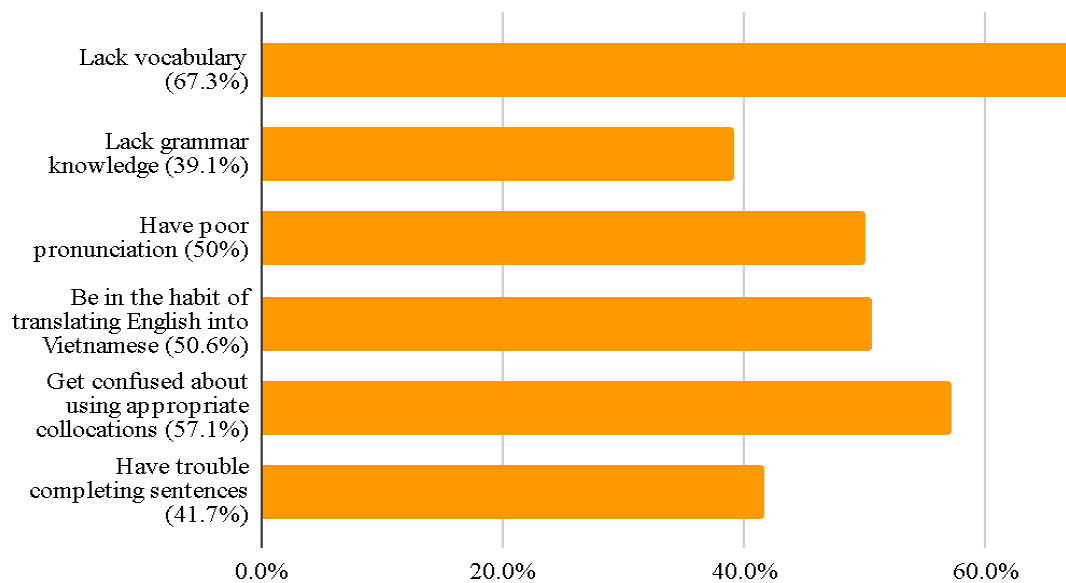
Figure 3. English-majored students' self-assessment regarding their speaking skills

According to the study of Schmitt (2014), the vocabulary essence always was a complex barrier to learners and analyzers. The scientist found that the larger gaps in the vocabulary box were, the more often disturbing rate of users' understanding could get (Carver, 1994). In fig. 3, learners mainly have trouble with wordy possession for proficient speaking and communication skills (about 67.3% of people agree with this view). Over 57.1% of people claimed that they got confused about using appropriate collocation when learning Speaking classes. Up to 50.6% of people stated that their habit of translating English into Vietnamese adversely prevents them from the comfort stage in class.
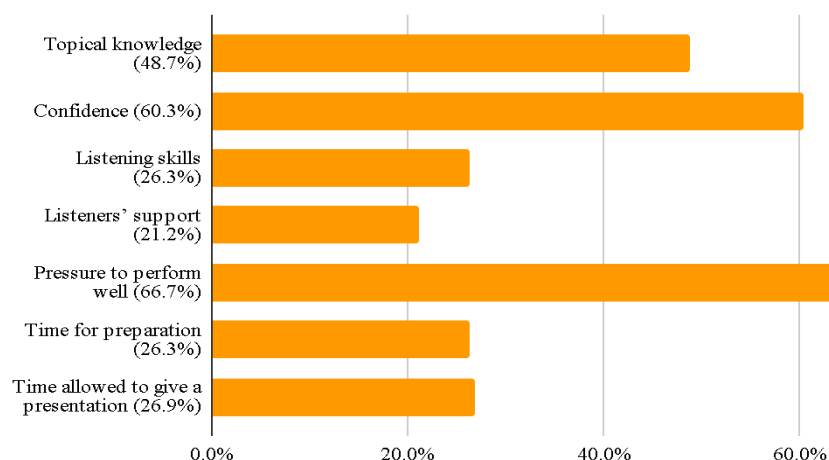
Figure 4. Factors influencing English-majored students' speaking performance

According to fig 4, it is particularly clear that the very highest rates of pressure for well-organized speech, specifically, coherence and cohesion, grammar, spelling, and accuracy, were at 66.7%, and the figure of confidence was second at 60.3%. The third rate is that lacking topical knowledge for give-and-take knowledge during the presentation, mostly speaking formal or unfamiliar topics, generally stays at 48.7%. In particular, the time for completion is 26.9%. The figure for listening skills and time for preparation was relatively about 26.3%.

4.2. Discussion

Our research results showed that most EFL students of Van Lang University's presentation skills and communication skills are still underestimated. According to the data, it is suggested that EFL students should be instructed to practice presenting in English professionally. Moreover, EFL lecturers need to take responsibility for observing and recommending EFL learners to present in English effectively.

The present study's results mentioned above have in common with the literature on difficulties in enhancing English-majored students' presentation skills, speaking skills, and attitudes towards these skills. Nguyen (2018) asserted that all students in her research described presentation skills as one of the most important skills. The students always wish to practice the skill in their classrooms because lecturers and classmates will listen to their presentations and provide feedback in order to assist them in enhancing their presentation skills. Furthermore, the students in her study lack satisfaction with their speaking performance because they frequently fail to deliver their presentations fluently (Nguyen, 2018, p. 41). Similarly, Riadil (2020) also concluded that students who tend to look nervous during activities for presentations have trouble delivering effective presentations due to individual factors, audiences, and bad presentation skills (p. 20). The study of Nguyen (2018) had the same results as our research in terms of teachers' teaching methods. The teachers of the students taking part in her paper are less likely to give detailed feedback and sufficient support to train them to be superior speakers (p. 42). Al-Nouh et al. (2015) concluded that learners of their research lacked grammar knowledge, fluency, and vocabulary. In addition, the students had limited chances to practice

speaking, which meant that speaking courses had not enhanced the students' presentation skills as well as speaking skills (p. 144). In addition to barriers in English language proficiency, students had poor technical knowledge and lacked preparation, which gave rise to nervousness and failure in doing presentations (Radzuan & Kaur, 2011; Vitasari et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Albino (2017) had exactly the same result as the present study when it comes to language proficiency. Students tend to be more confident in their excellent language, as their first language, when using it. For example, the Vietnamese can express themselves confidently in Vietnamese in front of a crowd because they have mastered their first language. EFL learners can use the second language (the English language) fluently compared to the first language. Still, sometimes they make mistakes in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage, leading to poor speaking performance. Lu & Hsu (2008) showed the same results regarding students' vocabulary usage. Specifically, students failed to express ideas because they could not expand their vocabulary. Sometimes they knew the words they wanted to use, but they forgot the word's meaning. The problem is related to the habit of translating the second language into the first language.

5. Conclusion

Students received limited comments and feedback for their errors from the teachers. As a result, they had yet to self-correct their mistakes. The students had yet to master their speaking skills, which led to poor presentation skills. They have to spend more time preparing for their presentations. They might not enhance this skill during their learning process. Learners had poor computer skills. The skill helps to make a good presentation with visual aids. Students could not adapt to a crowd and attract their audience when doing presentations due to being insecure, bad explanations, and examples. Most students face anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Students lacked vocabulary, sometimes used wrong collocations, made grammar mistakes, and could not listen clearly to others owing to bad listening skills.

Moreover, they lacked social knowledge to discuss various aspects, topical knowledge, and confidence with others. Learners became under pressure to perform well. They were not satisfied with their learning experiences because the courses could not make all students become confident about their presentations.

5.1. Limitations

A confined cluster of forecasters consisting of gender and experience for label measuring was detected in this inquiry. Many factors like private emotions, health, dilemmas, etc., probably influence the components of classifications. In that event, the coming income needs the predicting variable expansion. The interview questions electrically submitted led to inaccuracy due to a lack of in-person communication. Finally, this study did not investigate even if English speaking competence could impact self-learners skillful growth globally and locally.

5.2. Suggestions

Future studies should conduct interviews to obtain the most objective and realistic results. It is necessary to interview teachers to discover their teaching methods in speaking courses. Questions regarding learners' feelings and desires to enhance their presentation skills should be included. Future researchers can interview male and female participants to discover challenges regarding gender because some articles' results showed that gender has an impact on speech styles. Future researchers should conduct their studies in speaking courses; they join speaking classes to observe students' presentations and their difficulties in presentations, which helps get superior results when observing students' speaking performance. Lecturers should provide more activities for learners to practice, create a supportive environment where students can receive support from everyone if they face problems or make mistakes, and train students to use body language effectively, including eye contact, posture, and gestures.

Acknowledgement

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Biodata

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Investigating the Problems Faced by the University EFL Learners in Speaking English Language

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: English, speaking skill, EFL learners, public and private universities	Speaking English is a part of the daily academic life of the EFL learners at the undergraduate level of the major English programs in Bangladesh. This practice sometimes creates many problems for first-year undergraduate public and private university students. Despite its importance, sufficient data about the problems Bangladeshi university students face in speaking English was not found. To investigate the problems of speaking faced by the undergraduate students, the current study applied mixed methods, and eighty-eight students and four teachers from four universities participated in it. The result shows that both public and private university students with English majors face a lot of problems communicating in English. However, this study has found that public university students are slightly more competent in English and face fewer problems than private university students. The participants expressed different insights on the roles of curriculum, teaching techniques, and individual institutions to overcome the students' weakness in English speaking skills. Finally, the study puts forward some very specific recommendations on the basis of the findings for the concerned stakeholders.

Introduction

The English language fluency has been recognized as one of the most important factors to pursue a successful career in Bangladesh, like many regions of the current world (Ahmad, 2008; Hamid, 2012; Hamid, Jahan, & Islam, 2013; Leitner, Hashim, & Wolf, 2016; Rahman & Pandian, 2018). With a British colonial history of about two centuries, English is the most widely used language for business, technology, education, and overall communication after

the only predominant language of Bangla in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2015). Although there is a debate about whether English is an ESL (English as a Secondary Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) here, it is taught as a compulsory subject from the primary level to the higher secondary level of education. English is also used as the medium of instruction at the tertiary level in Bangladesh's public and private universities. There is no doubt in the fact that speaking skill is an important aspect of English communicative competence in the era in which it is the most dominant language of the current world, and Bangladesh is one of the largest countries in the world in respect of population in which the presence of the English language is found widely.

Bangladeshi educational premises adopted a "communicative approach" to language teaching to make English language learning and teaching more effective. The communicative approach aims to teach all four skills of a language so that the learner can have a good command over all the four skills, i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking, while communicating. After four decades of adopting the approach, the state is yet to find that common EFL learners reach a satisfactory level of English language skills (Rahman & Pandian, 2018; Rahman, Islam, Karim, Chowdhury, Rahman, Seraj, & Singh, 2019).

The problem in speaking becomes acute and visible when the learners enter universities where the medium of instruction is English. In Bangladesh, both public and private university first-year English major undergraduate students face problems while speaking English. Surely, it is an eye-catching fact as this is the very discipline in which they intend to complete their graduation. Suppose the major English students face problems in speaking in spite of choosing the subject to study. In that case, it is surely a common problem for all the students, and it indicates the standard of English language teaching (ELT), especially regarding speaking skills, at the secondary and higher secondary levels in Bangladesh. The researchers' own experiences show that EFL learners face some problems while speaking English, especially during the first year of their undergraduate studies in the English department. Moreover, students face problems regardless of the institution type, i.e., public or private. Hence, both public and private universities have been taken into consideration in this study for identifying and evaluating the problems on a general scale.

It has been seen that speaking skill is the most problematic skill for learners even at their tertiary level of education. The learners inside the classroom mostly use English for educational purposes, and when they face problems communicating in English, the whole education process becomes a problem to carry out and bring success. In spite of studying English as a compulsory subject since primary level education, which is also focused on the communicative approach, when the students fail to speak in English, it becomes an alarming issue. Therefore, it requires a study. Focusing on the speaking problems of the undergraduate fresher students of public and private universities will bring out their nature of problems with comparison. The investigation may shed light on eradicating or overcoming problems of the students and find out if any other factors related to institutions, study environment, or peers are related to the problem.

In most cases, in Bangladesh, tertiary-level education is provided in the English language. Moreover, the English-speaking capacity of the newly admitted students of the English departments may indicate the standard and problems of ELT at the secondary and higher secondary levels in Bangladesh. That is why the researchers felt the necessity the identification the problems of the undergraduate fresher students in speaking English. The purposes of the study were not only to analyze the problems of both public and private university students comparatively but also to find some common solutions to those problems.

Literature review

There existing studies on the problems and challenges of teaching and learning spoken English in Bangladesh have not covered the specific group of participants, i.e., the freshers of university English departments, that are addressed in this study. Some studies were conducted in the urban contexts, whereas some others were in rural contexts. Another research was carried out by Hamid (2011) on the problems and English proficiency of EFL learners in the country's rural schools. He analyzed some socio-economic factors that affect English teaching and learning.

Some other studies found the factors like language anxiety or 'English-phobia', family solvency, the educational background of family members, and location of the educational institutions to be crucial factors to affect the quality of ELT and motivation of the EFL learners and the speaking skill was found to be the most neglected language skill in the colleges of rural and urban areas in Bangladesh (Ahmad, 2014; Ahmad, 2017). Hasan and Akhand (2009) conducted a study on the challenges and sustainability of ELT at the college level in Bangladesh. That large-scale study covered all the sixty-four districts of the country, including colleges of both urban and rural areas. Its findings marked that the two factors that affected the teaching and learning of spoken English were the scarcity of appropriate teaching materials and the teachers' low level of ELT competence.

Communicative competence and speaking skills

Communicative competence is one of the most important survival skills in the globalized world. It has been an extensively studied topic in the field of education since the 1970s (Celce-Murcia, 2008). Dell Hymes coined the influential term Communicative competence in the 1980s. As Larsen-Freeman (2011) states, it indicates "knowing when and how to say what to whom, … which focuses on the components of the ability to communicate through a language" (p. 152). It comprises four components according to Canale and Swain (1980): grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Linguistic competence refers to the knowledge of syntax, phonology, vocabulary, and word-formation processes that enable us to use the language for a range of

different purposes and functions. The second ability, sociolinguistic competence, includes the sociocultural knowledge of how to vary the use of language to suit the setting and the

participants. Discourse competence is related to the knowledge of how to produce, differentiate, and interpret various types of texts in different modes, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Lastly, strategic competence is concerned with the language user's ability to use different kinds of communication strategies to maintain communication to meet the gap caused by limited language knowledge.

Speaking skill is considered a very important skill because it is necessary for oral communication. Speaking is also important because of its use in conversations and describing something, and it also works hand in hand with listening. Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information (Florez, 1999). In addition, speaking is also defined as a productive skill. It is the ability of participants to communicate and express their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and needs in order to make sense of them (Brown, 2004). It goes without saying that the importance of speaking skills is beyond measurement. Speaking skill is also important as it is directly related to communication and interaction. Therefore, competency in any language is largely dependent on how well the person speaks in that language.

Importance of speaking skills in education

In order to empower ourselves, we need knowledge; and in order to gain knowledge, we need formal education. English is widely used as a medium of education or instruction in many countries. In Bangladesh as well, the medium of tertiary level education is English. The medium of instruction in the country's many public as well as private universities, is English. Books and materials followed are mostly written in English. Lectures are given in English as well. We all know that education is an interactive process, and in order to receive the knowledge, we need interaction. As the medium of instruction is English therefore, speaking skill is very important for the students. Suppose the students do not know how to use this language inside the classroom. In that case, it is easily understandable that they will not be comfortable or confident in using English outside the classroom in their day-to-day conversations. Hence, speaking skill is very important for learners to practice and master.

Commonly faced English-speaking problems.

Acquiring a skill is never easy as many difficulties and obstacles keep blocking the development of the skills and make it harder for the learners to grasp. Speaking problems are faced by learners all over the world. Studies conducted so far have pointed out several speaking problems the learners face. Speaking is an interactive skill that has problems and difficulties of many kinds. According to Thornbury (2005), the main problems learner-speakers face are in two areas - knowledge factors and skills factors. The knowledge factors refer to the speaker's linguistic knowledge that is used for oral production. The skill factors mean that the learners' knowledge is not sufficiently automated to ensure fluency. Therefore, English speakers should have linguistic knowledge. They should have functional knowledge about the purpose of speaking, whether as a transactional or interpersonal function. Secondly, the speakers need to have discourse competence which controls the capacity to connect and

organize individual utterances. Thirdly, learners need pragmatic competence that relates to a particular language and the contexts in which it is used, including the purpose for which language is used. Last of all, English speakers should speak grammatically correct English and have a wide range of vocabulary with good pronunciation.

In her study, Hadijah (2014) found out some reasons why students face problems in speaking English. The reasons were not limited to having little knowledge of the components of speaking skills, including vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension but also personal reasons such as lack of self-confidence, shyness to perform speaking, lack of speaking practice, time management, speaking material, and exposure problems. Therefore, it is clear that speaking has a vast domain of problems or difficulties that obstruct learners' successful learning of the skill.

Many studies have recommended the integration of Information and communication technology (ICT) into ELT practices (Chau, 2021; Nguyen, 2022; Pham, 2021). But this type of practice was not very common in the ELT scenario of the country before the pandemic of COVID-19. But this scenario is expected to change slowly due to the forced online educational practices caused by the pandemic.

Speaking problems in the Bangladeshi context

English is used as an official language and as a medium of instruction for tertiary-level education in both public and private universities in Bangladesh. Though English is taught as a compulsory subject from the primary level of education, the students have yet to reach the speaking fluency level inside and outside their classroom. In her study, Bhattacharjee (2008) stated that exposure to speaking situations is extremely limited in the classroom. Moreover, the students get very limited access to English outside the classroom. They spend most of their time with their family, friends, and the community where the Bangla language is used predominantly. In an EFL context like Bangladesh, the learners are not required to engage in English in practical situations outside the academic context. That is why they cannot practice oral communication in English. The learners consider it only as an academic subject rather than a means of communication.

Research objectives

The primary purpose of the research was to explore the problems while speaking English as undergraduate students. It was designed to find and analyze the nature of their speaking problem or the most commonly faced difficulties. A part of its purpose was to check if there was any significant difference between the two types of university students' speaking problems. On the basis of the data, the study aimed to present some recommendations for the concerned ELT practitioners to improve their fluency in English speaking.

Methodology

Pedagogical setting & participants

The aim of the research was to find out the speaking problems faced by the first-year English major students and conduct a comparative study between the public and private university students. For this reason, the research was conducted at two public and two private universities in Dhaka city. It included four university teachers and eighty-eight randomly chosen students. All the students were first-year English-major undergraduate students.

Table 1. Research Participants

Participants	Public	Private	Total
Number of universities	02	02	04
Student - survey participants	44	44	88
Focused Group Discussions (FGD) - students	05	05	10
Teachers	02	02	04

Research design

To elicit enough valid data, a mixed-method approach by Creswell (2014) was followed in the study to investigate the relevant issues. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were collected side by side.

Research instruments and data collection

This mixed-method study used both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools. The study used a survey questionnaire of seventeen items and the five-point Likert scale to collect the quantitative data. The speaking problem of the students was identified and measured by themselves. The self-reported data about the speaking problem was the primary tool to measure and analyze the phenomena.

The qualitative data was collected through interviews and focused group discussions. The researchers conducted focused group discussions among the students and took teachers' interviews in order to collect and analyze qualitative data.

Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed according to the five major questions of the questionnaire. Then the interviews were transcribed for coding. After that, the thematic analysis of the qualitative data was prepared. Finally, the two types of data were triangulated to present the overall findings and recommendations.

Research findings and discussion

Students' perspectives

English competence level and problems

It was found from the study that most of the English major first-year undergraduate students of both public and private universities, more or less, faced problems speaking English due to both linguistic and communicative competence.

Communicative competence in English

Q1. How well can you communicate in English?

Figure 1 shows that 6.8% of the private university student ratings and 11.4% of the public university student ratings of the communication capacity in English is "Excellent."
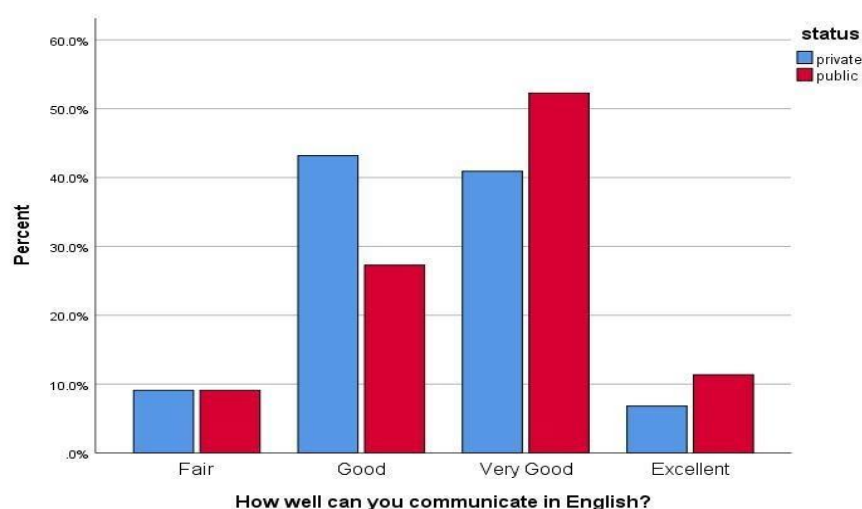
Figure 1: Communicative competence in English

No one rated their competence as "Poor ."After the overall calculation of the ratings given by the students, an average of 48% of ratings go to private university students, whereas 51% go to public university students.

Therefore, according to the students' own responses, we can state that public university students are slightly more competent than private university students in terms of English communication skills.

The problem of linking sentences

Q2. How often do you face problems linking sentences while you speak?

It seems that linking sentences while speaking is a common problem for most of the respondents. Only 2.3% of response is "never ."Regarding linking sentences, public university

students are again in an advantageous position. The ratio of easiness of this problem is Private 46: Public 53.
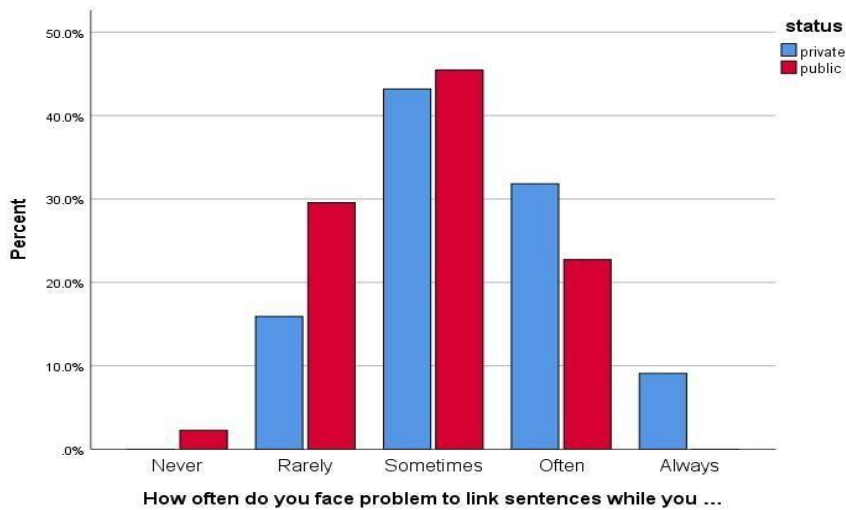
Figure 2: Problem of linking sentences

Fear of making grammatical mistakes

Q3. How much do you agree that "Thinking about making grammatical mistakes while speaking" is a hindrance to speaking English fluently?
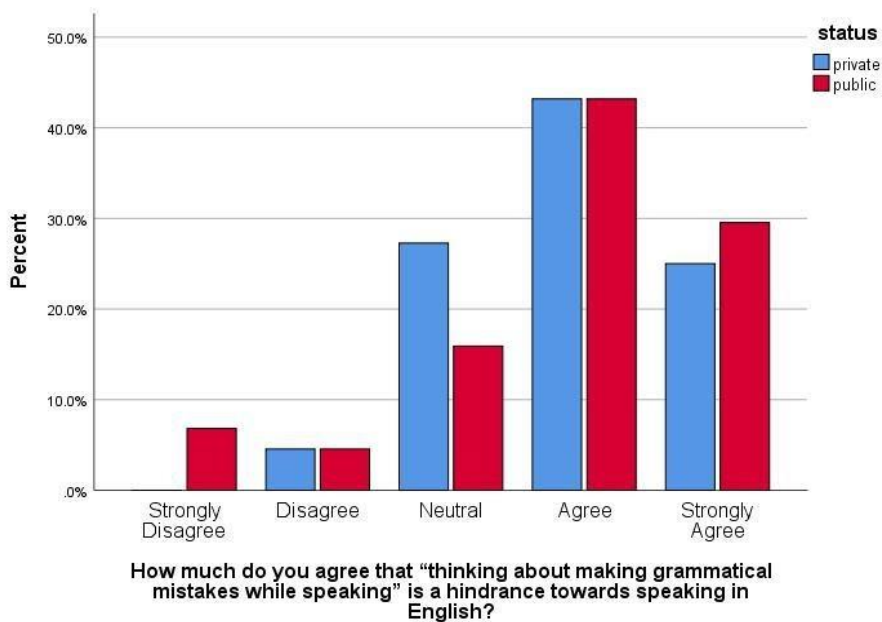
Figure 3: Fear of making grammatical mistakes

At least two-thirds of public and private university students have agreed with this statement that thinking about grammatical mistakes is a hindrance to speaking fluently. The ratio of ratings to this question is Public 50: Private 49.

Anxiety is as a problem while speaking.

Q4. To what extent do you think anxiety can cause any problem while speaking English?

The ratio of ratings of answers is Private 50: Public 50. It expresses that both parties have the same perception about anxiety as a problem with speaking English.

From figure 4, it is clear that most students find language anxiety as a problem always or often.
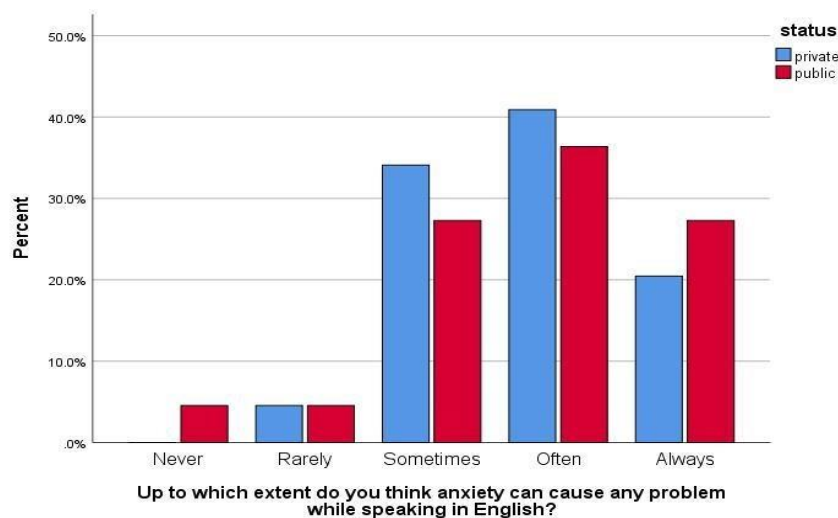
Figure 4: Anxiety as a problem while speaking

Role of the institution

Q5. Do you think your current institution plays any positive role in developing your speaking skill?
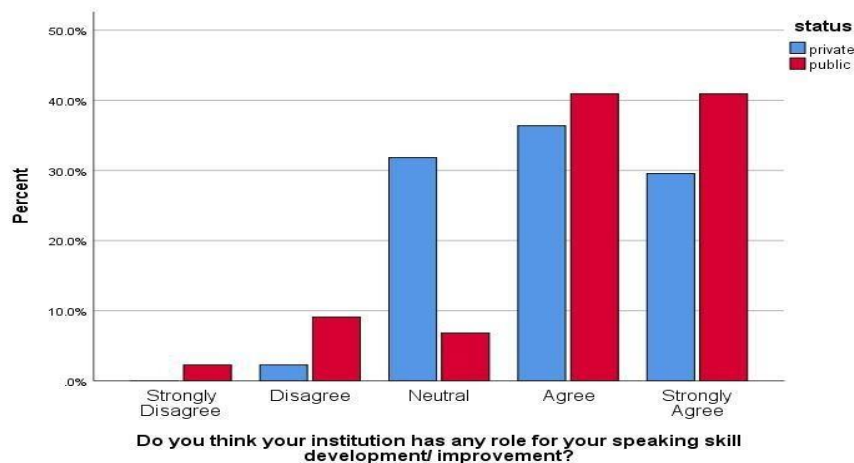
Figure 5: Role of the Institution

Here, the public university students expressed the opinion that institutions have a role to play regarding speaking skill development. The ratio of responses from private and public university students is 47: 52.

Absence of listening and speaking practices at the school level

Almost three-fourths of the students reported that they did not have enough scope of doing speaking-listening activities in the schools. Those skills were not tested as a part of the common examination systems at the school level. That is why the teachers did not emphasize developing the speaking skill.

Lack of motivation caused by lack of the scope to use English in real life

In the non-academic context in Bangladesh, the research participants did not need to use their discourse and strategic competence in English. The lack of scope to apply academically acquired linguistic competence in real-life demotivated them to increase their speaking skill.

Suggestions from the students

Few participants have addressed some more issues that are relevant to the problem of speaking. They have suggested a number of ways from their own experience to develop their English speaking.

> *New vocabularies or tough words are problems. For example, someone used the word "propensity" while talking to me, and I was embarrassed as I didn't know its meaning. It takes time to get on the momentum. I don't find appropriate words, and I also make grammatical mistakes.* (FGD, Public university student 2)

> *As English is our second language, we translate from Bangla to English. Therefore, it causes problems while speaking.* (FGD, Private university student 3)

> *Listening is the most important thing to me for the development of speaking skills.* (Interview, Public university student 4)

A number of students have proposed "mirror therapy" to relieve the fear of speaking.

> *We have to be confident. Everybody makes mistakes. It is not necessary to be super correct. Body language is also important. Practice with a partner or in front of a mirror is necessary. We have to have a desire to develop our speaking level, but we do not necessarily need to be like native speakers. We can also listen to podcasts and have foreign friends talk to them.* (FGD, Public university student 1)

Teachers' perspectives

The teachers from both public and private universities opined that first-year undergraduates face speaking English problems throughout the year. They mentioned several factors behind their impairment in speaking English. The study collected insights into the nature of the problems faced by the students. They defined the role of institutions and curriculum at large. Finally, the teachers of both public and private universities have given some, more or less similar, suggestions so that the first-year undergraduate English major students can overcome their English-speaking problems.

The teachers interviewed have pointed to several factors that are causing difficulties for the students. The interviewees have talked about several natures of students' speaking problems they have encountered. The problems of private and public university students have little difference. Most of the problems are very common to the learners of English as a Second or Foreign Language.

Bangla medium or poor schooling background

It is notable that all the teachers have mentioned that the students who are from Bangla medium backgrounds face more or less the same problems speaking English.

Social and economic constraints

One of the interviewees has mentioned that students of public universities do not get enough time to practice and develop their skills because of some financial issues.

Public speaking

Almost all the students felt uneasy speaking in front of a public audience. Most of the teachers have shared their experiences about this issue with the researchers.

Translate from Bangla

The function of the learner's first language is considered a major issue in second language learning. Here, in this research, it was found that students try to make sentences first in their native language, i.e., Bangla, and then try to translate them into English.

Affective filter

The teachers have suggested that the student's high level of affective filters hinders their language production.

Lack of vocabulary

All of the teachers interviewed have said that their students face problems mostly because of their lack of vocabulary.

Pronunciation and accent

Another reason the teachers have mentioned is that students face problems with the correct pronunciation of English. They also have trouble understanding the English accent.

Role of the curriculum

All the teachers have expressed the importance of a planned and consistent curriculum. They have shared different opinions regarding the status of the curriculum and what changes should be brought to it.

Teaching techniques

Both the teachers of public and private universities have agreed that teaching techniques of the curriculum have a major role in overcoming the students' speaking problems.

Syllabus design

Almost all the interviewees have put emphasis on a change in the syllabus. Some of them have said that more changes should be brought to the school and college levels.

Motivation

The teachers have remarked that motivation is an important factor that influences students' speaking skills. According to them, if students can feel the necessity to develop speaking skills, they will put more effort into it.

Role of the institution

All the interviewees have opined that the institution has immense importance in developing students' speaking skills. Most importantly, institutions can provide good teachers and mentors and ensure a friendly environment for developing speaking skills.

Role of the teacher

As the teacher can be a role model in front of the students in second language learning, interviewees have suggested that students may follow them and their experience of mastering the English language.

Environment

Interviewees have significantly emphasized the necessity of a good environment for learning English:

> *I advise students to go to the American center and British Council to get an English-speaking environment. I invite some foreigners to our university. Students can talk with them and this way they can improve their English very easily. (Teacher 2)*

Digital technology

A teacher remarked that current students, unlike the university students of the batches of a few years ago, are getting more facilities because of the availability of multimedia devices and contents:

> *The students are gradually improving because we did not have these opportunities like the internet, YouTube, etc., before.* (Teacher 3)

Private university students get more care about speaking fluency development

One of our interviewees has claimed a very significant issue that the private universities take more care about their speaking skills than public universities do. Moreover, the interviewee also remarked that nowadays, university students are becoming more interested in language skills and linguistics than literature, which badly affects their speaking performance.

> *Public university students are more concerned about their CGPA. They are unwilling to learn speaking though it is highly necessary for the job market. Even some English major students don't love reading books or watching movies. Even I also read and reread fairy tales books like Cinderella. I watch movies with my kids. I read out books for my kids. Nowadays, English major students are becoming more interested in linguistics than literature.* (Teacher 4)

Overall discussion and recommendations

The new major findings in comparison to the existing relevant literature can be highlighted through the following points:

The lack of speaking fluency of the undergraduate students is caused due to the absence of listening and speaking practices during the 12 years of academic studies from Class 1 to Class 12 at the primary, secondary, higher secondary (known as intimidating college in Bangladesh) levels at the schools. The Junior School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC), and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC.) English curricula focus on those two skills to a limited extent. On top of that, the existing major national public examinations, including the JSC, SSC, and HSC, which are held at the end of Class 8, Class 10, and Class 12, respectively, do not include the evaluation of listening and speaking skills. Surprisingly, the concerned national authorities named the English curricula as the Communicative English curriculum in 2010 and have been developing them since then, excluding those two skills in the rubrics. Hence, the students' foundation of English communicative competence is weak in the country, due to which they suffer at the undergraduate level.

The English language teachers have limited knowledge about how to apply the inductive approach in teaching. That is why the learners are too much concerned about grammatical mistakes, which has caused language anxiety.

Both public and private university students are weak in speaking fluency. But the private universities are found to take greater care to develop speaking fluency. The curricula and facilities of the private universities are better in this regard. The private universities have integrated the use of digital equipment and apps to implement E-learning more than the public universities, making English learning and teaching more effective there.

The following recommendations can be forwarded based on the findings of the study that may have an effective way to understand and overcome the challenges of English speaking skills faced by undergraduate students of English.

Grammar

The students should not only memorize grammar and its rules but also understand and be able to use it in practical life. While speaking, a lack of grammatical knowledge often causes problems, which was seen in this research based on the findings. Therefore, grammar and its competency should be dealt with seriousness.

Vocabulary

From the students' as well as teachers' point of view, it has been found that students' lack of vocabulary causes problems in their speaking. Therefore, students should give effort to building their vocabulary knowledge, and teachers should also take necessary measures so that they can ensure that students are learning vocabulary accordingly.

Anxiety

The students should reduce their anxiety and phobia about English speaking. They should take it naturally and overcome their shyness. Until and unless they defeat their psychological barrier, their speaking cannot be improved.

Motivation

The EFL learners should be more self-motivated. At the same time, the teachers also should motivate them in the class so that they take the initiative and willingly start giving efforts to overcome their speaking problems.

Institution

The institutions should also make necessary arrangements to help their students remove their speaking problems. From the research, it has been found that many students were benefited from the English club and practice sessions arranged by the institution. Therefore, the institution should put emphasis not only on their academic results but also on their English speaking competence.

Syllabus and curriculum

In order to overcome the speaking problem, the curricula and syllabuses should be updated timely, and the authorities should develop them in such a way that students can engage more and more through the lessons and tasks.

Outside the class activity

The speaking skills can be improved in various ways, including outside class activities. The teachers should encourage students to use English media on the internet. The students may use the outside resources provided by the British Council.

Conclusion

In this research, several issues came forward regarding the English major undergraduate students, which include the lack of practice, guidance, and self-motivation of the EFL learners to improve their speaking in their primary and secondary level education. It also explored their lack of practice and incompetence in grammar and vocabulary, the absence of the scope of a friendly environment to practice speaking. The overemphasis on grammar is common in the ELT scenario of the country at the school level, where the Grammar Translation (GT) method is followed despite the presence of communicative curricula. The poor ELT input with a minimum focus on the listening and speaking skills at the school level caused the EFL learners of the undergraduate level show poor performance in spoken English. The socio-economic background was also found to play a crucial role in this respect.

The delimitation of the study was that it was undertaken in four universities due to a lack of time and funding. But this research explored some experienced English teachers' opinions and feedback based on their long time teaching experience. Therefore it brought out some important factors that included the roles of higher educational institutions and the roles of English undergraduate syllabuses in this regard. It also sheds some light on the core areas of the undergraduate English curricula: literature, language skills, and linguistics. All these factors play important roles in influencing the English speaking performance of the EFL learners of the undergraduate level.

The problems which came to light throughout this research suggest that the nature of problems faced by the students are more or less the same in public and private institutions. The challenges are also similar in both types of institutions, yet the approach toward the problem is variable in some aspects. The teachers of these institutions also have almost similar points of view regarding the students speaking problems though their feedback towards the solution is versatile and different on some points.

The teachers and students should consider English more as a medium of communication than only an academic subject. The findings strongly demand more attention from the national education policymakers to develop ELT quality at secondary and higher secondary levels. The country needs an effective implementation of a stable and farsighted language-education policy and multidimensional short-term and long-term plans for the school level and the undergraduate level. Suppose the EFL learners gain the minimum fluency in speaking English at the school level. In that case, they can be nourished and polished further at the undergraduate level, which will enable them to communicate in the English language to survive in the competitive age of globalization.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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Understanding students' opportunities and challenges in a curriculum vitae writing process: Activity system as an analytical tool

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a complex language skill, and writing using English as a medium for employment purposes requires an intricate set of knowledge and skills. Because such a writing process frequently occurs outside of a formal learning setting, few attempts to study the phenomenon have been made. Through the lens of the activity theory, the paper analyses the influence of six components in a CV writing process from a social-constructivist approach. A mixed-method approach was adopted with a Likert scale survey with open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data from 184 participants revealed that students were mostly influenced by various digital artifacts (e.g., online dictionaries, online courses) and situated in online communities of learning. Qualitative results also indicate the prominent challenges relating to syntax and lexical use as one the conflicting factors and a certain level of autonomy as a facilitating factor while they managed to overcome these complications. The paper suggests how the curriculum of Business English could be adapted to support language learners in real-life employment situations.

Introduction

One critical indication of successful completion of higher education is freshly graduated students' employability. This, in turn, involves training for a rigorous recruiting procedure, which includes curriculum vitae (CV) application and screening. For job applications in multi-national or foreign companies, a CV written in English is a prerequisite; however, from our case study's observation, the preparation of such writing is done outside the campus without much intervention or assistance from members of the English faculty. In the context of the Vietnamese higher education system, challenges related to the traditional teacher-centered teaching and learning method, as well as a lack of connections between universities, research institutions,

and internal industry, tertiary students were reported to lack certain skills and expertise needed for the contemporary labor market (Tran, 2012). It is important to first gain better insights into the current practices; therefore, this research was set out to investigate the process of writing a curriculum vitae with English as a medium for senior students in a business school in an urban area in Vietnam.

In addition, writing and language learning are socially constructed processes. Originally stemming from socio-cultural theory and constructivism, Activity Theory (AT) corresponds to the dynamic, socially constructed writing process, making it a natural technique to explore the multiple factors that shape the nature of writing (Fisher, 2017). Although activity theory has been widely used as a framework for the analysis of the writing process in traditional teaching and learning settings (academic writing), limited studies are available on the research of writing for work placement, particularly curriculum vitae composition (Wang & Yorks, 2012). The present study, therefore, aims to examine what influences the activity of CV writing in an informal educational context using the lens of activity theory. The result of this research can inform English instructors and curriculum developers further on how to enhance facilitating factors and diminish challenges of the writing process for fruitful outcomes.

Research Objectives

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

1. Which components of activity system contribute to the CV writing process?

2. How do conflicting and facilitating factors that emerged from the CV writing process affect the third- and fourth-year students?

Literature review

Among the four skills in language learning, writing has always been regarded as a highly complex skill to acquire due to both the process and knowledge. The case is even more complex for students to write for a specific purpose of employment.

Using Activity Theory to understand the EFL Writing process

Activity Theory has been used to understand processes and features in language training and learning. Originating in socio-cultural theory and constructivism, activity theory is a suitable approach for doing systematic research on writing education because it conforms to the dynamic, socially constructed process of writing (Fisher, 2017). The author investigated activity theory in order to acquire a better understanding of effective writing instruction. The author finds that activity theory is a viable theoretical lens to design a mixed-method research study examining the complex structure of writing instruction due to the demand for descriptive accounts of multi-dimensional intermediate-level systems. Similarly, Kain and Wardle (2014) conclude that activity theory enables academics to examine the different elements that impact

and modify the instrument of writing by focusing on extremely specific features of context and community.

In another study, Yasuda (2005) uses activity theory to study some insights into the writing process of ESL students in a natural academic setting. Her research demonstrates the critical role of prior experience (learning history) in shaping students' attitudes and actions. Her study focuses on socio-cultural and historical aspects of students' learning environment affecting the way students interpret writing tasks in an academic context. Additionally, because this is a small study (three students in a case study), it cannot be generalized to a larger group of L2 students. In a similar academic setting, from a socio-cultural viewpoint, Lei's study (Lei, 2008) on EFL learners' writing approaches in a typical academic environment identifies four connected types of writing strategies: artifact-mediated, rule-mediated, community-mediated, and role-mediated strategies. The study, however, was conducted under rather controlled conditions in which participants were seated in a room set up for the purpose of the writing task and for the researcher to record the process. Furthermore, the study did not explore how individual factors interact with each other and mediate the writing process. As a result, the outcome might not be exhaustive.

Generally, previous studies have shown that activity theory has been utilized mainly in a typical teaching and learning environment (academic contexts) to examine the writing process. To the best of the authors' knowledge, research of writing for job placement, specifically curriculum vitae production, has not been given great attention by the researchers in the past, and this has motivated the present study.

Activity Theory and its components

The framework of activity theory (Engeström, 1987) is a philosophical and multidisciplinary approach to the study of a variety of human actions. In activity theory, the activity system is the basic lens or unit of study. Learning is regarded as a social action in activity theory, and the basic unit of analysis is an activity (Kaptelinin, 1996; Nardi, 1996). An activity system is made up of dynamic actions that result in the production of diverse items and strategic socio-cultural and sociohistorical lens through which a number of human actions may be investigated (Jonassen, 2000). It emphasizes both the social and cognitive elements of people's interactions with their settings.

According to Kain and Wardle (2016), activity theory is used by researchers to better understand the links between individuals who participate in activities, the tools they use to complete their activities, and the goals they have for the activity. Because activity systems may be embedded inside networks of other activity systems, this concept is useful for examining how various contexts of activity interact and impact one another (e.g., writing activities in a classroom vs. writing activities in an informal educational setting). When students complete a task, they function as subjects or subject collectives in an activity system and work toward the object that symbolizes the activity's orientation. This direction serves as the impetus for production or outcome. As a result, it is critical to examine learners' objectives and motivations through the

perspective of activity theory (Thorne, 2004).

Six components of the activity system

An activity system contains six interacting components: subjects, objects, tools, rules, division of labor, and community (Engeström, 1987, 1999). These six components are illustrated in Figure 1 and explained in detail as follows:
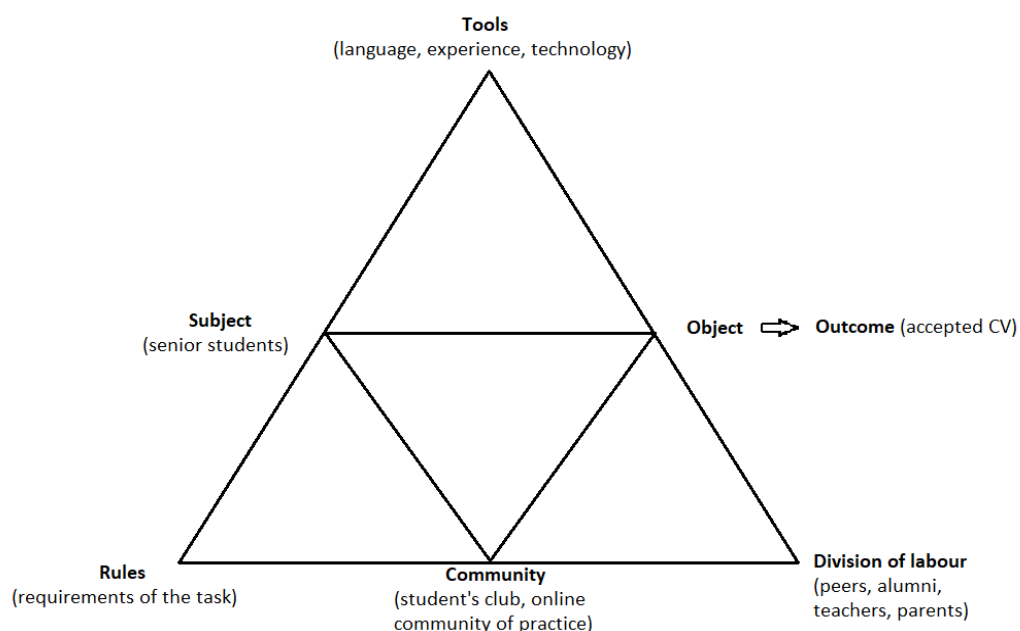
Figure 1: Activity system *Adopted from Engeström (1987)*

This diagram illustrates the essential components of an activity system. The unit of analysis in this visualization is an activity that is oriented toward an object that stimulates activity, provided that the action has a particular direction.

The term *subject* refers to an individual or group of individuals pursuing a goal to obtain an outcome (Sirisatit, 2010). In this study, the term "subject" refers to senior students who prepared for the recruitment process and succeeded.

The *object* is the system's focal point of action. It encapsulates a subject's mental or physical efforts to achieve the desired outcome (s) in an activity system (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). The object directs learners in a particular direction. For instance, the goal-directed activities may have as their objective the completion of tasks, the acquisition of vocabulary, and/or the mastery of a grammatical rule. The objective may also include developing vocabulary, securing a decent career, obtaining an A in class, or passing the examination. The "object" refers to the CV composition to apply for an internship or full-time position in this study.

The outcome means specific results of an activity. This study refers to the accepted CV that advances job applicants to the next round of interviews or assists them in landing the job.

The term *tools* refer to internal and external mediating methods or devices that aid in the accomplishment of an activity's objective (Sirisatit, 2010). Engeström's paradigm (Engeström, 1987) conceptualizes mediating artifacts as both tools and signals that mediate between the object and the system's outcome. The term *tools* also refer to the equipment that people utilize to accomplish or carry out tasks. For language learning, tools may be physical or psychological in nature and may include the learner's first language (L1), computers, textbooks, video-audio materials, concepts, diagrams, friends, tasks, and even the teacher, target language media, pedagogical strategies, and the range of newly available resources through information technology. In this study, *tools* include (1) the target language (English) in which participants write their CVs, (2) technical assistance apps and social networking sites, as well as (3) familiarity with these instruments or their experience with a job application.

The triangle's fundamental elements, *rules*, *community*, and *division of labor*, comprise what Engeström (1999) refers to as the activity system's "social basis." The social environment contextualizes the action and enables students to account for the variables that affect it. Unspoken or explicit rules govern behavior in the classroom and other places where language is learned (Walshaw & Anthony, 2008). Internal or external rules regulate the activity system's actions and interactions. *Rules* direct the subject in determining the appropriate course of action to pursue with other members of the public (Sirisatit, 2010). Rules in this study apply to both CV writing styles and industry-specific criteria with which applicants comply.

The *community* is made up of one or more individuals who share the subject's object (in terms of either supporting or impeding the activity). A community comprises many individuals and/or subgroups that share a common object(s) and self-identify as different from other communities, particularly those engaged in language teaching and learning and those engaged in non-language-related activities in the target language. It encompasses classmates, a group or groups of students working toward similar goals, parents, alumni, and the institution, all of which serve as supports of participants enrolled in the task-based course (Sirisatit, 2010; Ng & Hung, 2003; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The term "community" is used in this study to refer to students' clubs and online communities of practice.

Finally, the *division of labor* involves how tasks are divided horizontally between community members, as well as referring to any vertical division of power and status (Engeström, 1993). Division of labor is defined in this research as the interaction between students or students and others (i.e., the instructor, the parents) involved in task completion.

These six components interact and significantly mediate the CV writing process, ultimately resulting in the consequences of self-regulated learning attempts.

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The target populations for this study were 184 third and final-year college-level business-majored students in the spring semester of 2020 at one university in Ho Chi Minh City. Prior to the data collection, only senior students were approached; nevertheless, as the research proceeded, many third-year students had already prepared their CVs for internships in multi-national companies. This is the reason for an expansion in our pool of participants. These individuals were chosen because they were approaching the end of their university degrees and ready for the job application process. Following an explanation of the study's goal by academic researchers, students were given the option of completing the questionnaire and participating in the interview.

Data collection & analysis

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was adopted in the stages of data collection and data analysis. Responses from 10 students were analyzed for the pilot study of the questionnaire survey. Quantitative data covered the completion of a questionnaire which was sent out via Google form link to 184 students. Students answered the questionnaire with the first four questions collecting demographic information (current academic year, gender, course score, and whether they had written a CV in English before). There were 5-point Likert scale questions (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often) to explore students' frequent use of a variety of resources. Open-ended questions were added at the end of the survey to ask about other resources students used, obstacles, solutions, and suggestions from students. Participants were later invited to join 30-minute in-depth interviews. 184 responses were collected. Four participants provided consent for the researchers to interview and record their responses (Table 1).

Table 1: Participants' demographic

Participants (pseudonyms)	Gender	Academic Year	Major	CEFR level in English	Employment status
Lia	Female	Junior	Marketing	C1	Internship
Uya	Female	Senior	Accounting and auditing	B2	Full-time job
Dan	Male	Senior	International economics	B2	Internship
Ken	Male	Senior	International economics	C1	Internship

A classification scheme was developed to identify emerging themes in learner behaviors, as well as contradicting and facilitating elements. The researcher collaborated with a second coder on a random 20% of the data and debated the definitions of each code to attain an agreement. The data was organized in such a way that it could be calculated by the four stages of the CV

writing process. The codes extracted from the data were organized using an activity-based framework. The open-ended questions were grouped according to their theme. The interview data were transcribed and evaluated by deducing themes from the data and coding phrases and words that were consistent with each study topic. Each conflicting factor code was assigned to one of the activity system's components. (For instance, the 'confusion with English grammar' code was inserted between the activity system's subject and tools components.) Similarly, the enabling factors were evaluated in the same manner.

Findings

Research question 1: Which components of an activity system contribute to the CV writing process?

Table 2. Components of the activity system contributing to the CV writing process

Components of Activity system	Question Items	Mean	SD
Tool	Paper and Digital Dictionaries	3.48	1.09
	Online proofreading/ editing services	3.56	1.04
	Machine Translation services	3.84	1.02
	Videos/ Vlog/ Podcasts on YouTube/ Livestream on social media sites	3.85	0.97
Rules	Professional/ Official guidelines	3.05	1.17
Community of Practice	English courses on the campus	2.65	1.21
	Courses outside the campus	2.60	1.21
	Student clubs	3.25	1.16
	Facebook groups	3.80	1.06
Division of Labour	Teacher	3.18	1.06
	Peers	3.70	1.01
	Family members/ relatives	2.44	1.16

The research attempted to discover elements that facilitate or aid in the achievement of the goal. Among the experiences provided by respondents, components repeatedly emphasized were the use of tools, the support of the community, and the important roles of the division of labor, which were described as fact that facilitating factors emerged from the CV writing process. As conflicting factors, components such as tools, rules, objects, community, and division of labor were also highlighted.

Research question 2: How do conflicting and facilitating factors that emerged from the CV writing process affect third- and fourth-year students?

Opportunities with new technologies (facilitating factors)

When these enabling factors were examined comprehensively in relation to the matching components of an activity system, the most commonly detected facilitating factors occurred

between subject and tools. Social networking sites were the most frequently reported tool, with 98.4% of participants (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.97). These factors include "availability of free access to materials and advice from social networking sites (LinkedIn, TikTok, Facebook)", "advice from HR personnel's SNS", "free online courses (MOOCs)". This was followed by translation services (97%) (Mean = 3.84, SD = 1.02). Websites and software (Canva, Photoshop) provided design layouts and templates, while Pinterest kindled inspiration. Students reported the use of artificial intelligence writing aids (Grammarly) (Mean = 3.56, SD = 1.04), electronic dictionaries (Mean = 3.48, SD = 1.09), and cloud storage (Google Drive) to write and keep track of all essential resources and drafts during the prepare explanations.

Detailed explanations from the participants are presented as follows:

Lia: I use LinkedIn to contact the alumni. I also watch some useful tips on TikTok. I use Canva to download some ready-made CV templates. Sometimes I check grammar and spelling on Grammarly.

Uya: I enrolled in a MOOC about how to write a CV.

Dan: LinkedIn helped me a lot when I wanted to know what positions were available, and I could also connect with graduates and head-hunters.

Ken: I saved all my drafts and materials on Google Drive. I like Pinterest, and its content inspired me a lot. I used Photoshop to design my CV's layout. I already had a LinkedIn account.

The next most frequently observed supportive factors were located between subject and community. Online communities were prevalent among participants, with 96.8% of students being members of at least one Facebook group. Students clubs were also popular (89.1%). Participants indicated that assistance from online communities of practice, networking with friends, and senior members of their clubs all contribute significantly to the writing process. Additionally, they establish specific objectives at the start of the preparation process to assist them in managing their time and completing the objectives. The analysis also indicates that respondents demonstrate a certain level of initiative, responsibility, and a strong sense of community during this process. Regarding the division of labor, teachers facilitated this process. Three out of three interviewees reported taking advice from his/ her teacher and the course provided by the university; others got help from their networking circle.

Lia: I sent my CV to seniors from LinkedIn that I know and my friends from clubs for proofreading, and then I corrected it. There was one seminar about career development held by my club, so I also participated in learning some tips.

Uya: Some alumni helped me check my CVs. I also asked my English teacher to check my CV before I submitted it. I think it was really necessary and helpful.

It is also important to note the strong relationship between subject and object. As goals with ambitions and a clear goal in mind, the participants showed strong commitment, drive, and pro-activeness in their preparation process. Lia showed enthusiasm towards the job that she applied for, as it was referred by one senior she admired. She then prepared all needed

experience in the field, consulted with the alumni, and required all necessary requirements; Lia started her CV writing. Similarly, Uya knew from the beginning of her college what career path she would follow and prepared exactly for that. She joined non-formal classes, took an extra English class, and reached out to mentors. By the time of the interview, Uya had already written the third draft of her CV and cover letter and looked for feedback from different resources. A similar dedication was observed for Ken as he scheduled his writing process into four distinct stages: consulting with peers/ seniors, writing drafts, designing, and proofreading. He followed the process tightly and dedicated time to both content and visuals of his CV.

The facilitating factors are categorized in Table 3.

Table 3. Facilitating factors between subjects and other components

Components	Facilitating factors
Subject ←→ Tools	Availability of free access to materials and instructions Free courses on MOOCs Ready-made templates Inspirational figures or stories Online translation services Graphic design platform AI writing assistants Electric Dictionaries Proofreading Easy organization of materials on cloud storage
Subject ←→ Object	Drive Proactiveness
Subject ←→ Rules	N/A
Subject ←→ Community	Networking with alumni, members in clubs Seminar on the topic of career development Support from communities of practice
Subject ←→ Division of Labour	Feedback from teachers or mentors Feedback from peers

Challenges with language knowledge (conflicting factors)

The most frequently observed conflicting factors also occurred between subject and tools.

Table 4. Difficulties related to language knowledge

Language knowledge			
Organizational		Pragmatic	
Grammatical	Textual	Functional	Sociolinguistic
- Word-by-word translation from L1 - Word choices (formal words) - Differences in the use of words - Grammar errors/ mistakes - Strong words to make an impression on the recruiters	- Succinct statements - Organization of main points - Section arrangement - Format/ Design - Coherence	- What information to include/exclude - Make an impression with the recruiters - How to highlight my strength - Criteria of a good CV - Design of a good CV	- Cultural awareness in multi-cultural organizations - Professional writing style

Difficulties related to grammatical knowledge were the most frequently reported. Lexical barriers to effective communication include lexical range, word-by-word translation from L1, choosing appropriate meanings of the words, and words used in the right context to impress the recruiters. In the open-ended questions, participants reported problems when they tried the find the right words to describe what they wanted to say.

> *"I understand that a CV must be written in a clear and concise manner, but I don't know the right words in English to describe what I want to say.*
>
> *"What I worry most is whether the word I use can help me to stand out and get the attention of the recruiter."*
>
> *"It's pretty hard to write a short but sharp CV."*

Their solution would be translating the word from L1 to L2 with machine translation services such as Google Translate, VDict, vikitranslator or TraTu. Yet shortcomings of current translation services now emerged. They were confused with words of multiple meanings or words of specialized knowledge.

Another reported problem related to pragmatic knowledge of writing for a specific purpose of employment. As researching for information related to format, requirements, tips, and guidelines for writing a CV, participants found a plethora of available resources on the Internet. Much of them are *"not verified, and even though I follow some of the guidelines, I am still worried about whether they are correct or not."* as reported by a participant.

Another participant said*:*

> *"I was drowned from the information on the Internet. I'm not sure which advice to take."*

A student doubted the originality of her work.

> *"I used a lot of information on the Internet, but I worried that it would make my CV no different from others and the recruiter would regard it as low quality."*

Despite the employment of several digital tools, they were mostly on a free subscription, which offered limited functionality.

> *"Paid subscription is pricey but the free version is limited in functionality. For a free application such as Google translation, I don't fully trust the service. "*

The second most prominent factor, job preparation-related courses, which were merely included in the curriculum, was stated in the subject-division of labor subsystem, despite the fact that they appear to have an effect on the writing process. One respondent found it hard to arrange a meeting with the teacher to proofread her piece of writing. Some noteworthy comments are presented as follows:

Uya: *I had to arrange many times to have my teacher check my CV because she was busy, and I was also busy with my schedule.*

Dan: *I didn't find any lessons about writing a CV… ah … there was one unit in my ESP class, but I wasn't taught properly because my teacher said it would not appear in the final test.*

Finally, incompatible connections between subjects and rules were the last conflicting factors. The interviewees were unfamiliar with the rules or field-related requirements of the industry they were about to join as well as the demands of future employers. Unacquaintance with CV writing styles was also reported to hinder the process.

Lia: *I was not sure how long a CV should be because that was my first time writing a CV. My first draft was too long and wordy, so I had to cut it short.*

Dan: *I didn't know which experience to put in and which ones should be left out. I thought they were all essential, but they were not.*

Other mentioned factors, albeit having a minor influence, are also included in Table 5.

Table 5. Challenges between subjects and other components

Components	Challenges
Subject ⟷ Tools	Problems with English grammar context-related vocabulary Lack of paraphrasing technique experience in the field Unreliable assisting tools/ resources
Subject ⟷ Object	Difficulty with finding the relevant info Share unrelated info
Subject ⟷ Rules	Personal schedule
Subject ⟷ Community	Conflicts with other personal schedule Conflicts with other personal commitments
Subject ⟷ Division of Labour	Inadequate information Work delays

In summary, whether facilitating or contradictory, findings indicate that participants' performance was influenced primarily by themselves as subjects, objects that motivated them to complete the task, the tools they used to complete the tasks, the teacher, and seniors in the division of labor, and the non-formal learning community.

Discussion

Participants in this study reported a very frequent level of use of new technology as elements of tools, community, and division of labor. CALL programs in the second language writing curriculum have been established as the most extremely successful and useful (Cunningham, 2000). Research on the same topic has indicated that language learners who utilized CALL systems outperformed their peers who learned using standard language teaching methods. According to De Szendeffy (2005), CALL programs have the ability to let students study flexibly from his or her own location, whether that location is a home or a library. The result of the study is consistent with the research of Tran (2021), in which a majority of respondents reported using technological tools such as websites, sample paragraphs, and Google translation to assist with their writing. This finding also reflects the study of Le (2021), who showed that computer-assisted resources increase students' access to material and equip learners with tools to improve the quality of their written work.

For language learners placing themselves in a non-formal educational setting to successfully complete a recruiting process in a second language, a number of prerequisites had to be accomplished. The CV writing process ranged from a few days (Dan), a few weeks (Ken), to nearly a year (Uya); however, it is clear that all participants were already aware of the task and actively prepared for their goals since the first year of college. In the past three years, they had sharpened their professional knowledge, diversified their experience (subject → tool), networked and socialized with peers or seniors (subject → community), and got familiar with job requirements and the rules of the internal industry (subject → rule) through active involvement in professional and personal development. The introduction of social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and TikTok is a significant enabling element since they expose learners to authentic information in informal settings on a continuous basis (Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2011; Wodzicki, Schwämmlein & Moskaliuk, 2012).

The research sought to identify these facilitating factors that are positive or supportive of attaining the goal of a job seeker. As the activity's objective or goal is to write a successful CV, participants showed a strong drive to proactively seek learning sources (subject → tool) and help (subject → community). Before learners can utilize a new language, learners must have several meaningful experiences with it and have their attention directed to new linguistic features. This is especially important when learning Academic language or English for Specific Purposes because they are more sophisticated than everyday language and may require more conscious attention before the acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2020). Three out of four participants mentioned prominent challenges relating to syntax and lexical use, and all

overcame the obstacles with active help-seeking from experts' feedback, a community of practice, help-seeking courses, and seminars. The competence of an L2, user can be best improved not by studying but simply by continuing to use the language in their meaningful practices. Lia said that she "used" English in the process of autonomous learning. She followed and read blogs of native speakers who were experts in the field. She searched for English definitions, synonyms, and collocations of specific words she wanted to use.

The quality of enabling elements that interact with learners in English as a medium contributes to their success as language users. Authentic materials, accredited international standard courses, mentor or human resource expertise input, and active communities of practice are all critical components of their learning process. What distinguishes these candidates is that they are always "doing not being an L2 learner" in a non-formal learning situation (Firth, 2009). This they 'do' by participating in a variety of interactional behaviors on a contingent and situational basis – all of which appear to need and include interactional learning.

Negotiation between contradicting and facilitating elements is critical for success. Contrary to what the research findings indicated, contrasting factors can enhance and encourage the process, increasing their awareness of potential problems in advance (Jonassen, 2000). In one instance, Uya stated that she was aware of her self-perceived inadequacy in language use, the limitations of machine translation services, and the problematic practice of literal translation from L1 to L2. She sought assistance from professionals in the industry and was proactive in seeking professional opinions. Uya searched for information in English using key opinions provided by her mentors and peers. She also followed international professionals and specialists in the industry on social media platforms and read their blogs on a weekly basis.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, as students went through the writing process of their curriculum vitae for employment purposes, various elements, namely tools, rules, division of labor, and community, were involved in helping students reflect, plan, monitor, and evaluate the process. Tools have been reported as the most prominent element and acted as both facilitating and conflicting factors. Students also reported frequent reliance on online applications for tools, community, and division of labor.

The findings of this research provided an in-depth look into non-formal settings for language learning to happen. This result can be used by English instructors, university administrators as well as recruiters. For instructors, incorporating technology in their teaching is a sure way to facilitate learning and engage students. While it is apparent that technologies may stimulate autonomous learning, they must be utilized appropriately and in conjunction with a method that provides a momentum or stimulus for learning that the learners then undertake.

To facilitate this process, it is recommended to establish self-access or resource centers for learning that are not restricted to the classroom. Also, strategic learning skills should be taught

in a formal context to provide students with the processes and skills needed for their future careers. Language students will eventually face the challenge of using the target language under real-life conditions, which are frequently outside the classroom, with limited English input for learners. One strategy for increasing such input and providing much-needed chances for out-of-class practice is to provide learning resources that interconnect students' classroom learning to the real world. These resources may be obtained through the collaboration or assistance of university administrators and industry experts since they are often regarded as a critical component of improving the quality of tertiary education that prepares students for future employment. If students can gain experience from real experts in the target business, their writing process will be much more facilitated.

In addition, activity systems alone cannot provide the depth of analytical methods required by researchers. The research, therefore, could be expanded by examining students' individual pieces of writing (CVs) to determine whether the components of the activity system have distinct effects in formal and informal educational settings.

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Direct Apology Strategies and Their Lexicogrammatical Realizations in English Conversations: Implications for EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: apology; English conversations; lexicogrammar realizations; occurrence; strategies.	One of the most prevalent speech acts across languages and cultures is apologizing. It plays an important role in conversations which helps maintain social relationships. Many researchers in this field have proposed several apology strategies; however, this article aims to examine the direct apology strategies and the lexicogrammatical realizations of utterances, including apologies in English conversations. This is a descriptive qualitative study that gathered data from conversations extracted from romance and family film scripts. This study was also supported with quantitative information in order to seek the answers to three research questions. The findings show that *expression of regret* was the most prominent direct apology strategy, which the characters took advantage of in English-language conversations in film scripts. In terms of lexico-grammar, the utterances with the occurrence of *sorry* and its other realizations appeared most frequently.

Introduction

In everyday communication, people utter and exchange information through the occurrence of grammatical structures and words, and they also act via what they utter, which are known as speech acts. It seems that there is a great number of speech acts which comprise of the acts of suggesting, thanking, complaining, inviting, responding and et cetera. Apologizing, one kind of speech acts is a common activity in communication playing an important role in social relationships. When we make a mistake or hurt others unintentionally or deliberately, we will do apologetic actions to express repentance as well as take responsibility for hurting the listener.

Recently, a great amount of research has been conducted to have a deeper insight into apologies and apology-related issues. Awedyk (2011) revealed that Norwegian had a tendency to exploit *direct strategies* the most; however, which subcategory was mostly used was not mentioned. Sienes and Catan (2022) used the theory of speech act to find out that offering a repair was the dominant apology strategy taken advantage of by 90 call center representatives. Speech acts, implicatures, politeness, discourse, pragmatic failure in communication, and sociolinguistics

were all used in prior studies to investigate apology techniques in light of cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics. However, not many research studies on lexicogrammatical realizations focusing on direct apologies were conducted. It is for this reason that the article entitled *"Direct Apology Strategies and Their Lexicogrammatical Realizations in English Conversations: Implications for EFL Students"* was conducted. It aims to examine direct apology strategies and figure out the realizations of utterances containing direct apologies in English conversations. The researchers carried out this article in order to answer the three research questions as follows:

1. What are direct apology strategies which are taken advantage of in English conversations?

2. What are the realizations of apology utterances in English conversations?

3. How often do direct apology strategies and their realizations occur in English conversations?

Review of Previous Studies

Research by Trosborg (1987), House (1988), Garcia (1989), Sugimoto (1997), Hussein and Hammouri (1998), Brown and Gullberg (2008), and Nguyen (2010) look into how people apologize in separate languages. Various data collection methods, such as the Discourse Completion Task (DCT), role play, film scripts, and questionnaires, have been used in prior research on contrastive or cross-cultural pragmatics.

There are a lot of researchers who employ a DCT to collect data for their studies. House (1988) analyzed apologetic realizations of German students learning English and found that German-speaking English learners changed their communicative styles from German to English only by employing less common apology terms, namely *sorry*. Nguyen (2010) investigated apology creation in relation to strategy preferences using a DCT and the analysis in the field of socio-cultures.

Together with using DCTs for earlier cross-cultural studies on apologies, some researchers used roleplay to collect data. Trosborg (1987) investigated the apologetic realizations among Danish English learners and found that there was little differentiation among the negative first language (L1) pragmalinguistic transfers from Danish learners of English. Garcia (1989) contrasted the similarities and differences of the apologies among non-native English speakers from Venezuela and native English speakers. He discovered that the Venezuelans utilized positive politeness strategies more often. For example, Venezuelans uttered something nice to show their hospitality, intimacy, or positive energies feelings. However, the native speakers used negative styles more often, and self-effacing was among the negative strategies. Brown and Gullberg (2008) had an investigation into L1 and second language (L2) English usage and looked at how monolingual Japanese and English speakers differed from each other in the way they acted and used body language in the domain of way of motion. They also conducted a cross-cultural pragmatics study on refusal, examining the similarities and differences in request refusals

among Australian native English speakers.

Besides, a collection of questionnaires is considered to be one of the tools to gather data by many academics, in addition to roleplay and DCT as methods of investigating the speech act of apologizing. Sugimoto (1997), for example, compared the apology strategies of American and Japanese pupils. Hussein and Hammouri (1998) did another study on apology strategies using a questionnaire that analyzed apology strategies that were employed by Americans and Jordanian English speakers. The results revealed that Jordanian utilized more apology strategies than Americans. *Expression of apology, offer of repair, acknowledgment of responsibility,* and *promise of forbearance* were used by both Americans and Jordanians; however, praising their God of Allah for what had happened, the attack on victims, the minimization of the offense degree, and interjection were used by the latter only.

Abdi and Biri (2014) and Mecheti and Hudson (2014) employed film scripts and subtitles as an instrument to collect data. They utilized films as authentic video materials, which were regarded as a source of languages used in daily life conversations, cultural exchange, and entertainment.

Those studies mentioned above conducted different data collections. The researchers made a decision to use film scripts to observe this apologizing act. Different theories also approached these studies; however, this research made use of lexicogrammar as one of the theoretical frameworks, which could be different from the aforementioned studies.

Theoretical Backgrounds

The speech act of apologizing is appealing to a great number of educators, learners, linguists, and researchers in the field of sociolinguistics. Leech (1983) stated that interlocutors often apologize with the hope to restore and build up the relationship between the apologizer and the apologizee which could be broken due to the apologizer's offense against the apologizee. For him, the act of apologizing is not enough; the apologies must be effective if the apologizer is in the needs to be forgiven by the apologizee, and thereby restore the equilibrium. According to Olshtain (1989), the speech act of apologizing is implemented in order to show the support for the apologizee who a transgression has directly or indirectly influenced on. In the definition proposed by Holmes (1990), an apology is utilized with the intention to eliminate the offense and shows that the apologizer takes responsibility for what he/ she had done which may cause the offense to the apologizee; hence, to maintain the social contact among the apologizers and apologizees.

The speech acts were categorized by Searle (1969) into five groups of *commissive, directive, representative, declaration,* and *expressive*. He confirmed that based on structure and purpose, a distinct method to separate sorts of speech acts could be taken; we have a direct speech act. An indirect speech act occurs when there is a syntactic form in an utterance that does not match its apparent illocutionary power. In reality, communicative issues related to the untranslatability of an utterance's illocutionary force are particularly obvious when indirect speech acts are used.

In English, indirect speech acts are usually associated with more civility than direct speech acts. Apology strategies are people's techniques to execute the verbal act of apologies, such as the proclamation of remorse and compensation.

This article is based on the apology strategy taxonomy, which was developed by Trosborg (2011), and this taxonomy is regarded as the framework to investigate direct apology strategies, despite the fact that a variety of perspectives on the category of apology strategies was discussed. Trosborg (2011) classified apology strategies into five main groups and 15 subcategories, namely *direct strategies (*expression of regret, request for forgiveness, and offer of apology*), evasive strategies* (querying precondition, minimizing, and blaming someone else), *indirect strategies* (explanation or account and acknowledgment of responsibility*), remedial support* (expressing concern for the hearer, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance)*,* and *opting out* (implicit denial of responsibility, explicit denial of responsibility, justification). However, the researchers decided to investigate direct strategies or explicit strategies, which are demonstrated through explicit illocutionary force-indicator devices (IFIDs) such as *sorry, pardon, apologize, fault, excuse, regret*, and *apology* in English.

Language is studied in three different methods in systemic functional linguistics, which include semantics, phonology, and lexicogrammar. A great number of linguists regard grammar and lexis as distinct ideas; by contrast, Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) defined lexicogrammar, also entitled lexical grammar, as a term that is used to make an emphasis on the mutual connection between lexis and grammar. The three characteristics could be listed as follows: (1) Lexis is the key to language description, (2) grammar originates from lexical patterning, and (3) lexical and grammatical patterns are in lexical cores. Lexicogrammatical research cannot be one-way; therefore, grammar and lexis are involved at every stage of the investigation.

This research applied the speech act theory by Searle (1969) on apologizing, the taxonomy of apology strategies classified by Trosborg (2011) to clarify apology strategies in English conversations, and the lexicogrammar by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) to specify the lexical, grammatical realizations of utterances consisting of apologies.

Methods

Data Collection

In order to collect the direct apology strategies in English conversations, this article employed only one source of data which was the film scripts with the contexts of romance and family. Fifty films in English were produced during the period of 7 years from 2015 to 2021 with the hope that the data collected to some extent can represent the most updated methods of apologizing and catching up with the communication trends in society. The researchers collected these English films created in the United States of America, where English is spoken as a first language. American English was chosen but not others or English used by various

English-speaking countries since the researchers aimed to explore the direct apology strategies by a single country; therefore, a deeper insight into the use of apologies could be provided.

Regarding a conversation consisting of direct apology strategies with different performative parts of speech, 227 utterances were collected and included performative markers of apologies, namely *regret, afraid, excuse, apologize, apology, apology, forgive, fault,* and *sorry* in English. The researchers used Microsoft word 2019 in order to find these performative markers of *direct strategies* in film scripts in English. The utterances which comprised of these performative markers were then collected for the analysis to identify their realizations.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure of this research has the following steps. Initially, film scripts in English were downloaded, and films with English subtitles were watched. Based on the apology strategy taxonomy by Trosborg (2011), the researchers selected 227 utterances of direct apology strategies, which matched the direct apology taxonomy in Table 1. The apology strategy taxonomy by Trosborg (2011) was adapted to identify explicit apology strategies.

Table 1. Trosborg's direct apology strategy taxonomy

Direct apology strategies	Examples
Expression of Regret (EOR)	*Sorry, Maria. I regret to inform you that you failed the exam.*
Offer of Apology (OOA)	*My apologies.*
Request for Forgiveness (RFF)	*Please forgive me for what I have done.*

Subsequently, the researchers grouped the utterances to each apology marker in order to identify its lexicogrammatical realization based on the theory of lexicogrammar developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013).

The latest version of the Microsoft Excel program was chosen to analyze the data, which is known as the Microsoft Excel 2019. This version covers every single characteristic of previous versions of Excel and even more. The data statistics were, definitely, processed more exactly and were not time-consuming any longer.

Findings and Discussion

Explicit Apology Strategies in English Conversations

Direct strategies or explicit apology strategies include three categories such as *expression of regret* (EOR), *request for forgiveness* (RFF), an *offer of apology* (OOA), which made up 59.03%, 28.64%, and 12.33%, respectively. As can be seen evidently, the results were that the most frequently used strategy was EOR which was more twofold as opposed to the top two of RFF and in the region of fivefold compared to the bottom of OOA.
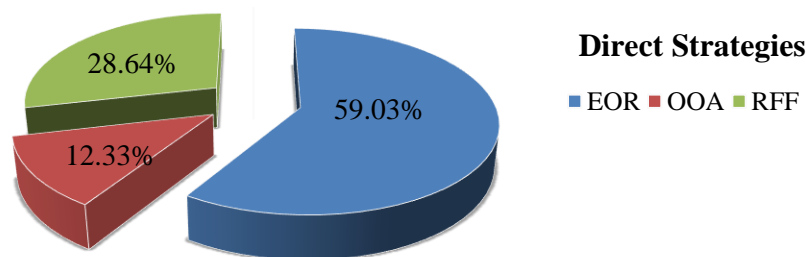
Figure 1. Frequency of direct apology strategies in English conversations

Figure 1 reveals that characters in English films took advantage of *expression of regret* the most among three strategies in *direct strategies*, which had the same results as investigated by prior research by Holmes (1990), Sari (2009), Shariati and Chamani (2010), and Nikmah (2012). According to Holmes (1990), the high frequency of this apology strategy was assumed to be related to not only its utility and effectiveness but also its simplicity when being used by apologizers. This was in accordance with Sari (2009), indicating that film characters in Pretty Women utilized *expression of regret* most frequently. Additionally, Nikmah (2012) found out that *expression of regret* and *offer of apology* ranked the top apology strategies in the film of Twilight series. It was acknowledged that *expression of regret* is a straightforward apologetic strategy where the apologizers expressed their regret for their wrongdoings. It is beneficial because it allows the apologizers to make apologies and repair destroyed relationships. Shariati and Chamani (2010) discovered that *requests for forgiveness* and *expression of regret* respectively ranked the first and bottom common apology strategies.

The next three subsections analyze instances to provide clear knowledge of direct apology strategies.

Expression of Regret

The apologizers employed performative expressions and verbs, namely *regret, afraid,* and *sorry,* to show their regret to the apologizees. The conversation below demonstrates how regret is expressed in conversation.

(Example 1).   Michael: *I'm sorry....*

                 Michael's girlfriend: *I don't want to hear you say sorry again.*

The phone conversation was between Michael and his girlfriend who have just quarreled. Michael said explicitly *I'm sorry* to his girlfriend since he thought he might make his girlfriend depressed after the quarrel. His girlfriend did not accept the apologies he made by uttering implicitly *I don't want to hear you say sorry again* and she then claimed the phone down. Michael did not call me back and at that point of time, the girl felt that he did not even care about her, and the apologies were not really sincere as it should be. She even thought about the breakup with Michael.

Request for Forgiveness

When the apologizers requested the apologizees' forgiveness, they used performative phrases or verbs including forgive*, pardon*, and *excuse*.

(Example 2).   Nicky: *Forgive me for not being able to bring you happiness but I will become your angel and always look out for you. Don't cry, honey!*

                     Judie: *How can I not cry? What you wanted was just impossible.*

The conversation occurred between the two lovers when Nicky and Judie were in the hospital, where Nicky stayed for several months for the treatment. Nicky asked his girlfriend Judie to forgive him since he could not bring her happiness by uttering *Forgive me for not being able to bring you happiness*. The girl seemed to be extremely upset and cried.

Offer of Apology

The apologizers utilized the last type of *direct strategies* when they apologized to the apologizees for their mistakes or offenses. *Apologize* and *apology* are examples of performative phrases which show an *offer of apology*.

(Example 3).   Amy: *You are right! I apologize.*

                 Amy's younger sister: *Don't apologize. Just let me go!*

The conversation was between Amy and her younger sister. Amy's parents asked her to keep their eyes on her sister and supervised her study. During the tutorial, Amy shouted at her sister since her sister did not understand the lesson even though Amy had explained it several times. After her shouting, she offered an apology to her sister by uttering *I apologize.*

Lexicogrammar Realizations of Direct Apology Utterances

This section clarified the lexico-grammatical realizations of utterances, which included the direct strategies in English conversations. It is defined by Olshtain and Cohen (1983) that *direct apology strategies* or *explicit apology strategies* are named since they employ a collection of performative expressions of apology, apology markers, or IFIDs, namely *afraid, apologize, apology, excuse, forgive, pardon, fault, regret*, and *sorry*.

What stands out from Table 2 below is that *sorry* was the most predominant word used by the characters in English films, which occupied 64.32% (n=146). *Sorry* as the most-frequently performative apology markers comprised of 9 lexico-grammatical realizations comprising of *[Sorry], [Sorry, proper name], [Sorry for noun phrase/ gerund], [Sorry to verb phrase], [I'm sorry], [I'm sorry that Clause], [I'm really sorry], [I'm truly sorry for what happened],* and *[I'm sorry about/ for noun phrase/ that Clause/ Gerund].* This occurrence was approximately 1.8 fold in comparison with the total proportion of the rest at 35.68%. Looking at the figure in more details, the three following performative phrases including *pardon* at 9.25% (n=21), *apologize* at 8.81% (n=20), and *excuse* at 7.05% (n=16) scored between 5 % and 10%. It is clear that pardon stood at the second-highest rank with four lexicogrammatical realizations, namely *[pardon], [Pardon me], [Pardon me for Gerund/ Noun phrase],* and *[I beg your pardon].* On top 3 was *apologize* with 7 realizations of *[I apologize], [I apologize that Clause], [I apologize if Clause], [I apologize for noun phrase/ that Clause/ Gerund], [I want to apologize to proper name/ pronoun], [I do apologize],* and *[I Modal verb apologize for NP/Gerund]. Regret* and *fault* came in the second and third place at 0.44% (n=1) and 0.88% (n=2), respectively.

Table 2. Occurrence of lexicogrammatical realizations of direct strategies

No.	Performative phrases	Lexicogrammatical realizations of direct strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Sorry	Sorry	26	11.45
		Sorry, *proper name*	15	6.61
		Sorry for *NP/ gerund*	10	4.41
		Sorry to *VP*	7	3.08
		I'm sorry	39	17.18
		I'm sorry that *Clause*	5	2.2
		I'm really sorry	24	10.57
		I'm terribly sorry for what happened	1	0.44
		I'm sorry about/ for *NP/* that *Clause/ Gerund*	19	8.37
			146	64.32
2	Apology	My apology	2	0.88
		My apology to *pronoun/proper name*	1	0.44
			3	1.32
3	Apologize	I apologize	3	1.32
		I apologize that *Clause*	7	3.08
		I apologize if *Clause*	1	0.44
		I apologize for *NP/ that Clause/ Gerund*	5	2.2
		I want to apologize to *proper name/ pronoun*	2	0.88
		I do apologize	1	0.44
		I Modal verb apologize for *NP/Gerund*	1	0.44
			20	8.81
4	Pardon	Pardon	8	3.53
		Pardon me	7	3.08
		Pardon me for *Gerund/ NP*	1	0.44
		I beg your pardon	5	2.2
			21	9.25
5	Excuse	Excuse me	14	6.17
		Excuse me for *Gerund/ NP*	1	0.44
		Would you excuse me?	1	0.44
			16	7.05
6	Forgive	Forgive me	4	1.76
		Forgive me for *Gerund/NP* but *Clause*	3	1.32
		Forgive me this but *Clause*	1	0.44
		Forgive my *NP*	1	0.44
		I forgive you	1	0.44
		You can forgive me	1	0.44
			11	4.85
7	Fault	My fault	2	0.88
8	Regret	I regret that *Clause*	1	0.44
9	Afraid	I'm afraid that *Clause*	7	3.08
		Total	**227**	**100**

Conclusion and Implications for Teaching and Learning

The research found out that in American English, *the expression of regret* was the direct strategy that ranked the top since the occurrence of this apology strategy was most frequently recorded. Of the performative markers for *direct strategies*, the category of *sorry* reached the top used marker.

The results of this article could be applied in teaching grammar, email writing, or cross-culture for EFL students in general. An example could be taken from the Faculty of English at Danang University of Foreign Language Studies (FE-UFLS) in particular. According to Ngo and Tran (2021), the last year students at FE-UFLS, Vietnam, had to meet the outcome standards of English language proficiency certificates, considered to be the Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency (VSTEP). VSTEP is designed and stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET) with six levels from Level 1 to Level 6, which are equivalent to 6 levels from the lowest level of A1 to the highest level of C2 based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The VSTEP writing format includes two tasks. To make it specific, task 1 requires students to write letters or emails accounting for a third of the test score, and students have to write an essay of different types in task 2. The objective of the first task is to examine test takers' interactive writing skills comprising of letters or emails of requests, applications, complaints, asking and giving information, response, and apology. This proves that verbal interactions in English, either through writing or speaking, are taken into consideration. Therefore, based on the core curriculum by MOET, FE uses commercial English materials, namely the Preliminary English Test (PET) and First Certificate in English (FCE), and compiles internal writing materials to develop interactive writing skills for first-year, second-year, and onwards, respectively. This article provides EFL students at FE a more insight into explicit apology strategies and their lexico-grammar realizations of apology utterances. Related to explicit apology strategies, knowing how to write formal and informal emails or letters to apologize and which apology strategies should be made use of when communicating in English could, to some extent, assist students not only in their study assessment but also in daily real-life interactions with people from English speaking countries. However, international tests in the English language demand a higher intellectual level than the language used in films, which is the language of everyday life.

Furthermore, there are several distinctions between the spoken and written forms of language. Therefore, when students write an informal email, they can utilize the movie language in their emails. That being aware of appropriate apology strategies when speaking in English contributes to better communication and more understanding among interlocutors. In terms of lexical and grammatical realizations of apology utterances, because grammar is one of four writing criteria, students have additional alternatives to make their writing structures diverse with a great degree of flexibility. American Culture is another course that can benefit from the findings of this study in sociopragmatics. Students have a better understanding of how people from English-speaking nations apologize in different situations based on their genders and

social status in order to behave responsibly. This research provides students with knowledge of speech act theory to improve their awareness of linguistic communication because much of a person's social life is concerned with the pragmatic act of apologizing.

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Appendix 1. Adjacency pairs in English conversations

No.	Year	Film titles	Adjacency pairs	Page no.
1	2017	Loveless	Michael: *I'm sorry....* Michael's girl friend: *I don't want to hear you say sorry again.*	17
2	2018	Can you ever forgive me	Nicky: *Forgive me for not being able to bring you happiness but I will become your angel and always look out for you. Don't cry, honey!* Judie: *How can I not cry? What you wanted was just impossible.*	45
3	2020	The father	Amy: *You are right! I apologize.* Amy's younger sister: *Don't apologize. Just let me go!*	72

A Study of Mobile Devices' Acceptance in Developing EFL Listening Skill among Vietnamese High School Learners

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: learners' acceptance, EFL listening skill, mobile devices, behavioral intention

This research explored mobile devices' acceptance in EFL listening skills among Vietnamese high school learners by utilizing the updated Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The data collection method used was semi-structured interviews and quantitative surveys with 260 students from several high schools located throughout central and southern Vietnam. It was revealed that high school learners in Vietnam had a positive perspective toward the integration of mobile devices to develop their EFL listening skills and showed their readiness to adopt these educational tools in the future to this skill, owing to the educational benefits offered by these devices and the fruitful achievement achieved by learners. The findings also indicated that the constructs of the UTAUT positively correlated with each other. Specifically, effort expectancy, performance expectancy, facilitating condition, social influence, behavioral intention, and attitude had a positive correlation with one another. Moreover, the outcomes suggested that this model could explain up to 63% of the variance in learners' behavioral intention to adopt mobile devices to enhance the development of their EFL listening skills. Furthermore, the strongest predictor of behavioral intention was attitude, followed by performance expectancy and facilitating condition. Additionally, performance expectancy was discovered to best predict attitude, subsequently facilitating condition and social influence. Based on the main findings, some implications were addressed.

1. Introduction

Listening is a skill with the involvement in receiving messages in a verbal form, so it is often regarded as a receptive skill (Harmer,1991). Undoubtedly it is a fundamental skill for language acquisition, as the only way to acquire a language is to receive linguistic input (Gilakjani &Sabouri, 2016), and listening can foster the development of other linguistic competencies

(Hamouda, 2013). However, it is widely recognized to be one of the most challenging skills for students to acquire (Tran & Duong, 2020) due to its intricate process in which "the listener takes the incoming data, the acoustic signal, and interprets that, using a wide variety of information and knowledge for a particular communicative purpose" (Buck, 2001, p29) and limited practicing opportunities in Asian countries (Hwang & Shadiey, 2014), especially in Vietnam where the primary purposes of teaching and learning English are to improve learners' grammar structures, reading, translation, and lexical skill while the value of listening tends to be underestimated (Ha & Ngo, 2021). In an effort to solve these listening-related problems, learners need significant practice (Hwang and Chen, 2013), especially with authentic listening materials which provide them with the language in real-life contexts, become familiar with natural speech tempo as well as develop motivation, particularly in the absence of threat assessment (Vandergrift, 2007).

One of the means of offering access to authentic listening materials and practice of this crucial skill is technology (Ince, 2015) which with the introduction of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), a sub-branch and an extension of CALL (Kukulsa-Hulme et al., 2015), the learning and teaching process has drastically changed. Practitioners, educators as well as academics have developed a variety of educational applications and pedagogical techniques to maximize mobile devices' educational affordances to facilitate teaching and learning processes (Hoi, 2020). However, not all educational contexts have achieved success with M-learning integration, nor have all learners demonstrated their willingness for M-learning applications (Stockwell, 2010; Fayed et al., 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to examine learners' behavioral intention toward using mobile devices in developing EFL listening skills before formally adapting them to the learning and teaching process because learners were considered as the center of M-learning instead of the technology's mobility (Lai &Zheng, 2018), and the integration of any Information System (IS) is expensive in conjunction with efforts and the time required for its integration (Kamaludin, 2018). However, surprisingly, there are limited studies on MALL acceptance among high school learners in the existing body of literature, let alone MALL acceptance in language learning, particularly in developing listening skills in the context of developing countries. Furthermore, at this point of time, findings in regard to acceptance of MALL could be hardly generalized since the outcomes of a little current research in particular aspects such as the investigation of various learning environments (Straub et al., 1997), the explanatory strength of the different technology acceptance models employed (Thomas et al., 2013), and the findings related to learners' technology adoption in industrialized and developing economies (Thomas et al., 2013) where learners with different nationalities had a different attitude toward the use of MALL (Hsu, 2013) yielded inconsistently. To bridge this gap, the current research aims to investigate the EFL learners' acceptance of using mobile devices to foster their listening skills in high schools in Vietnam and The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT, Venkatesh et al., 2003) is utilized to inform the suggested model and data analysis in this research. There are three research questions formulated and addressed in the present study as below:

Research Questions:

1. What is the Vietnamese high school students' perception toward using mobile devices in developing their EFL listening skills?

2. What are the relationships among the constructs of the UTAUT model?

3. Which factor can best predict users' behavioral intention of using mobile devices in improving listening skills?

2. Literature review

2.1 Overview of MALL

Definitions of MALL may be diverse due to the advancement of this technology and its changes in the main aims of the learning and teaching process. However, the main unique features remain unchangeable, including flexibility, accessibility, continuity, and adaptability (Loewen et al., 2019). There is a lot of literature about the benefits of MALL in education. One of the biggest advantages is "online education" (Caudill, 2007), in which learners are no longer confined to specific locations or have to sit at a desk computer. With its increasing popularity and advancing functionality, MALL has raised its potential in language learning and teaching. In fact, as stated by Lee (2005), its portability and mobility enable "learning on the move" and "anytime, anywhere learning". Learning outside the classroom has become more effective with M-learning when students can immediately relate to the real-world experience. Moreover, MALL helps learners to access the variety of input contents so that they have to incorporate the outside world with material on their gadgets and thus, receive a higher level of achievement (Nash, 2007). MALL, on the other hand, has some disadvantages in the role of an educational device. Several researchers have come to an agreement on the tiny screen of mobile devices (Begun, 2011; Mehta, 2012) or issues related to the battery charge, battery life, limited memory space, word limitation, difficulty in using these mobile tools in noisy places, teachers' difficulty in managing students with their cell phones, lack of training for teachers in designing M-learning activities (Chinnery, 2006), learners' distraction and interruption (Sevari, 2012).

In recent years, research has mainly emphasized the implementation of MALL into EFL learning and teaching. Saran et al. (2012), for instance, examined the efficacy of usage of multimedia messaging by mobile phones in assisting language students in enhancing vocabulary among 103 Turkish university students; or Kim (2013) studied Korean university learners' development of listening skills after the use of specific mobile applications, which generally showed the positive impacts of these gadgets on the process of language learning. M-learning integration, however, has not always been successful in all educational contexts, such as vocabulary learning in Japan (Stockwell, 2010), and speaking and listening skills among university learners in Qatar (Yayed, Yacoub & Hussein, 2013).

2.2 Learners 'perspectives about the usage of MALL in fostering their language learning

In terms of learners' perception of enhancing language learning, Azar et al. (2014), in addition to examining the effectiveness of MALL on the listening comprehension of EFL students, they also explored learners' attitudes toward using cell phones to develop EFL listening comprehension. The study found out that most of the respondents mentioned that MALL is useful due to its ease of access and portability. Moreover, they admitted that they were given more opportunities to negotiate with their teachers and classmates. In addition, the findings also discovered that the participants receiving cell-phone based audiobooks excelled over the control ones in terms of listening comprehension. In the same vein, Hwang et al. (2014) investigated learners' perceptions toward using M-learning systems to enhance ELF oral skills, which indicated that the majority of the respondents held positive perspectives about the usage of these systems in order to foster their speaking and listening skills, which was in line with the outcomes from the study of Ahmad (2020). Specifically, the participants in his research viewed the implementation of cell phones in the classroom context as a crucial collaboration, communication, accessing, and sharing of information.

2.3 Technology acceptance models in M-learning

According to Teo (2011), technology acceptance is the term originally used in the field of business to describe the strong relationship between the suitable applications of technology and company profits. Arning & Ziefle (2007) stated that it involves the agreement and continuity of information technology use and users' readiness to employ technology to support the given tasks (Teo, 2009). As suggested by Teo (2011), in the context of education, technology cannot complete its potential regarding capabilities when the users refuse to take advantage of it. Davis (1989) established the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), being known as one of the widely utilized acceptance models in m-learning. According to Adams (1992), with high reliability and validity, the dimensions of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitudes towards using, and users' behavioural intention were all included in TAM. However, the TAM has restrictions and is defined constantly, resulting in theoretical uncertainty and anarchy (Benbasat & Barki, 2007).

In addition, various explanatory frameworks have been utilized to examine if technology acceptance is related to its determinants. These frameworks include Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Ajzen & Fishbein's (1980) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Taylor & Todd's (1995b) Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior (DTPB), Taylor & Todd's (1995a) combination of TAM and TPB models (C- TAM TPB), Motivational Model (MM, Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1986), Triandis's (1997) Model of PC Utilization (MPCU), Rogers's (1995) Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT), Bandura's (1996) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and the Motivational Model (MM, Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1992). Despite the fact that each model is selected flexibly in specific contexts or research purposes offered by these alternatives, the important unique constructs of each model may be ignored, which leads to a great reduction of the explanatory power of each model (Hoi, 2020). Venkatesh et al. (2003) recognized this and developed the UTAUT model, a combination of the IDT, SCT, C-TAM &

TPB, MPCU, MM, TAM, TBP, and TRA. According to Marchewka et al. (2007), the integration of such eight models or UTAUT can better explain intentions regarding behavior towards technology acceptance than any model standing alone.

2.4 UTAUT

In the model developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), the four-construct UTAUT, namely facilitating condition, effort expectancy, performance expectancy, and social influence, acts as essential and direct factors in determining the behavioral intentions in using specific technology, whereas voluntariness, experience, gender, and age are moderating variables of these dimensions. This model has been popularly utilized since its emergence to assess the acceptance of technology across a variety of platforms, including MALL (Botero et al., 2018), M-learning (Abu-Al-Aish & Love, 2013; Thomas et al., 2013), podcast (Lin et al., 2013), interactive whiteboard (Tosuntas et al., 2015; Sumak & Sorgo, 2016), blogs and wikis (Avci and Askar 2012; Yueh et al., 2015), and use of websites (Van Schaik, 2009). In spite of the fact that the usefulness of UTAUT in investigating the acceptance of technology has been proved, not many studies truly evaluated the model in its entirety, including all moderating variables, components, and hypothesized relationships (Hoi, 2020). As a result, Dwivedi et al. (2019) introduced the updated UTAUT model, which dropped all moderating variables of the initial model since it was believed that the impact of those mainly relied on certain contexts and included an extra component, namely attitude. According to these researchers, it is regarded as a vital missing construct because theoretical and empirical studies proved its important role in explaining technology acceptance. Thus, in this research, the modified UTAUT model incorporates one new construct, attitude, while eliminating all moderating variables, such as voluntariness, experience, age, and gender, because the respondents are all high school students with almost identical voluntariness, experience, gender, and age.

Performance Expectancy

Performance expectancy refers to the assumption that the utilization of a specific technology will boost an individual's performance in their job in some way (Venkatesh et al., 2003). It, in the field of MALL, relates to learners' belief that the usage of mobile devices can benefit their language achievement. It is formed as a relative advantage in IDT, outcome expectations in SC, extrinsic motivation in MM, job fit in MPCU, and perceived usefulness in TAM and TAM 2. It was found to best predict behavioral intention (Hao et al., 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2003), positively affect behavioral intention (Hao et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2013; Iqbal & Qureshi, 2012; Tan, 2013), or not significantly influence behavioral intention (Botero et al., 2018).

Effort Expectancy

Effort expectancy was described as a belief that using a given technology will be simple and require little effort. For learners of MALL, it is related to their belief of ease when utilizing mobile devices in learning languages. The ease of use in IDT, TAM/ TAM 2, and the degree of complexity in MPCU, are all seen as indicators of effort expectancy. It was suggested to significantly predict behavioral intention only during the beginning periods of usage (Venkatesh

et al., 2003), but it loses its predictive power over time. Few studies showed that it positively influenced behavioral intention (Almaiah Jali & Man, 2016; Chavoshi & Hamidi, 2019). In the research of Milisecic et al. (2015), behavioral intention, in contrast, was negatively influenced by effort expectancy. On the other hand, it was also discovered to have no impact on behavioral intention in previous research (Botero et al., 2018; Iqual & Qureshi, 2012).

Facilitating condition

Being characterized as an individual's conviction that existing organization and technical infrastructure can bolster the utilization of a modern system or technology, facilitating condition was formed as compatibility in IDT, facilitating condition in MPCU, and perceived behavioral control in TPB/DTPB. It was shown to be the predictor of learners' intention only with the exclusion of effort expectancy in the model (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Tosuntas et al. (2015), however, suggested that even in the existence of effort expectancy, facilitating condition could be the predictor of behavioral intention, which supported the outcomes from the study of Botero et al. (2018). Additionally, it was shown to positively affect behavioral intention (Botero et al., 2018; Dwivedi et al., 2019; Hao et al., 2017).

Social Influence

This term was defined as how much important people could influence a decision on the employment of specific technology of an individual. In the MALL scenario, important people such as friends, teachers, or family members can affect learners' inclination to utilize mobile devices in foreign or second language learning. It is represented as subjective norms in several acceptance models, including the image in IDT, C-TAM-TPB, TPB/DTPB, TAM/ TAM2, and TRA, and it was discovered to positively influence behavioral intention (Bris-Ponce et al., 2017; Botero et al., 2018; Yeap et al., 2016), which found no support in a study of Nassuora (2013) in which no impact of social influence on behavioral intention was explored.

Attitude

Individuals' good or negative thoughts about completing a goal behavior are termed as attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1997). In technology acceptance studies, Venkatesh et al. (2003) coined the term "attitude" as an individual's overall emotional response to the employment of new technology. Although attitude was a key element in acceptance models such as TRA and TPB, it was excluded from the initial UTAUT due to spurious relationships (Hoi, 2020). In the empirical findings of several studies, the attitude was suggested to have a decisive role in technology acceptance. It was indicated to be positively affected by performance expectancy and effort expectancy (Yeap et al., 2016), social influence (Botero et al., 2018; Nassuora, 2012) and facilitating conditions (Nassuora, 2012), and positively influence behavioural intention (Botero et al., 2018; Nassuora, 2012; Yeap et al., 2016).

Behavioral intention

It was characterized as "a measure of the strength of an individual's intention to perform a specific behavior" (Ajzen, 1991) as well as a fundamental requirement for users' approval of

user behavior (Venkatesh et al., 2003). To put it another way, it was hypothesized to positively influence the actual technology use.

2.5 Research questions

The current research aims to investigate the EFL learners' acceptance of using mobile devices to foster their listening skills in high schools in Vietnam, and The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT, Venkatesh et al., 2003) is utilized to inform the suggested model and data analysis in this research. There are three research questions formulated and addressed as follows

1. What is the Vietnamese high school students' perception toward using mobile devices in developing their EFL listening skills?

2. What are the relationships among the constructs of the UTAUT model?

3. Which factor can best predict users' behavioral intention of using mobile devices in improving listening skills?

3. Methods

3.1 Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The current study recruited 260 Vietnamese students from several high schools on a voluntary basis. They were from central and southern Vietnam and were between the ages of 16 and 18. The majority of them have spent more than eight years studying English. They each own a mobile device and have prior experience utilizing them for English learning purposes. Prior to completing the study's surveys and participating in semi-structured interviews, they were asked for their consent to use their responses for the research purpose and assigned pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity.

3.2 Design of the Study

This research was conducted in a mixed-method research design, collecting data from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

3.3 Data collection & analysis

3.3.1 Questionnaires

The first section of the survey includes seven questions that were used to gauge the respondents' background information regarding their name, gender, age, school, length of English study, mobile devices ownership as well as their use of these gadgets to develop their listening skills. Secondly, learners were required to rate themselves on a five-point-Likert-scale survey, the updated UTAUT model, comprising six scales, namely behavioral intention, attitude, facilitating conditions, social influence, effort expectancy, and performance expectancy, mainly adapted from the prior research (Hoi, 2020) with a small adjustment to fit the purpose of this current research and the specific context of the study. For example, the original scale item

"Using mobile devices to learn a foreign language is a good idea" was modified into "Using mobile devices to develop EFL listening skill is a good idea", and three items from the original scale " I find it convenient to use mobile devices for speaking practice", "I find it convenient to use mobile devices for reading practice", "I find it convenient to use mobile devices for writing practice" were deleted since the target skill in this study was listening. Therefore, the performance expectancy scale consisting of five items was used to explore learners' opinions about how useful mobile devices are in developing their EFL listening skills. The effort expectancy comprising four items was employed to measure participants' belief toward the ease associated with the usage of this technology to promote their EFL listening skills. The social influence with four items was utilized to assess the influence of important people on learners' intention to use mobile devices to foster their EFL listening skills. How much the respondents believe their usage of mobile devices to develop EFL listening skills could be assisted by the availability of technical infrastructure is measured by facilitating scales, including six items. The five items in the attitude dimension may capture the attitude of respondents toward the use of gadgets in developing EFL listening skills. Finally, the intention of participants to adopt these gadgets to improve their EFL listening skills was assessed by the four items. Additionally, in order to prevent misunderstanding on the part of the participants, the questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese by two translators having a Master's degree, majoring in applied linguistics.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

In order to gauge deeper insights of the participants toward the usage of these technological tools in developing EFL listening skills as a continuation from their questionnaire's responses, twelve high school students were recruited to take part in the interview with their voluntariness, answering four guideline questions. The interview was conducted for approximately 15 minutes with each participant in their first language via Google Meet and recorded with the respondents' permission, transcribed, and translated into English.

3.3.3 Data collection

To begin with, a pilot study was conducted with three high school learners to validate the questionnaire items and check the existence of any ambiguous survey items. Therefore, the participants were required to complete the online questionnaire, then provide feedback on the items' language, comprehensibility, and clarity, followed by being further interviewed with 5 guideline questions. In the formal study, the questionnaires were distributed online by using Google form to the participants via Facebook. In an effort to maximize the likelihood of the survey reaching the target respondents, the online questionnaire was sent to the private groups on Facebook in which the members are the learners in the target high schools. In addition, the interview was conducted in their first language in order to avoid misunderstanding and allow them to express their thoughts and feelings flexibly. The interview took place for approximately 15 minutes on each participant via Google Meet, being recorded, transcribed, and translated into English.

3.3.4 Data analysis

The quantitative analysis revealed the questionnaire's statistical outcome, using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), statically describing and measuring the mean and frequency of each variable analyzed. Descriptive statistics was operated to investigate the participants' perspective on the usage of mobile devices to enable the development of their EFL listening skill. In addition, the qualitative analysis was also employed by conducting a content analysis of the interview transcripts to shed light on the learners' perception of the usage of the gadgets to foster their EFL listening skills. Additionally, in regard to the quantitative analysis, with the employment of the Pearson correlation coefficient, the relationships among the constructs of the model were examined. Finally, multiple regression was also conducted to explore which factor can best predict behavioral intention to use these devices to improve listening skills among Vietnamese high school learners.

4. Results/Findings and discussion

4.1 Results/ Findings

RQ1: What is the Vietnamese high school students' perception toward using mobile devices in developing their EFL listening skills?

Results of the UTAUT-based Questionnaire

The descriptive statistics of the UTAUT scores, containing mean scores, and standard deviation, are summarized in Table 4.1, showing the respondents held positive perspectives toward the adoption of mobile devices to improve their EFL listening skills (M= 111.13).

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the UTAUT Scores

Scale	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
UTAUT	260	31	140	111.13	17.13

Furthermore, as shown in Table 4.2, descriptive statistics showed that among six constructs of the model, facilitating condition had the highest rate (M= 23.95), followed by attitude (M= 20.55), performance expectancy (M= 19.80), behavioral intention (M= 15.88), effort expectancy (M= 15.84) while social influence had the lowest rate (M= 15.10).

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Each Dimension

Dimensions	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
PE	260	5	25	19.80	3.48
EE	260	4	20	15.84	2.84
SI	260	4	20	15.10	2.98
FC	260	7	30	23.95	4.13
ATT	260	6	25	20.55	3.66
BI	260	5	20	15.88	2.92

Results of Semi-structured Interviews

Q1: Do you think using mobile devices can improve your EFL listening skill? Why or why not?

For this question, eleven interviewees admitted that the usage of mobile devices could foster their EFL listening skills because these portable technological devices offered them chances to practice EFL listening skills without the restriction of location and time. One of their responses was excerpted as follows: "I think using mobile devices can improve my EFL listening skill because with these devices, I can practice listening to English whenever I have free time and wherever I can get an internet connection. I no longer restrict myself to sit on a desk computer or wait for EFL listening lessons at school." (S1) In addition, nine of them added that mobile devices provided them with a variety of authentic listening materials, which helped them to get familiar with natural speech rates, and offered them language in real-life situations with speakers coming from English-speaking countries. They can easily access these materials on YouTube and other English learning websites such as VOA learning English. Also, some mentioned that with the popularity of mobile apps, they could communicate online with foreigners, thus not only improving their EFL listening skills but also other linguistic competence such as speaking, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

However, one of twelve participants reported that their aural skills could not be improved with the assistance of these devices. The reason she used to support her opinion was that she usually encountered internet connection issues which led to the miss of online listening lessons or being unable to smoothly access online listening materials. Her response is excerpted as below: "I don't think mobile devices can play any crucial role in the development of my EFL listening skill because my WiFi network is unstable. Hence, I cannot access online learning materials frequently, which makes me upset and angry sometimes." (S6)

Q2: What do you like and dislike about using mobile devices to develop your EFL listening skill?

Firstly, in terms of what they like when utilizing mobile devices to enhance their EFL listening skill, all of the interviewees stated that one of the biggest benefits of adopting these devices was that they were lightweight. Therefore, they could easily carry these devices with them, which enabled them to practice listening to English anywhere at any time. Moreover, six of them added that they liked the features of mobile devices, which offered available learning apps to practice EFL listening skills online and offline, and these educational devices also allowed them to download authentic listening materials.

On the other hand, problems related to internet connection were reported by the majority of the interviewees as the most popular reason they disliked when using these portable devices in the development of their EFL listening skills. Unstable connections prevented them from online practicing listening skills. In addition, the reason for making learners not like using mobile devices to develop their EFL listening skills was unreliable sources. Some students indicated that there was a variety of listening materials on the internet, but it was hard for them to know which sources were reliable and which were unreliable. Sometimes it took them a lot of time to

find good listening materials that fit their listening proficiency (S4, S7). Another reason emerging from the interview data was related to health issues. During this time, the breakout of Covid-19, most the Vietnamese high schools shut down and were forced to move online. Therefore, three of them reported that due to the amount of time using mobile devices for their online learning, they were enduring some pains in their eyes and ears.

Q3: What factor or who will influence your decision to use mobile devices to develop your EFL listening skill? How?

All of them indicated that influencers on social media and important people such as teachers, family members, and friends positively influenced their decision to use mobile devices to foster their EFL listening skills. It seemed that they tended to use these gadgets in their English listening learning process if they were recommended or encouraged to use these educational, technological tools. However, four of them added that those people only had a partial influence on their decision. Learners seemed to be the ones who made their own decision after self-evaluating the educational affordances of these gadgets in the enhancement of their EFL listening skills.

Q4: Would you like to use mobile devices to develop your EFL listening skill in the future? Why or why not?

Eleven of the respondents stated that they would continue to use these educational devices in order to enhance their EFL listening skills because of the usefulness of these devices, which offered them various listening materials and unrestricted learning processes that they could learn anywhere in their free time. Some of them said that they could personally witness their improvement in their listening skill and other linguistic competencies. However, one interviewee reported that she would not use mobile devices to develop her aural skill in the future because of health problems caused by frequently using these devices. Moreover, she mentioned that another reason preventing her from the continuation of using these educational tools was an unstable internet connection which led to unclear sound and the interruption of her listening practice process.

RQ2: What are the relationships among the constructs of the model?

As shown in Table 4.3, the participants' behavioral intention had highly positive correlations with performance expectancy (r= .689, p<0.01), social influence (r= .622, p<0.01), facilitating condition (r= .665, p<0.01), attitude (r= .751, p<0.01); and it had moderate positive correlation with effort expectancy (r= .592, p<0.01). In addition, facilitating condition, social influence, effort expectancy and performance expectancy were demonstrated to highly correlate with attitude (r=.724, p<0.01, r=.637, p<0.01, r=.672, p<0.01, r= .695, p<0.01.

Table 4.3 Correlations among the Constructs of the Model

Variables	PE	EE	SI	FC	ATT	BI
PE	-					
EE	.698**	-				
SI	.646**	.653**	-			
FC	.650**	.740**	.694**	-		
ATT	.724**	.637**	.672**	.695**	-	
BI	.697**	.592**	.622**	.665**	.751**	-

Note:

**p < .01

RQ3: Which factor can best predict behavioral intention of using mobile devices in improving listening skills?

The outcome displayed in Table 4.4 showed that this model could explain up to 63% of the variance in learners' behavioral intention to adopt mobile devices into their EFL listening enhancement (R2=0.635, F=88.408, p<0.001). In addition, the findings revealed that the strongest and significant predictor of users' behavioral intention was attitude with β= .404, t= 6.454, p<0.001 while another significant predictor was recorded on performance expectancy (β= .256, t= 4.107, p<0.001), followed by facilitating condition (β= .192, t= 2.960, p<0.01). This could be interpreted that learners with a good attitude, high-performance expectancy, and being highly aware of the availability of the technical and organizational supports would form a positive behavioral intention to utilize these gadgets in developing their EFL listening skills. Social influence and effort expectancy, however, were non-predictors of behavioral intention.

Table 4.4 Regression Analysis of Behavioral Intention

Variables	Behavioral Intention				
	B	SE B	B	T	p
PE	.215	0.52	.256***	4.107	.000
EE	-.035	.065	-.034	-.540	.589
SI	.073	.057	.074	1.266	.207
FC	.136	.046	.192**	2.960	.003
ATT	.322	.050	.404***	6.454	.000
R2	.635				
F for change in R2	88.408				
p	.000				

Note: **p < .01, ***p < .001

In addition, performance expectancy was discovered to best predict attitude (β= .394, t= 6.873, p< 0.001), followed by facilitating condition (β= .278, t= 4.429, p< .001) and social influence (β= .213, t= 3.733, p<.001). Surprisingly, effort expectancy showed its no significant influence on attitude (β.017, t= .275, p>.05) (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Regression Analysis of Attitude

Variables	Attitude				
	B	SE B	B	T	p
PE	.414	.060	.394***	6.873	.000
EE	.022	.081	.017	.275	.783
SI	.262	.070	.213***	3.733	.000
FC	.246	.056	.278**	4.429	.000
R2	.632				
F for change in R2	109.717				
P	.000				

Note: **p < .01, ***p < .001

4.2 Discussion

The outcomes of this research revealed that the majority of the respondents held positive perspectives about the use of mobile devices to foster their EFL listening skills which were also parallel with the study of Hwang et al. (2014), Lawrence (2015), and Ahmad (2020). In addition, the qualitative results also indicated that most learners expressed their positive perceptions. They stated that these lightweight educational tools offered them chances to practice listening to English anywhere, anytime. This feedback was consistent with a previous study (Azar, 2014), suggesting that using cell phones was useful for their EFL listening development because these portable devices could be used without the restriction of location and time. Additionally, the result of the study of Hashim et al. (2015) strongly suggested that the majority of Malaysian learners in their research perceived M-learning as useful as it allowed them to learn whenever and wherever they wanted, being in line with Liu et al., (2017); Lora and Agresott (2019); Zhang, (2016), suggesting that learners perceived utilizing mobile devices in learning languages as a facilitator and the developer of various linguistic competences. Moreover, the respondents in the current research also expressed that their decision to use mobile devices to enhance their EFL listening skills could be affected by others such as teachers, family members, peers, or influencers on social media. Some of the male interviewees, however, stated that they took other people's recommendations but eventually, they made their own decision on whether they should use mobile devices to develop EFL listening skills. This was in agreement with Sabah (2016), concluding that male learners tended to be less influenced by other people than females since they did not frequently rely much on others' opinions compared to females. In addition, the findings from the semi-structured interview in this study also emerged some pitfalls in implementing mobile devices to foster EFL listening skills among Vietnamese learners, such as internet connection-related problems, which supported the outcomes from the research of Pham et al. (2022), indicating that online learners in Vietnam faced the instability of internet connection, resulting in unclear sound or difficulties in practicing the aural skill and listening to their instructors' lesson. Additionally, unreliable sources and health issues were pointed out as challenges of adopting these tools in order to foster the improvement of listening skills

among Vietnamese high school students. These happened probably because internet connection in Vietnam was not as strong as in other countries, and during the Covid-19 breakout, the majority of Vietnamese high schools were forced to shut down, resulting in shifting from offline to online classes, leading to the overuse of these educational tools for learning purposes among Vietnamese high school learners, which in turn might cause some health-related problems such as earache and eye ache.

The outcomes for the second question, the relationships among the construct of the model were investigated, and a significant positive correlation among them was reported, which could be interpreted that facilitating condition, social influence, effort expectancy, performance expectancy, and attitude tended positively influence intention to use and vice versa. Previous studies (Chung et al., 2014; Hao et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2013; Iqbal & Qureshi, 2012; Tan, 2013) also confirmed a positive correlation between behavioral intention and performance expectancy. The positive relationship between behavioral intention and effort expectancy found in the current study echoed the findings from Almaiah Jalil & Man (2016), Chavoshi & Hamidi (2019), Chung et al. (2014); the positive one between facilitating condition and behavioral intention supported Botero at al. (2018), Chung et al. (2014), Dwivedi et al. (2019) and Hao et al. (2017). Furthermore, the positive correlation between behavioral intention and social influence and behavioral intention and attitude supported the findings in Nassuora's study (2012). The findings suggested that students with a higher level of effort expectancy, social influence, performance expectancy, attitude, and facilitating condition could form a better behavioral intention and vice versa.

On the other hand, the findings being relevant to the correlation between behavioral intention and effort expectancy were in contradiction with the research conducted by Milisecic et al. (2015). In their study, a negative relationship between these two variables was found. They attributed the inconsistency to the fact that the M-learning system would be difficult and inflexible to use, and the participants in their study needed to put a lot of effort into using it. However, in the current study, even though the participants had never had official MALL instruction or training, they possessed mobile devices and showed their familiarity with the usage of these technological devices to support their language learning process and practice their EFL listening skills.

In addition, although attitude was not modeled in the initial UTAUT model, it was demonstrated to significantly correlate with effort expectancy and performance expectancy in this research, which supported the findings from Yeap et al. (2016). Additionally, a positive relationship between facilitating conditions and attitude was also revealed in this study, which was in line with Nassuora's study (2012). Furthermore, the attitude was found to positively correlate with social influence, agreeing with the previous studies (Botero et al., (2018); Nassuora (2012). Therefore, the findings indicated that learners with higher social influence, facilitating condition, effort expectancy, and performance expectancy resulted in a higher attitude toward the usage of mobile devices to develop their EFL listening skills and vice versa.

For the last question, which was related to a factor that can best predict behavioral intention, indicated that this model could account for 63% (R2= .635) of the variance explained in behavioral intention, and attitude was the best predictor of behavioral intention (β= .404, t= 6.454, p< .001) which was in agreement with what Hoi (2020) explored in his study, and joined Botero et al. (2018) supporting Dwivedi et al. (2019) that exclusion of attitude from the initial model could greatly decrease its predictive power. In addition, this study revealed that the attitude of learners significantly influenced their behavioral intention, which was consistent with what was found in the previous studies (Botero et al., 2018; Hoi, 2020; Nassuora, 2013; Thomas et al., 2013, Yeap et al., 2016). Furthermore, it demonstrated that social influence, facilitating conditions, and performance expectancy positively influenced attitude. This finding concurred with the study of Hoi (2020), implying that when students were aware of the value of mobile devices in their EFL listening development and the support of the available technical infrastructures and organization as well as the influence from important people, they tended to develop a positive attitude and, consequently behavioral intention toward adopting mobile devices to improve their EFL listening skill.

In addition, consistent with previous research, the behavioral intention was discovered to be positively influenced by performance expectancy (Hao et al., 2017; Hoi, 2020; Nassoura, 2012; Lin et al., 2013; Venkatesh, 2003). It seemed that students with high-performance expectancy tended to be more receptive to using these gadgets to develop their EFL listening skills than those with lower performance expectancy. However, the significant positive relationship found between these two variables in this study was inconsistent with (Botero et al., 2018; Yueh et al., 2015), suggesting that behavioral intention was not positively influenced by performance expectancy. A potential explanation for this inconsistency was that the respondents in this research might effectively adopt mobile devices in developing their EFL listening skills, which positively influences their behavioral intention toward integrating these technological devices to enhance their EFL listening skills. As stated in the interview part, some of the learners mentioned that they could witness the improvement in their EFL listening skills with the assistance of mobile devices, such as a better understanding of what English speakers were talking about, being able to keep up with their speaking rate, and improving their other linguistic competence even though M-learning has not been formally introduced in Vietnamese high schools. Additionally, the outcomes showed that facilitating conditions could significantly predict behavioral intention (β=.192, t= 2.960, p< 0.01), which confirmed earlier research on M-learning employment (Botero et al., 2018; Hao et al., 2017; Hoi, 2020; Iqbal & Qureshi, 2012), suggesting that when learners were provided with more facilitating conditions to use an M-learning system, they would form a greater tendency to accept M-learning. Particularly, in this study, the findings implied that Vietnamese high school learners would be willing to adopt mobile devices to develop their EFL listening skill when facilitating conditions provided was seen as being good and helpful for their EFL listening development.

However, one of the interesting findings was that effort expectancy was not a significant predictor of behavioral intention or attitude, which supported the findings from the study of

Botero et al. (2018); Hoi (2020) but inconsistent with Milosevic et al.(2015) in which effort expectancy was indicated to negatively affect learners' behavioral intention about the use of M-learning because they felt that M-learning system was difficult and inflexible, and required much effort to use it, and the study of Almaiah Jalil & Man (2016), Chavoshi & Hamidi (2019), Hao et al., (2017), Lin et al. (2013) in which behavioral intention was significantly influenced by effort expectancy. This inconsistency could be understandable because, as suggested by Venkatesh et al. (2003), effort expectancy could significantly predict behavioral intention only in the early stages of use and lost its predictive power over time. Additionally, the results from the semi-structured interview confirmed that Vietnamese high school students in the current study were not completely unaware of using mobile devices to develop their EFL listening skills even though they did not receive any formal introduction to it. However, the results in regard to effort expectancy should be treated cautiously.

More interestingly, the findings in the current research also indicated that social influence was a non-predictor of intention to use (p> .05), implying that behavioral intention to use mobile devices to develop EFL listening skills among Vietnamese high school learners would not be determined by their teachers, peers or some influencers. This outcome was consistent with Attuquayefio and Addo (2014); however, it contradicted the findings from previous studies on M-learning implementation (Bris-Ponce et al., 2017; Botero et al., 2018; Hoi, 2020; Sabah, 2016; Yeap et al., 2016), indicating that social influence positively influenced behavioral intention. An alternative explanation could be that the majority of respondents in the current research were male (168 out of 260), which might affect the results of the study because social influence has been pointed out to be a better predictor of IT usage intention for women than for men in previous studies (Morris & Venkatesh, 2000; Venkatesh et al., 2003 as cited in Wang et al., 2009). In the field of M-learning adoption, Sabah (2016) concluded that males were less affected by social influence than females because they did not usually rely much on other people's opinions compared to females. In fact, the results from the interview section of the current study also revealed that some of the interviewees were partially influenced by important people or influencers on social media, and they tended to make their own decision on whether they should use these devices to foster their EFL listening skill. However, justifying and validating the explanation propositions in this study need further investigations in future research, and the results in the current research related to social influence should also be treated with caution.

Implications

Based on the findings, some implications are addressed. First of all, attitude played a crucial role in the intention of high school students to use mobile devices to enhance their EFL listening skills. Therefore, Vietnamese high school teachers and educators should find it beneficial to shape the positive attitude of learners toward mobile devices adoption in their EFL listening enhancement. One of the possible ways to accomplish this objective is spreading the word about the effectiveness and benefits of the adoption of these educational tools in enhancing their EFL listening skill. Performance expectancy was obviously more influential in determining

behavioral intention and attitude toward the adoption of these gadgets instead of effort expectancy, given that the generation of high school learners nowadays was technology-savvy. High school learners would adopt mobile devices to develop their EFL listening skills when they were convinced that these devices could help them in their EFL listening development. Therefore, in an effort to foster the usage of mobile devices to enhance high school learners' EFL listening skills, teachers and educators should show them the useful aspects of these devices in fostering the development of their EFL listening skills, such as offering the convenience of accessing authentic listening materials anytime and anywhere, enhancing their learning process, enabling them to improve not only their listening skills but also other linguistics abilities.

Although social influence was pointed out not to predict behavioral intention, it was discovered to positively influence learners' attitudes, and the respondents in semi-structured interviews expressed that their decision to use mobile devices to develop their EFL listening skills was influenced by important people with different levels among them. Therefore, high school authorities and educators should seize the chance to encourage sharing and discussions among learners on their personal experience of using these gadgets to foster their aural skills to get students motivated about the usefulness of these devices. When learners hear their peers' stories in which they successfully adopt mobile devices to enhance this skill, they probably adopt these technologies for their learning process. Also, M-learning educators can collaborate with technology developers to create some learning content appropriate and attractive to high school learners, to make them an early adopters of mobile devices in their EFL listening development. When they make a decision on employing these devices, high school students can utilize their social influence to inspire their friends to adopt mobile devices to foster their EFL listening skills. Additionally, high school teachers can recommend MALL to learners, which in turn somehow can affect their performance expectancy.

Moreover, Vietnamese teachers should consider the usage of mobile devices to improve their instruction since the traditional approach is no longer suitable for the younger population who are accustomed to these portable devices (Suria & Kamaruzaman, 2009, as cited in Azli et al., 2018). Mobile devices are a good tool for allowing better interaction among students and between learners and teachers when they are not at school.

In addition, the result indicated that the existence of suitable facilitating conditions could impact the users' behavioral intention. These facilitating conditions, consisting of support services, high internet speed, and mobile devices with advanced technology, would enable the users to experience better with the usage of mobile devices to develop their EFL listening skills. Therefore, the technology developers should consider providing the users with the appropriateness of ICT infrastructure and promoting it with the advanced technology to make the utilization of technology smooth for them as well as to decrease health-related problems caused by overusing mobile devices.

5. Conclusion

By using the modification of UTAUT, this study successfully examined EFL high school learners' acceptance of the usage of technological devices, known as mobile devices, to foster the improvement of their listening skills. The outcomes of the current research reported that the respondents in the EFL context generally had a positive perception toward M-learning adoption as well as showed their willingness to adopt these educational tools to foster their EFL listening skills in the future due to the educational affordances of these devices offering and the fruitful achievement learners were reaping. In addition, the Pearson correlation also indicated a highly positive correlation among the constructs of the model. Moreover, multiple regression analysis revealed that the UTAUT model might account for up to 63% of the variance in students' behavioral intention. Specifically, the attitude was pointed out to be the best predictor of behavioral intention, followed by performance expectancy and facilitating condition. Additionally, the findings also revealed that performance expectancy was the best determinant of attitude, followed by facilitating conditions and social influence. Based on the findings, some pedagogical implications were provided, which can hopefully benefit high school administrators, educators and teachers, and technology developers.

The current study was thoroughly conducted; however, it inevitably had some limitations. In this section, three main limitations in this research are addressed and taken into consideration, along with some suggestions for future study. First, this study is cross-sectional, solely collecting data from the respondents' self-reports and semi-structured interviews without long-term follow-up data collection. However, perspectives can change over time because users obtain more experience (Venkatesh et al., 2003). For this reason, future studies may bridge this gap by measuring high school learners' perceptions at different points in time, which can provide insight in regard to any possible shifts in acceptance over time. Moreover, experimental research is highly recommended to be conducted as an attempt to examine the effectiveness of mobile devices' adoption to develop EFL listening skills among high school learners. Secondly, the data collected only came from some high schools in the central and southern parts of Vietnam. The outcomes of the current research can hardly be generalized to all high school students in Vietnam. Therefore, future studies should also include high school learners from the north of Vietnam, where the cultural characteristics are fairly different from the other parts of Vietnam, to gauge a more representative sample, which would make the outcomes more convincing. Thirdly, the current study dropped all the moderating variables because the participants were all high school learners, sharing fairly similar moderating characteristics. Further research can include the moderating variables such as voluntariness, experience, age, and gender, and consider any improvements in the scales of social influence and effort expectancy.

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Pre-Service Teacher Performance and High-School Student Uptake of Oral Corrective Feedback in EFL Classes in Da Nang

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates how pre-service EFL teachers at the University of Foreign Language Studies – the University of Danang (UFLS – UD) perceive and perform oral corrective feedback (OCF); as well as how high-school students respond to OCF. The questionnaire was given to a random group of 32 pre-service teachers, ten classroom observations were made, and five trainees were interviewed. The results demonstrate the types, timing, and target errors of OCF given to learners by novice teachers. Furthermore, despite some matches and mismatches between perception and in-class practices of OCF types, the majority of trainee teachers were aware of the significance and efficiency of correcting verbal errors. As a result, while there were some cases of needs-repair or no uptake produced by learners, successful repairs recorded predominated. The study concludes with practical recommendations to promote future EFL teachers' feedback-giving practices at UFLS-UD in enhancing their professional growth and students' speaking performances at high schools in Danang.

Introduction

There is no doubt that making and fixing mistakes is an important aspect of studying a foreign language. As a result, many types of research highlighting the efficiency of verbal and written comments, corrective feedback (CF) preferences, and their distribution have been carried out. English teachers care more about positive feedback concerning if, when, and how CF should be delivered (Ellis, 2017). As learners employ a word in a different context, mispronounce words, and so on, it is essential to get CF which helps them recognize and avoid mistakes in the future. Errors that are not corrected properly could become fossilized because they stick in learners' minds and somehow impede improvement toward language proficiency (Huan & Phuong, 2018).

However, some studies on this problem in Vietnam have been conducted mostly in university settings with English-major respondents. The author is aware of a lack of studies on the effects of oral corrective feedback (OCF) in Vietnam high schools, in which each English lesson lasts 45 minutes. According to Poulos and Mathony (2008), useful feedback could improve learning as well as teaching and ease the transition from school to higher education. Furthermore, in comparison to experienced teachers, EFL trainee teachers at UFLS-UD may have challenges in providing OCF to students because of lacking teaching expertise.

Thus, the goal of this research is to provide insight into how pre-service teachers perceive and deliver OCF to students during the teaching practicum. The way teenage learners in Danang modified their immediate output is also scrutinized due to their varied tastes, feelings, and reactions to educator correction.

Literature review

Overview of Speaking Skills in L2 Learning and Teaching

Speaking is regarded as a vital skill since it is required for verbal communication, explaining things, and is associated with listening (Islam et al., 2022). As reported by Bygate (2003), speaking a foreign language includes several sub-skills such as message development and management, negotiation of meaning, production, and accuracy. While accuracy relies on understanding grammar and pronunciation rules, the writer indicates that conversing in a foreign language is determined by an amalgamation of these sub-skills. Therefore, learners should acquire rules of the language and promote communication by paraphrasing, checking comprehension, or seeking information.

The term "communicative language teaching" is frequently discussed because traditional teaching failed to help learners speak in a foreign language. In light of second language acquisition studies since 1972, the aim of language learning is not to generate perfect grammar but to communicate efficiently in a specific situation. To promote fluency, language instructors are regularly recommended to design communicative speaking activities which include an information gap (Scrivener, 2005). Language competency is achieved through activities such as role-play or discussions (Teh, 2021).

In communicative teaching methods, it is important to handle grammar and fluency of English speaking individually. Accordingly, language teachers tend to move from controlled practice that emphasizes accuracy to free practice underscoring fluency.

Oral Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback (CF) is considered a form of negative feedback, which comes as a response to a learner's speech, including a language mistake. CF occurrences take account of triggers, feedback moves, and uptake (optionally). (Ellis and Sheen, 2006)

CF is also described as "any feedback provided to a learner, from any source, that contains

evidence of learner error of language form" (Russell & Spada, 2006, p. 134). In accordance with this description, CF could represent both written and verbal comments from an educator or another learner. The paper, on the other hand, discuss particularly OCF delivered by UFLS-UD pre-service teachers in a Vietnamese high-school classroom setting.

Types of OCF

Firstly, Lyster and Ranta (1997) grouped CF into six forms, subsequently developed a two-part discrepancy, and listed them into reformulations and prompts. Reformulations consist of recasts and explicit corrections giving the proper utterance, whereas the other four are referred to as "prompts." Sheen and Ellis's (2011) taxonomy retains these six types but demonstrates some new characteristics using two standards: explicit vs. implicit and input-providing vs. output-pushing. Then Lyster, Saito, and Sato (2013) upgraded the latest model of OCF classification, adding different single feedback moves on a continuum (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Classification of OCF

Clarification requests

The teacher shows he or she did not grasp what the learner said. (Ellis and Rod, 2009).

S: Yesterday I go to the beach. T: Pardon?

Recasts

Teachers correct implicitly without stating inaccurate utterances, so recasts are employed to avoid breaking down learners' communication. As a result, recasts can be either didactic or conversational. (Huan & Phuong, 2018)

Conversational recasts are commonly followed by a question tag. (Sheen and Ellis, 2011).

- S: Yesterday I go to the beach. T: "Ah, yesterday you went to the beach, didn't you?"

Didactic recasts

- S: Yesterday I go to the beach. T: "Ah, you went to the beach."

Repetition

The teachers repeat the learners' incorrect utterances in separation, usually with adjusted intonation. (Lyster and Ranta, 1997).

S: Yesterday I go to the beach. T: I go to the beach? (Accompanied by a rising tone).

Paralinguistic signal

To signal that an error is made, the teachers perform a gesture or facial expression. (Ellis and Rod, 2009)

S: Yesterday I go to the beach. T: Moving the pointer finger over the shoulder to imply the past.

Elicitation

An effort elicits the correct utterance from the learner, for instance, by asking a prompting question. (Sheen and Ellis, 2011).

S: Yesterday I go to the beach. T: Yesterday I...?

Explicit correction

A direct signal indicates that a mistake has occurred and the correction is provided (Sheen and Ellis, 2011).

T: Not "go", you should say "went".

Metalinguistic clue

Linguistic explanations of the students' speeches do not explicitly provide an accurate form (Lyster and Ranta, 1997).

S: Yesterday I go to the beach. T: You should use past tense.

Explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation

Besides notifying errors and offering the proper form, a metalinguistic comment is also provided (Sheen and Ellis, 2011).

T: You should say "went" not "go". Yesterday shows action from the past.

The timing of OCF

The timing of CF has been debited from the outset of communicative language education. While some authors state it should be supplied immediately, others believe it should be postponed (Roothooft, 2014). In order to dodge interrupting, Chastain (1971) proposed teachers could delay reviewing typical errors till the end of communicative activities, whereas Doughty (2001) claimed, that it is indispensable for CF to be delivered promptly within the framework of meaning-grounded interaction.

In this current study, the timing of OCF was divided into two:

- Immediate feedback is given promptly following a student's incorrect utterance by interrupting them.

- A delayed comment is delivered after waiting for pupils to finish their sentences. (Ellis, 2009, cited in Ölmezer-Öztürk and Öztürk, 2016, p.118).

Target errors

Errors have been codified by Mackey et al. (2000) into four categories:

- Grammar error is recorded as students use incorrect word order, tense, conjugation, as well as particles.

- Pronunciation error is when learners mispronounce words and make mistakes related to suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation.

- Vocabulary error is the inappropriate use of vocabulary or code-switching to the first language due to being short of lexical resources.

- Semantic and pragmatic errors mean although there is no grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary error, learners' communication is still misunderstood. (Hernández et al., 2012, p.68)

However, only the first three target errors were identified in the paper as they were likely to regularly arise in basic classes and expected to be observed by researchers.

Student OCF uptake and treatment sequence

Learners' immediate responses towards a given CF of the teacher are named uptake. Student uptake is categorized as repair and needs-repair uptake in Lyster and Ranta's (1997) taxonomy. Repair refers to uptake leading to the correction of a particular mistake the feedback is aimed at, whereas needs-repair uptake produces an utterance requiring further repair.

Likewise, no uptake is another instance that probably occurs. Lyster and Ranta (1997) indicate (cited in Phuong & Huan, 2018, p.117) "if there is no uptake, then there is topic continuation, which is initiated by either the same or another student (in both cases, the teacher's intention goes unheeded) or by the teacher (in which case the teacher has not provided an opportunity for uptake)". An error treatment sequence is adapted for the purpose of this present study (see Figure 2).
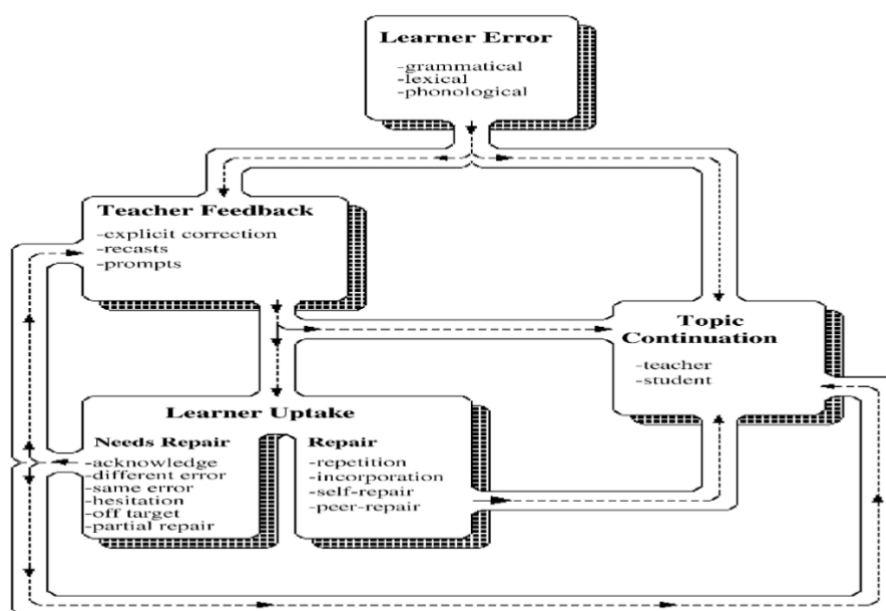
Figure 1. Error treatment sequence. Adapted from Lyster and Ranta, 1997, p.44.

Teachers' perception and practices toward OCF

In a study where 99 pre-service instructors participated in a perception survey and then ten observed, Kartchava et al. (2020) revealed recasts were the CF type preferred and carried out often in their classroom. Nevertheless, Junqueira and Kim (2013) investigated inconsistency in a novice and an experienced educator's attitudes as well as behaviors concerning the language targets of CF. Besides, as observing two experienced teachers and 50 teenagers at a private high school in the Mekong Delta, Phuong and Huan (2018) displayed that OCF types sharing the highest popularity were recasts and explicit correction. Meanwhile, clarification requests and metalinguistic explanations are beneficial for assisting learners in recognizing oral mistakes. Ha & Murray (2020) also conducted a study on six Vietnamese teachers in primary schools, who showed their high awareness of OCF advantages.

Teaching EFL has arisen as a part of language education in central Vietnam, but there was a little investigation on OCF accomplished in the environment. Thus, a study on how UFLS pre-service teachers perceive and perform OCF during the teaching practicum in Danang, along with high-school student uptake, is well-timed.

Research Questions

In order to attain research objectives, the following questions are addressed in the paper:

1. How do pre-service EFL teachers perceive oral corrective feedback?

2. How do pre-service EFL teachers give oral corrective feedback to students?

3. How oral corrective feedback is handled by high-school students?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The English teacher education program at UFLS-UD

The TEFL program at UFLS-UD is summarized as a four-year program that accepts Vietnamese students. The admission score for this program has been the highest of all available programs at UFLS. Language instruction for General English, Linguistics, and Professional courses in English. The pre-service teachers take some theoretical and practical courses during their program. Over the second year of the training, students have taken a variety of English-language classes that develop their overall proficiency and academic language skills. In the third and fourth years, students take professional courses such as English Translation Module 1 and 2, Psychology, Education Management, English Culture, and English Language Teaching Methodology. (ELTM) Module 1, 2 and 3; Language testing and assessment. In the program's final term, pre-service teachers participate in a teaching practicum in which they teach students in real classrooms from local high schools under the guidance of mentors and university supervisors. Some of them worked as English language teachers, private tutors, or Teaching Assistants while being enrolled in the TEFL program. Furthermore, during the three ELTM modules, students gained teaching experience through micro-teaching sessions in front of their peers and lecturers. The final semester of the program requires pre-service teachers to design and deliver full lessons for students while being observed. They have to prepare what they will teach ahead of time and submit lesson plans to their supervisors. During the teaching sessions, they are observed for reviews by their mentors, peers, and university supervisors.

Pre-service EFL teachers selected to participate in this research were current senior students at UFLS-UD, so they underwent the same education, training, and internship process described above.

Participants

Questionnaire respondents of the study comprised of 32 current EFL pre-service teachers (29 females and 3 males) at the UFLS - Faculty of Foreign Teacher Education. Simple random sampling was used, so Table 1 indicated the demographic features of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Study Participants (N=32)

Gender	No. (%)
Female	29 (90.63%)
Male	3 (9.38%)
Language learning experience	
English	14 (43.75%)
2 foreign languages	15 (46.88%)
More than 2 foreign languages	3 (9.38%)

Years of studying English	
7-10 years	10 (31.25%)
More than 10 years	22 (68.75%)
English proficiency (C1 & C2)	
Listening	19 (59.38%)
Reading	18 (56.25%)
Speaking	14 (43.75%)
Writing	16 (50%)
Teaching Experience	
About 1 year	14 (43.75%)
About 2 years	10 (31.25%)
About 3 years	4 (12.5%)
More than 3 years	4 (12.5%)

Afterward, the researchers randomly selected five teachers for classroom observations after getting their permission to conduct an in-class investigation. Subsequently, they are asked to join follow-up interviews at the end of their internship period. Table 2 below showcases their biographical summary.

Table 2. Biographical summary of five pre-service teachers

Trainee	Gender	English learning	English teaching experience	Overall English proficiency	Class grade
T1	Male	10 years	About 1 year	B2	Grade 11
T2	Female	More than 10 years	About 2 years (part-time teaching assistant, private tutoring session)	C1	Grade 10
T3	Female	10 years	About 1 year (part-time teaching assistant)	B2	Grade 10
T4	Female	More than 10 years	About 3 years (private tutoring lessons)	C1	Grade 11
T5	Female	More than 10 years	More than 3 years (private tutoring lessons, part-time teachers)	C1	Grade 11

During the two-month teaching practicum, five chosen trainee teachers taught more than 120 students from three different local high schools, namely Le Quy Don (LQD), Hoang Hoa Tham (HHT) and Tran Phu (TP), in the observed EFL classrooms. English has been a required subject in Danang from grade 1 to grade 12. The high-school education program includes three 45-

minute English classes every week beginning in grade 10. Students are expected to achieve a level equivalent to B1 on the CEFR-based rating scale by the end of grade 12. As a result, students in the 10th and 11th grades (at level A2) with at least five years of learning English were capable of following and responding to OCF techniques provided by teachers.

Design of the Study

In order to meet the study's aims, the authors of the paper adopted a descriptive research design to find out how UFLS-UD pre-service EFL teachers perceive and correct oral mistakes, along with how students respond to these feedbacks. In accordance with Cohen et al. (2003), questionnaires, observations, and interviews are among the most commonly utilized tools for this approach.

Data collection & analysis

A descriptive study employed a questionnaire (32 UFLS-UD pre-service EFL teachers), classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews (5 trainee teachers).

Questionnaires

An English questionnaire adapted from Ha & Murray (2020) and Gurzynski (2010) composes of two parts: background and perception. The background section consists of six personal questions about EFL pre-service teachers' language learning experience and teaching experience up to date. The second part focuses on six questions of OCF, which includes four 5-point Likert questions exploring their general perception, correction sources, types, and target errors of OCF; one multiple choice regarding timing; one open-ended question gaining an insight into instances in which OCF is unlikely to be provided. The questionnaire was conducted online via Google Forms due to the Covid-19 outbreak in Danang.

Once collected, the data were tabulated and analyzed using Ms. Excel. Having converted to a numerical rate ranging from 5 to 1, Likert-scale questions resulted in the average score indicating EFL pre-service's perception of giving OCF to their students regarding types and target errors. On the other hand, the data in percentage performed general perception, correction sources, and OCF timing. Open-ended questions revealing situations when OCF does not have a tendency to emerge were open-coded. The data is coded up by the authors, who added additional codes and categories as needed before tabulating it in percent.

Observations

Each of the five chosen pre-service teachers was observed in two 45-minute lessons (a total of ten lessons). Observation forms are combined from Phuong & Huan (2018) and Huong (2020) to explore pre-service teachers' practices and learners' uptake of OCF. It also covers the class, observation date, estimated time, and lesson topic. While observing, the author noted down students' mistakes, the teacher feedback, and learner uptake in transcript sections. Actual classroom practices were recorded so the researcher could review particular events which might be missing by play-back.

Observed English lessons were recorded, then reviewed. Authors then counted and categorized notes into target errors, correction timings, OCF strategies, and those student uptake before finally summarizing transcripts in observation sheets.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews adapted from Ha & Murray (2020) were carried out in Vietnamese three weeks after observations to delve deeper into the reasons and difficulties behind OCF choices, as well as student reactions toward teacher correction during the teaching practicum. Eight guiding interview questions were designed to clarify and elaborate on data at the two previous stages. All interviews were recorded and took place in about 20 minutes on average.

Responses were audio-recorded with the interviewees' approval. As soon as the interview sessions had finished, the data was transcribed, translated, and coded. The researcher then read and reread scripts multiple times in order to open-coded aspects of interviewees' responses to find similar and different patterns. The following step was axial coding, which "seeks to make links between categories and codes" (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 493), to explore interrelationships. Extracts and quotes from answers were employed to illustrate, support and dispute results from two previous data sets, namely questionnaire and observation.

Results and discussion

Results

Pre-service EFL teachers' perception of OCF (N=32).

Table 3. Pre-service EFL teachers' general perception of giving OCF

General perception of giving OCF	Totally agree/Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Totally disagree
It is important to give students oral feedback on language mistakes.	**90.63%**	9.37%	
Without oral feedback in the classroom, students will continue to make the same mistakes.	**84.38%**	15.62%	
Students expect to get feedback on their oral mistakes.	**68.75%**	25%	6.25%
Some errors are more important to correct than others.	**65.63%**	25%	9.37%
It is easy to give OCF in English.	40.62%	**59.38%**	

Table 3, indicates that most pre-service teachers agreed with the fact that OCF played an important role in learners' language development. T3 highlighted students would definitely benefit from teacher correction, while T2 added, *"OCF provision helps my teaching practicum*

to be more natural, informative and less script-based.”. T1 and T4 also shared like *“the internship was not that long for me to observe my students' development. What a pity!”*.

Nearly 85% of trainees emphasized a tangible advantage of OCF to reduce mistake repetition. *“Learners will not make similar mistakes”* or *“They would know what's wrong in their speech and remember it”* can be seen in T4 and T5's responses. More than 68% of respondents assumed that students expected to receive OCF on their mistakes as teachers pay attention to them. Similarly, approximately 66% supposed that there were some mistakes more crucial to amend than others. As T1 mentioned, slip-of-tongue errors were less important than mispronunciation.

However, the confidence in delivering OCF in English seemed to be vague because the figure for the "neutral" choice of this statement stood at about 59%. T2 reflected like *"I have a neutral perspective on this because it largely relies on the situation as well as the kind of mistakes learners make. And it is often difficult to correct in English, especially when students make grammatical errors; feedback in English is occasionally not clear enough for them.",* while T3 indicated that OCF provision in English depended on various aspects, such as the complexity of context, student levels, teachers' English competence and so on. T3 explained like *“it is easier to correct good learners because they would recognize mistakes immediately, compared to weaker students”* or *“it is simpler if teachers' knowledge is firm and broad enough to ensure their feedback is accurate”*. Likewise, T1 emphasized *“If I want to correct students, the most essential element is I myself have to pronounce correctly. I can't give feedback to anyone if I'm wrong.”*.

Table 4. OCF provision from three main sources

How often do you	Always/Often	Sometimes	Rarely/ Never
correct orals mistakes on your own?	**75%**	25%	
expect your students to self-correct?	**59.38%**	40.62%	
let your students correct each other?	**65.63%**	25%	9.37%

According to table 4, it is clear that pre-service teachers were likely to give OCF on their own (75%) rather than let students self-correct (59.38%) or peer correct (65.63%). All 5 interviewees shared that after eliciting, they would like students to fix errors rather than giving out correct forms themselves. Because they thought if students could recall what they had studied and fixed errors, OCF definitely contributed to their long-term memory. Though peer correction is acclaimed to be a good technique, especially in discussions and group work activities, trainee teachers preferred to correct oral mistakes by themselves, helping students improve their speaking performances. T1 elaborated, *“my feedback on students' oral mistakes was beneficial to them, especially pronunciation, my students' pronunciation during my internship had improved a lot after my correction. I also hope that other teachers will try to give oral positive feedback with encouragement so that students will be more motivated and excited during classes.”*.

Table 5. Pre-service EFL teachers' preferences for OCF types

Types of OCF	Mean value
Clarification requests	*3.25*
Conversational recasts	3.66
Didactic recasts	**3.97**
Repetition	3.47
Paralinguistic signal	3.41
Elicitation	**3.84**
Explicit correction	*3.31*
Metalinguistic clue	**3.97**
Explicit correction + metalinguistic explanation	**4.16**

As can be seen from table 5, explicit correction accompanied by a metalinguistic explanation was highly chosen as the favored OCF strategy by most pre-service teachers (M=4.16). T1 demonstrated, *"I personally believe this strategy would be more effective than others since it provides sufficient clarity and learners, hence, not only recognize mistakes but also comprehend why they are incorrect and what have to be done to correct them.".* The second preferred ones were metalinguistic clues and didactic recasts, with M=3.97 for each, but the opposite was true for clarification requests as the least favorable type (M=3.25). T3 and T4 commented, *"I find metalinguistic clues quite helpful to high-school students".* Meanwhile, clarification requests were declared intricate and confusing because students did not know what was wrong with their answers.

When it comes to recasts, T4 mentioned, *"this one seems to be useful because students would satisfy with being attended to and listened by their teachers".* The third favored technique was elicitation (M=3.84) as T1 explained, *"it helps students develop their thinking skills but it is quite time-consuming in lessons".* Elicitation was also acclaimed as T3's all-time favorite correction because students would brainstorm, self-correct and increase their power of recall to what they have learned. By contrast, the explicit correction came in the eighth place with M =3.31 as the second least favored OCF strategy. However, T5 went, *"this method was effective and time-saving for students to recognize their mistakes".*
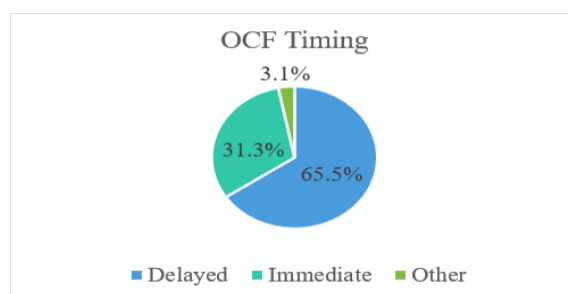

Figure 3. Pre-service EFL teachers' preferences for OCF timing

Figure 3 illustrates that delayed OCF is the most favored timing, with more than 65% of participants, followed by immediate one with a half of that. T1 compared these two timings, *"Immediate can decrease the confidence of the students, and I don't think that people want to be interrupted by any reasons, whereas delayed seems better because it shows the respect of the teachers towards students."* Besides, around 3% chose others as they highlighted their decision towards OCF timing depended on the situation, as can also be seen in T2 and T3's responses. During the knowledge formation stage, mistakes would be corrected immediately. Otherwise, teachers should wait until the practice stage. In addition, T5 drew attention to timely feedback based on target errors like *"it is essential to correct phonological mistakes immediately for students to repeat, compared to lexical and grammatical errors, delayed feedback was preferred without interrupting their flow of thought".*
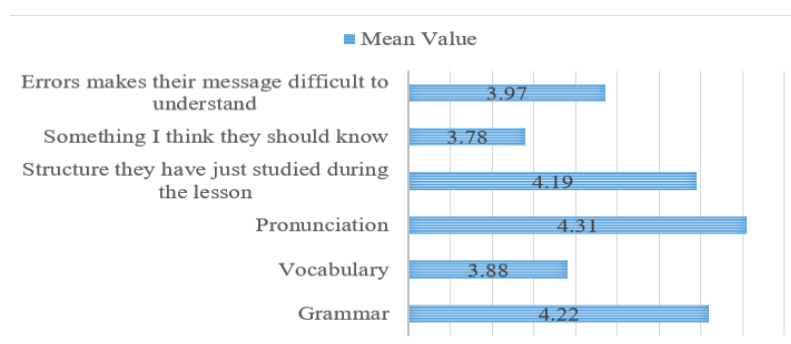
Figure 4. Pre-service EFL teachers' target errors of given OCF

Figure 4 demonstrates pronunciation and grammar are two language elements that pre-service teachers seemed to correct verbally, with M=4.31 and 4.22, respectively. T1 commented, *"Pronunciation and grammar errors are quite easy to recognize. But vocabulary errors should be carefully considered before giving feedback.".* They also paid more attention to correct "structures learners have just studied during the lesson" to achieve specific goals set in the lesson plan they prepare before each class. In contrast, "something I think they should know" is the type of mistakes on which pre-service teachers is less likely to give OCF.

Table 6. Situations when OCF is unlikely to be delivered

OCF-free situations	Frequency
Student-related	7 (17.07%)
(Not overwhelming S, interrupting S's flow of thought, hurting shy S, letting S explain ideas or content in English)	
Mistake-related	9 (21.95%)
(Minor/acceptable errors or too many errors are made)	
Context-related	9 (21.95%)
(Writing test/assignment, production stage, fluency practice)	
No situation recorded so far/ No idea on this matter	16 (39.02%)

According to table 6, it was supposed to be three main reasons why pre-service teachers decided not to correct S's oral mistakes from their teaching experience, namely, mistake, context, and student-related situations. In terms of mistakes, more than a fifth of student teachers assumed that they did not deliver OCF if errors seemed to be acceptable and minor or too many errors were made. When it comes to context, writing test or written assignment is where errors should be handled in written format, not verbally. They also tended not to give OCF in the production stage or activities focusing on fluency. Regarding students' concerns, approximately 17% of novice teachers chose not to deliver OCF because of overwhelming students or interrupting their flow of thought. Furthermore, the personality of S is also taken into account. For example, if S is too shy, pre-service teachers suffered OCF constraints. Both five interviewees confirmed student's emotional reactions were vital, as reflected in the comments below:

T1: "Yes, there are always students who are sensitive. They rarely speak in my classes, so I tend to praise their effort to speak and I correct his/her mistakes generally for the whole class without mentioning that student.".

T2: "Teachers have to consider their students' feelings. Because some learners are quite sensitive, I normally employ indirect approaches in those situations. I was split between the two at times – whether or not to correct him/her – but in a language lesson, I believe the most essential thing is for students to learn how to use the language efficiently and accurately, therefore I will always correct any errors."

T3, T4 and T5: "Though I do pay attention to students' feelings, I am going to change my ways of speaking to alleviate the degree of errors rather than ignore them."

Nevertheless, about 39% of surveyed participants claimed that they had never thought of any OCF-free situations when their students made spoken mistakes.

Pre-service teachers' OCF performance in the teaching practicum (N=5).

Before pre-service teachers' OCF delivery in actual class hours is showcased, it should be noted that ten observed lessons followed students' textbook (New English 10 and 11), which consisted of linguistic focus for every lesson, such as Speaking and Language (pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary).

Overall, **51 spoken errors** by high-school learners were identified during about seven hours of observing and recording, and **45 teacher responses** to the mistakes were made.

Table 7. OCF distribution in actual class hours

Types of OCF	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	Frequency (%)
Clarification requests	2	0	2	1	3	**8 (17.8%)**
Conversational recasts	0	0	0	0	0	*0 (0%)*
Didactic recasts	3	0	4	1	4	**12 (26.7%)**
Repetition	1	0	0	0	0	1 (2.2%)
Paralinguistic signal	0	0	1	0	0	1 (2.2%)
Elicitation	1	2	0	0	1	4 (8.9%)
Explicit correction	5	2	1	4	0	**12 (26.7%)**
Metalinguistic clue	0	1	1	2	0	4 (8.9%)
Explicit correction + metalinguistic explanation	1	0	0	0	2	3 (2.2%)
Total	13	5	9	8	10	45 (100%)

As seen in Table 7, the distribution of OCF types delivered by five teachers across ten lessons differed significantly. There were six times of no OCF recorded. Pre-services teachers made use of explicit correction and didactic recasts to correct mistakes during their actual teaching practices at an equal rate of 26.7% for each. For example, T4 uttered, *"cleaner not more clean"* to inform her S of the according grammatical error, while T2 performed the accurate stress of the new word *"infrastructure"* as soon as S mispronounced it. Following that, clarification request was utilized 17.8%. For instance, T1 replied *"yes?"* after an erroneous form occurred. In contrast, no one among five participants used conversation recasts to amend S's errors, which might be due to the fact that they have never experienced or learned about this OCF type. Besides, T1 and T5 were the ones correcting S verbally more often than others with a total of 13 and 10 times respectively; meanwhile, T2 rarely used OCF in her class with a half of T5's figure in the same amount of time. It came to a surprise that only T3 delivered OCF once in the form of a paralinguistic signal by shaking her head and frowning a bit. Though T3 praised elicitation, she did not utilize this technique in both her two observed lessons. Explicit correction along with metalinguistic clues was only employed by T1 to correct a grammatical error (conditionals type 1). T1 also demonstrated the usage of explicit correction more frequently than his counterparts, which is consistent with his comments on this type, *"in my opinion, this direct method is the most effective one, teachers can also ask students to repeat the sentence after giving feedback."*
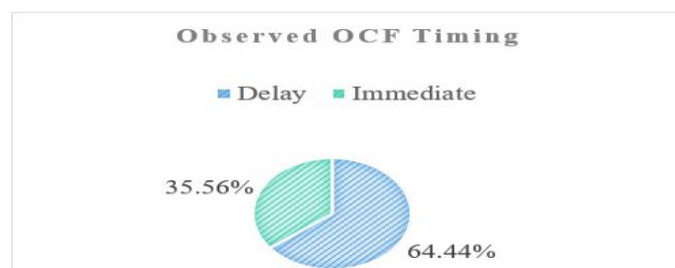
Figure 5. OCF timing in actual class hours

When it comes to the timing of OCF observed in classes, it is noticeable that more than 64% of OCF were put off till students had finished their utterances by 5 pre-service teachers. Immediate type accounted for approximately a third of the total OCF provision. T4 portrayed the equal use of both timing types, whereas the other 4 participants waited instead of interrupting Ss. At the same time, the author also noticed that during the production stage, especially when S had to give one to two minutes talks on specific topics, pre-service teachers were used to delaying the process of OCF by recording mistakes and telling the whole class later.
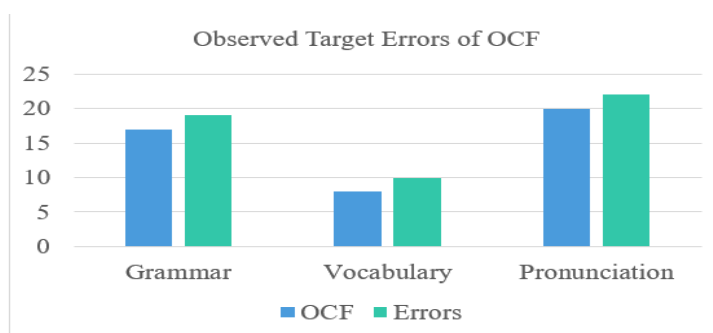
Figure 6. Observed targets errors of OCF

During the actual class hours, five pre-service teachers gave more OCF on phonological mistakes up to 20 times (around 45% of the total OCF), whilst as the number of vocabulary errors recorded was relatively low, just eight out of them were rectified by participants. Grammar errors was the target that all five novice teachers did deliver OCF to their Ss regularly. There were certain mistakes regarding vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation that pre-service teachers neither paid attention to nor had enough time to correct as they were afraid of failing to fulfill their lesson in 45-minute limit.

High-school students' uptake of OCF.

Table 8. Student uptake to OCF (N=45)

Types of student uptake	Frequency (%)
Repair	26 (57.78%)
Needs-repair	4 (8.89%)
No uptake	15 (33.33%)
Total	45 (100%)

As presented in table 8, nearly 58% of OCF resulted in student uptake as pre-service teachers successfully helped learners to give the correct form. Therefore, most high-school students in Danang were capable of handling OCF given by T. For example, T2 reminded on the importance of ending sounds, then the word *"disgrace"* was pronounced accurately by her student. Another example is that during a role-play, S came up with creative ideas but lacked lexical resources so they sometimes code-switched to Vietnamese like *"the atmosphere would be loãng hơn"*. Although T3 assisted them with equivalent English vocabulary, she noted down and finally commented that earlier they could paraphrase simply with alternative words they had studied. Ss welcomed that OCF positively.

However, no uptake accounted for more than a third of OCF moves. Some observed was mainly because trainees did not offer opportunities for student uptake. One particular case was that S was about to treat his/her mistake but T5 just called other Ss to answer the next question. Another case was that T1 moved on with the following activities without letting S correct themselves after underscoring the intonation of question tags. In terms of needs-repair, less than 5% OCF led to this type of uptake. For instance, though T4 amended how her student pronounced vowel sounds with the word *"sustainable"* about two to three times, S finally failed to deal with these errors. Overall, the researchers took notice of positive responses from students as most of them were willing and comfortable to treat their errors like whispering or repeating teacher corrections.

Discussion

Pre-service EFL teachers' perception and performance of giving OCF

Concerning pre-service EFL teachers' preferences toward OCF types, it is noted that respondents pondered they utilized explicit correction with metalinguistic clues the most because this strategy was to help students avoid ambiguity. Novice teachers thought Ss would benefit from OCF with not only accurate forms of errors but also metalinguistic comments, which might stand a reason why the metalinguistic explanation was also ranked as one of the second preferred strategies. The other high valued by pre-service teachers were didactic recasts since students would compare and figure out what their mistakes are. Also, this method would not break down their communication.

Based on the observation results from five cases, we can see briefly that there are some matches and mismatches between pre-service teachers' perceptions and in-class practices of OCF types. During the classroom, they made use of the explicit correction the most without metalinguistic feedback. It might be because time-stricken lessons forced novice teachers to reduce explanations so only correct forms were put forward. Additionally, it was interesting that clarification requests were considered to be the least voted strategy, in contrast, pre-service teachers often delivered them in classrooms. As this technique may be time-saving, and students could manage to self-repair or peer-repair. Their fondness for didactic recasts was observed in classes, showing consistency with their perception. However, although conversation recasts ranked the number four preferred type, none of five teachers practiced this OCF in actual

classrooms, which might be due to their little experience; as T3 pointed out, she used didactic recasts more regularly than conversation ones.

With regard to timing, UFLS-UD pre-service teachers gave a lot of credits to delayed OCF as they were afraid of interrupting students' flow of thought. Aside from that, they considered context, such as whether they wanted to focus on accuracy in the practice or fluency in the production stage, which would influence their selection on correction timing. This study supported Hernández et al.'s (2012) research finding that timing was determined by the intent the teacher has towards OCF.

Pronunciation was considered to be a common target mistake because two-thirds of those surveyed believed that some errors were more important than others in language development. It was consistent with Ha and Murray's (2020) conclusion teachers indicated their thought that pronunciation was likely to hinder dialogue and understanding (p. 20). However, grammar errors are more likely to be corrected by pre-service instructors than lexical ones, which contradicts the prior study. It could be due to differences in target participants (experienced vs. inexperienced teachers), student ages (primary vs. high school), and other factors.

In actual observations, there was no difference in timing and target errors. To avoid impeding students' speaking fluency, trainee teachers offered more delayed OCF. Both pronunciation and grammar mistakes were favored to be corrected, which was also observed during actual class hours when trainees faced fewer lexical errors than these two. Furthermore, surveyed participants tended to overlook oral errors based on mistakes, context, and student-related factors, but more than a third did not acknowledge these situations - in other words, the amount of spoken error correction.

High-school student uptake of OCF

With more than a haft of uptake moves observed during the observations, high-school learners were capable of handling OCF. Repairs occurred as trainees made room for student uptake, and OCF strategies were associated with classroom settings such as S' level of language proficiency, their age, and teachers' experience. This corresponds with Sheen & Younghee (2004) reference that "the rates of uptake following recasts can differ considerably depending on whether learners do or do not have a chance to uptake" (p. 268), and their capacity to perceive correction might be affected by their language competence. Students also portrayed positive reactions toward teacher correction. This trend was supported by the following reflections from all five interviewees:

T2, T4 and T5: "Most of the time, learners will repeat the sentence correctly, or I will have to instruct them to do so, but they are generally pretty optimistic and collaborative.".

T1 and T3: "Most learners recognize the error, nod their heads, and self-correct; but, for weaker learners, I have to correct them several times before they understand.".

Nonetheless, students made needs-repair utterances in certain circumstances, even when their teacher attempted to provide feedback. They recognized errors but were unsure how to reply or

even accurately mimic the teacher, particularly for sound-related mistakes. These could be fossilized errors not easily corrected over a short period of time, which need greater elaboration. As Linh (2018) pointed out, in spite of possible correction, students were unsure whether their correction was precise or satisfied teachers' expectations. However, trainees were unlikely to dwell on mistakes as no uptake reported a third due to time restrictions. Besides that, a few students simply resumed the discussion without paying attention to the teacher's correction, which may mirror their prior classroom experiences in response to OCF (Sheen & Younghee, 2004) and result in the same errors later in lessons.

Implications for teaching and learning activities to improve giving and handling OCF

Because participants had minimal familiarity with the various types of OCF and student treatment sequences, some implications are presented below to narrow this gap.

a. Professional development courses

It is critical to incorporate OCF language and strategies into professional development programs or training for pre-service teachers to participate in. For example:

• In the English Language Teaching Methodology 2 course, student teachers can learn more about whether, when, which errors, how, and who to correct, following the teaching Speaking section. Because the course aims to not only offer practical techniques to teach language elements and language skills but also supply guidelines for planning lessons. One approach is to initiate conversations about actual OCF instances, like presenting a set of OCF episodes and asking trainees to debate in the light of guiding questions (Ellis, 2009).

• In the Testing and Assessment course, as novice teachers are equipped themselves with delivering feedback, treatment sequence and learner uptake could be adopted to help them perceive feedback moves as well as immediate modifications. They should acknowledge making time for students to uptake and evaluate strategies based on modified output guidelines. To be specific, tips on discussing with students can address OCF. Higher-level learners can note down or converse about their positive and negative language learning experiences, which may cause problems. When it comes to beginners, a checklist or questionnaire could be used to explore their attitudes regarding OCF.

• At the end of the English Language Teaching Methodology 3 course, student teachers might share effective OCF strategies used with teacher educators and other trainees in their reflective journals or individual presentation. Since reflecting on OCF aids in assessing, change current feedback-giving practices and improve understanding of their teaching.

Future teachers can also take part in online workshops or sharing platforms open for Vietnamese EFL educators to get a deeper understanding of OCF and exchange feedback-giving strategies.

b. Micro-teaching sessions in three ELTM modules and the teaching practicum

Pre-service teachers are encouraged to practice various OCF strategies in micro-teaching sessions in order to become acquainted with correction procedures and evaluate their efficiency.

Furthermore, OCF-related comments from their peers, educators, and supervisors during this stage could be applied to actual practices in the teaching practicum, enriching their experience.

During the teaching practicum, trainees are motivated to observe the OCF performance of mentors in the actual classroom and consult them about students' backgrounds or preferences to facilitate error correction. Student teachers are also recommended to provide opportunities for uptake and observe feedback flows. Thus, they can tailor OCF types and timing to specific grades, classes, students, and target errors. Another way of accomplishing this is to begin with a simple indication that there is a mistake (e.g., clarification request), and if the student is incapable of self/peer-correcting, to go on with a more explicit strategy (e.g., explicit correction). As a result, novice teachers would be attentive to responses they receive from learners on their own OCF (Ellis, 2009).

c. Teaching practices with learners outside the TEFL program

Approximately two-thirds of participants had teaching jobs at local English language centers, were private tutors, or worked as teaching assistants. Therefore, pre-service teachers should inform students that making spoken errors is a sign of development in English, not something to be feared. As a result, learners may feel more comfortable sharing if OCF discourages them and hurts their emotions. Students might even find teacher correction difficult to notice and treat spoken mistakes. Regarding emotional concerns, mini-training sessions by giving remarks or asking the whole class to repeat instead of correcting individuals would be meaningful and helpful.

In addition, trainees can encourage learners to self-correct or peer-correct after teacher correction, record mistakes on their own, and later review notes. As Paul (2011, p.14) stated that "follow-up activities such as error feedback logs or revisiting an error at a later time might also support student learning.". Since students might not be used to responding to OCF, they should be instructed briefly on what to say/do to correct spoken mistakes in particular cases. When it comes to fossilized errors, it would be better to host a one-on-one conference after class to both elaborate with metalinguistic explanations or learning methods and save learners' faces.

d. High schools

The results of this present research serve as a beneficial source of reference to learner uptake for in-service teachers due to the positive responses of most students toward OCF. Teachers might conduct a short investigation into OCF preferences and learner uptake from the outset of each academic year. Paul (2011) claims developing a record of mistake-related conversations and follow-up activities makes it possible to discover the efficiency of OCF. However, these oral corrections actually help second language acquisition stays unresolved. Furthermore, both inexperienced and experienced teachers could put into practice key suggestions from the above sections, which are sequentially recapped in an attributes model from Paul (2011, p.13) to customize OCF for particular needs of learners and promote high-school students' OCF treatment as well as language learning.
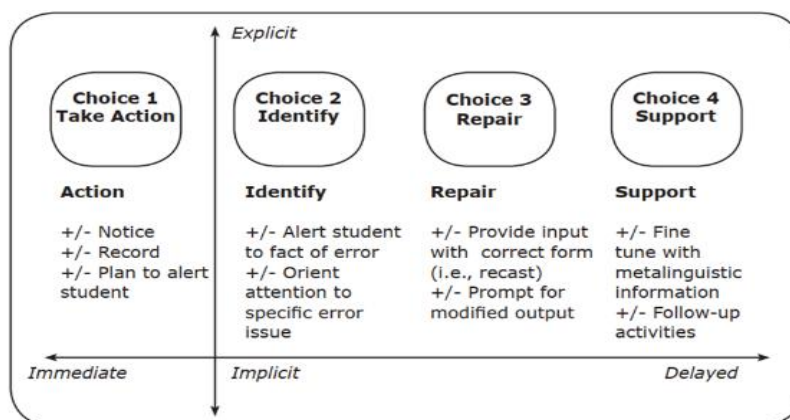
Figure 7. Errors Feedback Attributes Model (Paul 2011, p.13)

Conclusion

The study indicated UFLS-UD pre-service teachers' OCF performance in EFL lessons at Danang high schools. The majority of trainee teachers were aware of the significance and effectiveness of correcting verbal errors. One of the most remarkable findings was that explicit correction and didactic recasts were used more frequently during observed classes, whereas pre-service teachers were eager to provide metalinguistic hints to students' errors. Further research might be undertaken to examine the elements that influence novice teachers' decisions to reduce metalinguistic comments in the classroom, such as contextual and emotional cues, students' English competency, time constraints, and so on.

Because trainee teachers needed to ensure that their feedback was precise, they thought very carefully before correcting lexical errors, which the researchers noted as the lowest figure. Meanwhile, the majority of those questioned addressed pronunciation and grammar errors. Delayed OCF was thought to be more useful to students' speaking. Hence it was strongly voted for and used in actual lessons.

Furthermore, OCF provision from pre-service teachers was beneficial in assisting high-school students in recognizing their errors as uptake moves predominated. Students' emotions and feelings are also considered, but they have little influence on the decision because trainees are likely to fine-tune their remarks on oral errors somewhat. However, in order for students to create following free-error utterances, another study is necessary to investigate the distribution of student uptake following OCF techniques at a deeper level, as well as learners' prior experience with instructor correction.

Despite certain limitations in this present study, such as a small number of participants and a single one given an example of grammatical errors in the questionnaire, which might impact T's preference rankings of OCF types, another research might enlarge the size of participants and come up with more appropriate scenarios representing different target errors. Lastly, the researchers expect that the gap between future-to-be teacher perceptions and in-class practices of OCF, as well as learner uptake, would be bridged by implications proposed above.

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Biodata

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Effects of Strategy Instruction on Tertiary Students' Attitudes towards Learning English Listening Skill: An Action Research Project in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

listening strategy instruction, EFL listening strategies, learners' attitudes

Strategy instruction has been proved as an effective method to enhance the listening ability and metacognition of learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). However, little attention has been paid to how listening strategy instruction impacts the learners' attitudes towards their listening learning. This study investigated Vietnamese students' attitudes towards English listening learning after the two cycles of an action research project in which strategy instruction was employed as the intervention. A total of 30 English-majored freshmen students in a university in Vietnam expressed their attitudes through weekly diaries and focus-group interviews. The findings revealed that the students showed positive attitudes towards English listening learning in terms of all three aspects of attitudes, i.e., cognitive, behavioral, and effective. The results of the study suggest that teachers of English should implement strategy instruction in English listening classes to motivate their EFL learners. Moreover, collaboration with the teacher and among partners is advisable.

Introduction

Listening has been recognized as a very important skill in language acquisition in general and EFL learning in particular (Kurita, 2012; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Ha & Ngo, 2021). However, this skill seems to be underrated by Vietnamese educators (Nguyen, 2013; Ngo, 2015). This fact is reflected in the English testing system from primary to high schools in Vietnam, in which the listening tasks are not included in English examinations. As a result, teaching and learning this skill has received little attention from teachers and students (Nguyen, 2013; Nguyen, 2018; Ngo, 2019). Hence, the learners often encounter many difficulties in learning this skill when they enter universities to study English as their major (Ngo, 2017). It is common to hear from EFL learners that they perceive listening as the most challenging among the four macro skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking (Ngo, 2015; Ha & Ngo, 2021).

Literature shows that instructing language listening strategies can help improve learners' listening comprehension (Carrier, 2003; Graham et al., 2003; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010; Bidabadi

& Yamat, 2011; Moradi, 2013) and enhance aspects of learners' attitudes, such as their autonomy, self-regulation, confidence, motivation, satisfaction, eagerness, and so on (Ozeki, 2000; Al-Qahtani, 2013; Cohen, 2014). While many previous studies on the impacts of listening strategy instruction (LSI) on learners' listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness have been conducted, there has been little research on the impacts of LSI on the learners' attitudes towards learning English listening skills. Furthermore, learners' attitudes contribute as one vital factor in the EFL learners' success and should be paid sufficient attention as it deserves (Nguyen, 2018; López, 2017; Simasanggyaporn, 2016). Based on this gap, the present study was conducted to examine the impacts of the listening strategy instruction course on the tertiary English-majored students' attitudes towards English listening skill**s.**

Literature review

Listening strategy definition

Regarding listening strategies, hereby referred to as LSs, Vandergrift (1997), one of the pioneers in researching listening strategies, defined that LSs are conscious plans and actions that the learners take to control, understand, recall and memorize the incoming speech. Going in line with this definition, Siegel (2013, p.2) regards LSs are "conscious plans" that the learners use to control their speech, especially when they are aware that they need to compensate for incomplete input of partial understanding. After reviewing various definitions of learning strategies and listening strategies with referring to Oxford's (2017) analysis of 33 previous definitions in the field and the cognitive theory of Anderson (1985, 2009), the researcher of this study proposes a definition of LSs as follows: *listening strategies are the plans and actions first consciously taken by the learners, then automatically used by them through long-term practice to comprehend various listening activities and improve their listening proficiency.*

It can be observed from the definition that, like general learning strategies, LSs are both mental and physical guides that help learners improve their listening proficiency in the long term. Furthermore, LSs are teachable, observable, combinable, and transferable (Oxford, 2017).

Language attitudes

Together with the development of research in human languages, various definitions of language attitudes have occurred. Reviewing the features of language attitudes previously described by Eagly and Chaiken (1993), Ianos (2014) defined language attitudes as "psychological tendencies expressed by evaluating favorably or unfavorably a particular language" (p.130). Garrett (2010) defined that "an attitude is an evaluative orientation to a social object of some sort, whether it is a language, or a new government policy, etc." (p.20). Dating back, Moreno (1998) proposed a broader definition of language attitudes. Accordingly, it referred to "a manifestation of the social attitude of the individuals, distinguished by focus and specific reference to both language and its use in society; and when discussing language any type of linguistic variety is included" (p.179, cited in Ianos, 2014, p.128).

Taking language attitudes into consideration, Baker (1992, cited in Ianos, 2014) explained that the concept of language attitude was an "umbrella concept" that referred to attitude toward language, attitude to language variety and dialect, attitude toward speakers of a specific language or variety, attitude towards language learning, attitude towards learning contexts, and attitude towards

language associated with behaviors, such as language use, language maintenance or planning behaviors.

In previous studies, learners' language attitudes were shown to be "a contributing factor in achievement but only as mediated by other contributors" (Wesely, 2012, p.102). Other scholars agreed on this position in the field, such as Bernau and Garner (2008 cited in Wesely, 2012), Gardner (2005), Al-Qahtani (2013), and Asmali (2017). These studies all had a consensus that learners' attitudes, perceptions, motivation, and achievement had a supportive relationship with each other.

Learners' attitude components

Depending on the theoretical perspectives, there have been two ways of explaining the components of attitude (Walker et al., 2013).

From a multidimensional perspective, attitude consists of three domains: affect, behavior, and cognition. The affected domain refers to one's emotions toward the object, such as liked or disliked, pleased or displeased. The behavior domain means "the behavioral readiness associated with the attitude" (Walker et al., 2013, p.39). The cognition domain refers to one's belief about the object. Changes in cognition may entail changes in the attitude to the object; however, one's belief may also change independently of one's attitude.

From a unidimensional perspective, attitude is composed of four domains- affect, cognition, conation, and behavior. The affect component refers to one's feelings toward and evaluation of the attitudinal object. Cognition means one's knowledge, opinions, or beliefs about the attitudinal object. The Conation domain refers to behavioral intentions toward the object. The behavior component refers to observable actions (Walker et al., 2013).

The present study adopted the three-component model of attitudes by Ianos (2014) from a multidimensional perspective to examine the attitudes of the participants. Accordingly, the learners' attitudes are viewed as having a bidirectional relationship with its three constructs-affective, cognitive, and behavioral. In other words, the "emotions, beliefs, and behaviors can create and guide attitudes, as well as be influenced by attitudes" (Ianos, 2014, p.105). This bidirectional relationship is demonstrated in Figure 1, which serves as the framework of learners' attitudes in the present study.
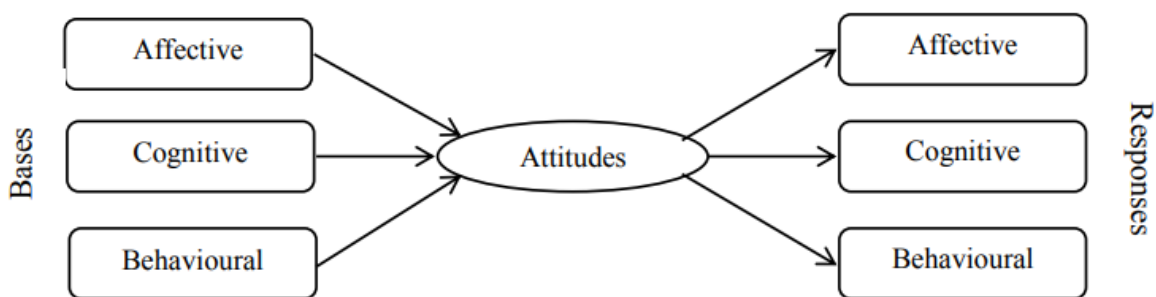

Figure 1. The relationship between attitudes and affective, cognitive, and behavioral components (Ianos, 2014, p.105)

Related studies on the effects of LSI on learners' attitudes

In 2004, the International Project on Language Learner Strategies (IPOLLS) was conducted at Oxford University with the presence of 23 scholars in the field. In the project, the researchers agreed on several aspects of learning strategies (LS), in which they concluded that language learning strategies make the use and learning of a foreign language become easier, faster, and more enjoyable (Cohen, 2014). In this international conference, a number of scholars agreed that language learning instruction (LSI) might lead to a positive attitude of the language learners when they were taught how to listen to spoken English (Cohen, 2014). Also, Kurita (2012) asserted that a metacognitive approach to teaching was effective in reducing anxiety encountered by language learners. However, there have been only a few studies on this aspect of LSI (Cohen, 2014).

Among the pioneers investigating the effects of the LSI on language learners' attitudes, Ozeki (2000) applied an LSI for female EFL students in Japan to examine listening strategies that the students frequently used and the students' perceptions of the LSI. During the study, unfamiliar strategies were introduced to the students, then the effectiveness of these strategies was evaluated from various perspectives. The study followed two steps in which the survey and interview were first employed to investigate the strategies used by the participants. Then, the listening pretest was delivered to group students into control and experiment groups. In the second step, the LSI was implemented and functioned as the intervention. Data collected from posttest, questionnaires, guided journals, and self-evaluation sheets revealed that the participants' listening comprehension, strategy use, the transfer and durability of the strategies, and the student's attitudes toward the instruction significantly improved. After the LSI, the participants showed that their motivation to listening learning and self-confidence in their listening ability increased.

Next, Graham and Macaro (2008) conducted a two-phase investigation on the effects of LSI on both learners' listening performance and self-efficacy. The participants of this study were 68 lower-intermediate French learners. Two phases were included in the study. At first, difficulties encountered by the participants were identified with the assistance of think-aloud procedures. Data in this phase showed that the students rarely used their prior knowledge and strategies to listen to the tasks. After that, these two researchers decided to apply LSI as the intervention for high-assisting group and the low-assisting group in the next phase. The listening proficiency tests were sent to the participants in each phase. Each listening test consisted of different audio recordings on the same topic. Also, a questionnaire was used to investigate the students' self-efficacy. Findings in the study show that the learners in the experiment group dramatically surpassed those in the control group in terms of listening proficiency and their confidence in listening ability. Moreover, the findings also reveal that the learners' listening comprehension has a close relationship with the changes in their self-efficacy.

In order to investigate the effects of the learning strategy instruction course on the learners' development of all four language skills, their growth in autonomy, and the teachers' roles as well as their professionalism, Tarhuni (2013) conducted action research on 61 students from three levels of proficiency (elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate). Results of the study showed that the program raised both the students' and teachers' awareness of learning strategies. The intervention helped the learners improve their skills and performance; their frequency of uses of strategies. Moreover, the program was useful for the learners to develop their learning autonomy and motivation. In addition, the intervention was also beneficial to the teachers in their professional

growth due to their exposure to the strategy instruction and collaboration with each other during the action research.

Then, to investigate the listening strategies used by ESL undergraduate learners, their motivations for studying English, their perceptions of the learning environment, learners' attitudes towards English speakers, and relationships among these variables, Al-Qahtani (2013) conducted a cross-sectional descriptive study, using the Attitudinal Measure of Learners of English as a Second Language (AMLESL) questionnaire. The study covered all three types of learning strategies (metacognitive, cognitive, social/affective strategies). The results showed that the students employed all learning strategies, which were the most frequently used cognitive strategies. The participants perceived their learning environment as positive. They felt pleased and satisfied with their instructor and the courses. They possessed a positive attitude towards English speakers. Moreover, there were significant relationships between their achievement, learning strategies, and their attitudes.

Later, Siegel (2015) conducted a three-phase action research project during a 15-week semester, using LSI as the intervention. First, top-down and bottom-up processing (Buck, 2001; Helgesen & Brown, 2007 cited in Siegel, 2015) and Anderson's (2005, cited in Siegel, 2015) sequential steps in listening were reviewed to function as the framework in his study. The classification of listening strategies proposed by O'Malley & Chamot (1990), including metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies, was employed as the conceptual framework. The study mainly focused on metacognitive and cognitive strategies. The participants of the study were upper-intermediate English level students and ESL teachers. A mixed-methods approach was conducted with a questionnaire and interview as the primary data collection instruments; and listening tests, diaries, and observation as secondary instruments. Results from the questionnaire, observation, and interviews reveal that the participants assessed the LSI positively. They possessed positive attitudes towards LS, teacher's scaffolding, materials, and listening activities. They also eagerly participated in the LSI course and employed all listening strategies taught in the course. Triangulation of questionnaires, interviews for students, listening tests, and interviews for teachers was used to examine the students' improvement in listening ability. The results in the students' listening tests and the teachers' acknowledgment showed that the students' listening comprehension significantly improved. Additionally, the research instruments also asserted that the participants of the study showed positive behaviors in listening lessons. The study suggested that the LS should be instructed in a scaffolding way that is helpful to the students.

In Vietnam, to date, Nguyen (2018) conducted research on the effects of the LSI intervention on the learners' learning habit, their perceptions, and attitudes. Under an action research design study, Nguyen (2018) integrated explicit LSI and sub-skill instructions into listening lessons to teach 20 first-year students of Business English in a university in Vietnam for eight continuous weeks. The study aimed to investigate the changes in the students' listening habits as well as their engagement and perceptions of LSI through using interviews, observations, and narrative frames. The results showed that there were positive changes in the students' learning habits and perceptions after the LSI. Firstly, the students reported not having much difficulty in listening because they actively applied suitable strategies to overcome encountered obstacles. For example, they used inferencing strategies to overcome problems related to vocabulary and comprehension and repetition for pronunciation problems. Secondly, the students increased a wide range of strategies; employed metacognitive strategies more frequently than others because they were reported as more

manageable. In terms of cognitive strategies, the learners also used inferencing and elaboration more often than summarization and note-taking strategies. Furthermore, they can combine some listening strategies. Thirdly, after the LSI, positive changes in students' learning habits were also reflected in their real-life listening. For instance, LSI could make the students become autonomous. Fourthly, the LSI and the integrated syllabus improved the participants' self-confidence in their capacity to comprehend English and their satisfaction with the listening course. The study suggested that the LSI should be extended to two consecutive sessions for the students to get familiar with the use of listening strategies. Moreover, it is advisable that the teachers of any LSI program should provide students with more listening resources to practice using listening strategies by including both academic and real-life materials. Additionally, during the LSI, the teachers were advised to present easier tasks first and then come to more complicated ones not to demotivate the learners. Next, the explicit LSI was recommended to integrate into the listening lessons, especially for less proficient listeners.

Noticeably, unlike the above-reviewed studies, the participants did not always possess positive attitudes after the LSI.

Simasanggyaporn (2016) conducted a quasi-experiment study under a mix-method approach to examine the improvements in the Thai learners' listening comprehension, their use of strategies, and self-efficacy. Total 161 EFL learners participated in the study, divided into two experimental groups and two control groups according to their proficiency level. The intervention only focused on metacognitive and cognitive strategies in the listening strategy classification proposed by Macaro (2007). The research instruments used in the study were listening tests, the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) adapted from Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), and student interviews. The findings showed that the participants' self-efficacy and motivation in all groups did not change despite the significant improvement in the learners' listening comprehension of the experiment groups. Regarding the strategy use, the experiment groups used much more listening strategies than the control groups. The study suggested that the listening strategies should be instructed to improve the language learners' listening comprehension and self-efficacy with some cautions in pedagogical methodology.

Additionally, Nogueroles (2017) conducted a study on the impacts of LSI on 38 students' strategic behaviors in Hongkong. These participants, studying Spanish as their foreign language, were assigned to one experimental group and one control group. The former one was explicitly instructed in listening strategies, while the latter one did not receive the instruction. The LSI was integrated into the regular course of the Spanish language and lasted for one 13-week semester. Planning, monitoring, and evaluation (metacognitive strategies), elaboration and inferencing (cognitive strategies), and questioning for clarification and cooperation (social/affective strategies) were selected for the LSI. The data relating to learners' strategic behaviors were collected before and after the LSI, using a self-report questionnaire. After the LSI, a number of students who received LSI reported being less satisfied with their comprehension, the outcome of the listening activity, and their capacity to fulfill the listening tasks. Also, they felt less confident about their listening ability.

Regarding their use of listening strategies, the students in both groups reported using less social/affective strategy of self-encouragement due to the reduction in their self-confidence and satisfaction. To conclude, Nogueroles (2017) suggested that the implementation of LSI should be extended in time, at least for one academic year, for the learners to have a "prolonged and

systematic attention, awareness, drills, self-assessment, and reflection" (p.12). This suggestion advocated the one given by Cross (2009), who confessed that a 10-week course in his LSI was not sufficient for his students to absorb, practice, and combine the clusters of listening strategies.

In summary, the review of previous studies shows that the LSI could support teachers in improving ESL/EFL learners' attitudes, motivation, self-confidence, and self-efficacy; however, this fact was not always true, as evident in some prior studies. Therefore, this aspect of LSI should call for more research. More importantly, the effects of LSI on the learners' attitudes have still been a debate. While several previous studies, such as Graham and Macaro (2008); Ozeki (2000); Tarhuni (2013), Qahtani (2013), Siegel (2015), and Nguyen (2018), showed that LSI helped create learners' positive attitudes; some other studies (e.g., Cross, 2009; Simasanggyaporn, 2016; Wang, 2016; Nogueroles López, 2017; Webb, 2017) released negative impacts of LSI on learners' attitudes. Therefore, whether LSI leads to positive or negative attitudes toward language learners still needs further investigation. The review of previous studies on learners' attitudes towards language learning also shows that most of the prior studies on learners' attitudes relied on quantitative research instruments such as Foreign Language Attitude Scale (FLAS, Bartley, 1970 cited in Wesely, 2012), the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB- Gardner, 1985), the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS- Horwitz et al., 1986 cited in Wesely, 2012), and the Beliefs and Attitudes Language Learning Inventory (BALLI- Horwitz, 1988 cited in Wesely, 2012) while fewer qualitative studies were conducted. The present study fills such a research gap in that it investigates attitudes "with the same components but different research methods" to get more insights (Wesely, 2012, p. 111).

Research question

This paper is part of an ongoing larger research project in which the participants' attitudes towards learning English listening skills are one of the dependent variables. Specifically, the study was aimed at seeking answers to the following research question:

> To what extent does the listening strategy-explicit instruction affect the students' attitudes towards learning English listening skills?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study was carried out in the Department of Foreign Languages Studies at a university in northern Vietnam, hereby referred to as the university. The university offers various courses such as business, English, Chinese, informatics, technology, forestry, agriculture, and teacher training for preschools, primary, secondary, and high schools. The English-majored students need to study practical skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and integrated skills in the first three academic years and advanced courses including translation, interpretation, presentation, semantics, pragmatics, phonetics, British-American cultures, the second foreign language, etc. In the current study, this site was selected to conduct the study because to date there has been no research conducted on listening strategy instruction. Moreover, it was favorable for the researcher to get access to the university to conduct her intervention program because she has been working there for over 10 years and deeply understood the setting and the participants. Previous experience in this context allowed the researcher to interact with the site and participants for a more intensive period to collect useful data.

The participants of the current study were 30 students (23 females and 7 males) in their first year studying English as a foreign language at the Department of Foreign Languages. They were selected for convenience sampling purposes. Their English level was pre-intermediate. Nine of these students, hereby coded as ST, were majored in English Teacher Education and 25 in English Linguistics. All students voluntarily took part in the study after consulting the teacher-researcher about the program thoroughly. All students were at the age of 18-20. Their mother tongue of all the participants was Vietnamese. They had spent quite a long time on learning English at high schools. Specifically, 11 students (36.7%) had spent 6-8 years and 19 students (63.3%) had spent 10-13 years studying English. Besides listening lessons in high school, they did not have many opportunities to communicate with English speakers authentically. To ensure confidentiality, the identity of the students was coded, and each student was given a pseudonym, from ST1 to ST30, for this purpose.

The intervention of this action research project was the listening strategy instruction which lasted for 9 weeks. During this period, twelve listening strategies were integrated into the syllabus and extra materials, then presented to the students. The listening strategies were planning, selective attention, directed attention, evaluating, monitoring, imagery, elaboration, summarizing, note-taking, inferencing, asking for clarification, and lowering anxiety.

The strategies were explicitly instructed to the students, which meant the teacher obviously named strategies and explained how, when, and why to use each strategy by modeling how to use each strategy, providing guided exercises, then gradually withdrawing her role from listening activities.

Design of the study

The present study was under the design of action research which consisted of four phases, namely planning, action, observation, and reflection. The study opted for the model of action research spiral proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2014), who are the major authors in this field. Although the project followed the two cycles in this model, only findings collected in cycle 1 are presented in this paper.
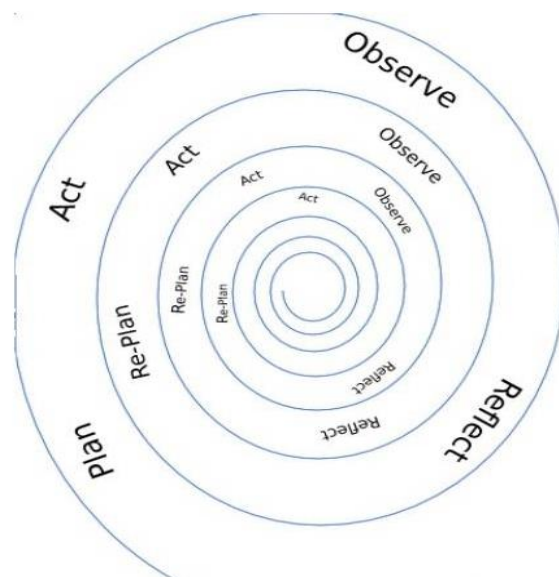

Figure 2. The action research spiral (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2014, p.19)

Data collection & analysis

In order to examine the participants' attitudes towards English listening learning, diaries and focus group interviews were employed to collect data. In fact, the items in the diaries and questions in interviews also aimed at investigating other dependent variables in the whole study; however, in this article, only data related to the students' attitudes are presented. In detail, the items in the diaries of the students in this study were built on the basis of the framework of attitudes proposed by Ianos (2014). Accordingly, the diaries consisted of items to identify three aspects, namely cognitive, behavioral, and effective. To ensure the validity of the diary items, the diary was given to two lecturers of English chosen from the university's teaching staff. Their comments and advice were taken into consideration to revise the items in the diaries before delivering them to the participants.

The focus group interview included 10 open-ended questions in which there were 5 questions investigating the three aspects of attitudes, namely cognitive, behavioral, and effective. Before the actual interviews, the interview questions were delivered to five students in the piloting step to obtain feedback on the content, the question sequence, understandability, and the duration of the interview. The pilot also aided in enhancing the validity of the questions and their constructs (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009, cited in Nguyen, 2014) because the comments from interviewees gave the interviewer opportunities to revise and refine the questions before the actual interviews.

During the nine-week project, the students were asked to write their diaries right after each listening class finished. In the last week, the students were invited to participate in the focus group interviews. All 30 students participated in writing weekly diaries, while twenty of them agreed to take part in a focus group interview at the end of the course. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews could not be conducted face to face; but through Microsoft Teams instead. Each interview lasted 70-85 minutes with five participants in each group, as suggested by Dörnyei and Griffee (2010).

The data from focus group interviews and students' diaries were in Vietnamese, the mother tongue of the participants.

To analyze the data, thematic analysis was used with the help of Nvivo (version 12). To ensure the validity of the qualitative data, three techniques were employed to determine that all information collected was accurate and appropriate. The first technique was the triangulation method (Patton, 2002, cited in Li, 2017) which helped check the consistency of findings collected from focus group interviews and students' diaries. The second technique was member check (Patton, 2002, cited in Li, 2017). The third technique was peer debriefing (Tashakkori & Teddli, 1998, cited in Li, 2017). In detail, one experienced Vietnamese lecturer from the Department of Foreign Language Studies at the university was asked to review the analyses and interpretation of the data. The data collected from the group interviews and diaries were coded independently by the researcher and the lecturer. Then, the coding of the researchers and that lecturer were compared and contrasted. The similarities and differences in their coding were counted. The inter-agreement rate of the data coding for diaries and for interviews were 89% and 83 respectively. Disagreements in coding were discussed to come to a consensus.

Findings and discussion

There were 3 themes, 8 subthemes and 36 codes emerging from data collected through students' diaries and focus group interviews. The findings are briefly summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of themes, subthemes, and codes associated with students' attitudes toward learning English listening skills

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Cognitive aspects	Students' perception of listening skills	• Students thought that listening skill was essential for academic subjects • Students thought that listening skill was important for their future career • The students perceived listening skills as difficult to be acquired • Students thought that listening was an important skill because it had great impact on other skills • At the end of the cycle, students thought that listening was interesting and resolvable
	Students' beliefs in value of LS	• LS were reported as helpful in guiding students to listen • LS helped students identify information to complete the task • Self-monitoring helped students control their listening • LS helped students to obtain information and unknown knowledge • LS kept students focused and active in listening tasks • LS were perceived as useful for academic purposes • LS were reported as useful for broader use in entertaining activities and daily conversations • LS helped students react to information quickly • LS helped motivate the students
	Students encountered obstacles	Internal obstacles: • limited vocabulary • poor grammar • concentration loss • laziness • ineffective learning routines • inappropriate use of LS External obstacles: • rate of speed • length of talks • various accents of speakers • unfamiliar topics
Behavioral aspects	Students' concentration in listening classes	• Students reported more concentrated than before LSI • Students reported they needed to improve their concentration in longer listening tasks • Sometimes concentration was still lost

		• Reasons for concentration loss were difficulties in listening process • The number of students who reported keeping concentration slightly increased in finals weeks • The motive might be good mark achievement
	Students' autonomy and self-regulation	• Students were active in expanding learning environment • Students were active in finding listening resources • Learning space went beyond listening classes: library, home, online, real life • Students used a wide range of listening materials: library books, online resources, paper dictionary, electronic dictionaries • More learning tools were employed: smart phones, laptops, Google translation, Otter application, YouTube channels • 9 students absent from classes • A number of students submitted their homework before deadline through Google classroom • Students prepared lessons before going to class • Students set up learning goals • Students' goals were locally limited.
	Students' willingness to learn and employ LS	• Most students were eager to learn and employ LS • It was convenient and comfortable to practice listening using LS • Students already had plan to use LS • Students were determined to use LS outside classes
Affective aspects	Students' satisfaction with LSI	• Students did not satisfy with their listening comprehension level • Students were satisfied with LSI • Students were satisfied with the teacher's methodology • Students were satisfied with learning materials • Students were satisfied with classroom atmosphere
	Students' self-confidence	• Before the LSI, students felt nervous and anxious • Students felt confident after the LSI • Students felt optimistic about further improvement in their listening comprehension

Cognitive aspects

❖ *Students' perceptions of listening skill*

Firstly, data from qualitative instruments show that the students perceived listening skills as a very difficult but extremely important skill. For example, examining data collected from diaries of the students in week 3, the researcher noticed that there were 27/30 students who stated that listening was very difficult while only 3 students claimed that listening was not too challenging. The following excerpts can illustrate that:

"I think that listening skills is extremely difficult because it depends on my pronunciation, my concentration, my industriousness, and my vocabulary" (ST4).

> "In my opinion, listening is a hard skill; it is not easy to learn. However, it can be practiced to improve." (ST19).

Data from interviews also supports this view. Most students (25/30) reported that they found listening one of the most difficult skills to acquire. The examples are as follows:

> "Among all skills in English, listening is still the most difficult to me. For easy tasks, listening strategies could help but for more complicated tasks, I still find it difficult." (ST13).

> "At the moment, I still find it hard to catch information. Maybe my vocabulary is so limited." (ST19).

Secondly, although listening is considered a difficult skill, data also shows that students perceived listening skill as extremely important because it has a great impact on other English skills and academic subjects. Twelve students cited the close relationship between listening and speaking in diaries in week 6. For example, student 12 described the importance of listening skills in her diary (week 6): "Listening is very important because it helps me better my pronunciation in speaking skills. Moreover, I also imitate many new words and structures to use in my speaking skill." Moreover, some other students asserted that listening skill assists them in learning reading and writing skills by enriching their vocabulary, functional grammar, and social knowledge.

Data in the interviews also show that the students perceived listening skills as essential for other academic subjects in their learning process at university and for their future careers as well.

> "I mean listening is very important because when I am good at listening in English, I can learn some more complicated subjects like Interpreting and Presentation." (ST30)

> "When I start working after graduation, listening ability, together with speaking, helps me communicate with people at the workplace and get promoted. Some of my friends who have worked in some companies shared with me that their salary depended so much on their communication capacity. I think listening skill is very important to build up a good communicative ability." (ST21)

In general, data from the students' diaries and interviews suggest that the students find listening skills really challenging but important because it sets a good foundation for their further academic development and their career opportunities as well. More importantly, the students also reported their listening skills improved thanks to the employment of listening strategies.

❖ *Students' beliefs in the value of listening strategies*

Regarding listening activities in classes, strategies were reported as very helpful in guiding the students on how to listen properly. In diaries, many of the students recognized the advantages brought by listening strategies. The following quotes help illustrate this point:

> "Strategies help me identify information to fill in and complete the task quickly. I think without them, listening would be awful to me." (ST2).

> "Self-monitoring helps me control my listening; for example, when I lose my concentration, I know how to get back the track, which I never thought about before." (ST4).

Moreover, data from group interviews also supports the findings in students' diaries. Most of the students repeatedly mentioned that they highly appreciated the value of listening strategies in the course.

> "After applying strategies, I understand more information. Some strategies also keep me focused and active in listening tasks." (ST5).

> "I recognize that strategies save my time and energy while I still can listen to information more effectively because I know I need to select information to listen for." (ST8).

Furthermore, the responses of the students demonstrate that they perceived listening strategies as useful not only for academic purposes in listening classes but also for broader uses such as in entertaining activities and daily conversations. This point can be illustrated in the students' diaries. For instance, in diaries in week 7, 17/30 students mentioned that they could react to information in their conversations with others better when they applied strategies in listening to people; 12/30 students shared that they felt more motivated to listen to English at home because they currently knew to practice, and 16/30 students shared that they could communicate better because they understood what their foreign friends or lecturers of English were speaking.

In addition, data from the interviews go in line with those from the diaries in showing that the students also recognized that strategies could be effectively applied for other circumstances in their life, such as listening to songs, news, and stories in English, watching movies and videos in English. The following excerpt is an example.

> "I feel interesting because after applying strategies you taught, I can understand several films and conversations in English. It is easier to me now." (ST4).

> "Before, I sometimes watched films or listened to songs in English, but I did not understand, so I lost my motivation. After using strategies, I practice listening to English every day and sing along with the songs in English or repeat the speakers. I usually listen to BBC, YouTube and apps that you introduced to practice listening. I find those websites understandable." (ST6).

In short, data from the students' diaries and focus group interviews indicate that the students perceived that listening strategies were valuable to their listening learning in particular and to their communication skills in general.

   ❖ *Students' encountered obstacles*

Data from the students' diaries and focus group interviews go in line with each other in showing that in cycle 1, even though the students benefited a lot from the use of listening strategies, they still faced a great number of obstacles.

Obstacles encountered by the students reported in diaries and group interviews are categorized into two types in the study, namely, internal obstacles and external obstacles. Internal obstacles include students' limited vocabulary, poor grammar, concentration loss, laziness, ineffective learning routines, and ineffective use of strategies. External obstacles consist of the rate of speed, length of talks, various accents of interlocutors, and unfamiliar topics.

Specifically, in both data collection instruments, many students reported that they did not improve their listening comprehension much because of their limited vocabulary, poor grammar, and concentration loss. For example, in week 5, eight students reported in their diaries that they knew why they could not understand much even when they found strategies useful. The reason was they

pronounced many words incorrectly; therefore, they were unable to recognize the known words in their spoken form, or there were so many new words for them. Six students complained that they often lost concentration when listening to long conversations or talks. This obstacle leads to their ineffective use of listening strategies. In other words, they forgot to employ strategies while listening and as a result, they were unable to comprehend the texts despite using strategies. Moreover, in group interviews, 7 students shared that they have not built up a system of abbreviations and signals to take notes. Three students complained that sometimes they found it hard to find out suitable strategies to each listening task. Especially, 6 students confessed that they found themselves lazy in practicing listening skills outside listening classes.

Besides internal obstacles, other challenges coming from the external environment also limited the students from utilizing listening strategies and comprehending listening texts. At least one-fifth of the students complained about the rate of speed and length of recordings. In his diary in week 6, ST 14 wrote that: "*I think the speakers talked so quickly and I could not catch up with the information stream. I also found that the last recording in task 4 was so long. That made me frustrated.*" In group interviews, 5 students reported that sometimes they found the listening topics too challenging for them because they did not have enough experience and knowledge about them. For example, ST30 said that: "*I think all the topics in the course are suitable; but some of them were quite challenging such as the lesson about Fears/ Phobia.*" Moreover, a small number of students (3 students) complained in their diaries that the various accents of interlocutors also caused trouble for them.

In summary, it was found that the participants encountered a variety of external and internal obstacles in their listening comprehension in cycle 1. These reported obstacles also serve as a basis for adjustments of the strategy instruction in cycle 2 of the project, in which the strategies trained in cycle 2 must help solve these problems encountered by the students.

Behavioral aspects

❖ *Students' concentration in listening classes*

The students reported in their diaries and interviews that they found themselves more concentrated than before, but they still needed to improve their concentration in longer listening tasks. For example, in the students' diaries in week 4, half of the students (50%) reported that they paid their attention to the listening tasks at an average and good level, while the other 15 students (50%) shared that they did not pay much attention to listening tasks. The number of students who perceived themselves as focusing on listening tasks slightly increased in some final weeks of the course. For example, in week 8, 18 students (60%) reported in their diaries that they paid average or much attention to listening activities and 12 students (40%) did not focus on their listening process. The reason might be there was a listening test in week 8; thus, they had to pay more attention to their listening process to get good marks.

When joining group interviews, most of the students also shared that sometimes they paid much attention, but sometimes they still lost their focus on the tasks. When asked about the reasons why, they explained that they still encountered difficulties in the listening process, such as long conversation, ineffective use of strategies, accents of speakers, and limited vocabulary. These obstacles, to some extent, prevented them from paying all attention to listen for comprehension.

❖ *Students' autonomy and self-regulation*

In terms of autonomy, data from both research instruments show that the participants seemed to be active in expanding their learning environment and finding resources for their extensive learning.

The students appeared to thoroughly exploit their learning environment during the project. Their learning space seemed to have gone beyond listening classes and had reached further to home study, library, online or real communications. Concurrently, they also used a wide range of learning materials such as library books, online resources, paper dictionaries, and electronic dictionaries. Besides, more learning tools were employed to assist their learning, such as smartphones and laptops along with Google Translation and Otter application. The researcher also introduced a lot of YouTube channels in which they could practice listening in levels such as Yakka Dee, Hi 5, Koala Brother, Coilbook, English Funhouse, and Super Why. Most of the students went to these channels to practice listening and entertaining themselves. ST15 shared in her diary that "*I used a lot of resources to practice listening such as online websites and channels. Sometimes, I downloaded electronic books or songs or movies to my smartphones so that I could listen everywher*e."

Regarding students' self-regulation, during this cycle, the researcher saw that the number of students who were absent from listening classes was not much (9 students during the whole cycle). However, only 4 of them asked their friends and teacher about the content of the missed lessons.

Moreover, the learners' self-regulation was expressed by the way they submitted their homework before deadlines. For homework, the researcher created a Google classroom for this class and always assigned homework on a weekly basis. After each lesson, the researcher sent the students the link to the Google classroom in which all listening tasks had been assigned. The Google classroom assisted me not only in creating an out-of-class practice resource but also in checking the time when each student submitted their homework. A number of students usually submitted their homework on time. For example, in week 7, 21/30, students handed in their homework before the deadline.

Furthermore, the participants' self-regulation was evidenced through their preparation before each listening lesson. At the beginning of cycle 1, it was not difficult to find some students who came to the class without checking the vocabulary of the lesson, practicing the pronunciation of the words, or seeking information related to the lesson in advance. However, in the final weeks of the cycle, their self-regulation changed. For example, in week 6, 21/30, students reported that they prepared the lesson in advance.

Since self-regulation is directed to a voluntary goal-setting process (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011, cited in Oxford, 2017), which means by setting personal goals, the learners create self-oriented feedbacks through which they can control the effectiveness and adapt their functioning; goal setting is found as another evidence for the students' self-regulation.

❖ *Students' willingness to learn and employ listening strategies*

Data from students' diaries and focus group interviews showed that most of the participants were eager to continue learning and employing listening strategies whenever they needed to comprehend listening tasks. Twenty-five students (corresponding to 88.6%) expressed their desire to learn and use listening strategies in the future. For instance, ST22 expressed her willingness to learn more listening strategies in her diary "*I am looking forward to the next lessons because I know you will*

teach us more strategies.” When interviewed in the group, she said that she would definitely employ listening strategies at home or when she got free time because she recognized that it is convenient and comfortable to practice listening as she could listen everywhere in various forms with the assistance of strategies.

Moreover, in interviews, some students shared that they already had a plan to use listening strategies. This was clear in their quotes: "*Strategies are beneficial, so I will use them to listen in English every day, at least 2 hour a day*” (ST21).

Furthermore, some other students determined to use listening strategies that were taught outside the listening classes, such as watching movies in English, listening to English songs, practicing English listening skills in groups, and joining some forums or groups to practice English skills. Here are some comments from them:

> “I am going to use clues like visuals, images, music, tones of people, and animated sounds in films when I cannot understand what people are speaking.” (ST16).

> “I will definitely use listening strategies you taught when I need to listen to English speaking people when I communicate with them in the English speaking club that I have just joined.” (ST13).

In short, data from students' diaries and group interviews revealed that all students were eager to learn new strategies and willing to use them in listening activities in classes and in external circumstances.

Affective aspects

❖ *Students' satisfaction with LSI course*

Data from diaries show that although most of the students did not feel satisfied with their listening comprehension level, they were satisfied with the listening strategy instruction. Some participants noted in their diaries, which can be presented below:

> “I have not improved my listening comprehension much. I just hear 30% of the text. Maybe at the moment, I have just known the listening strategies, I could not hear much correct information. But I like strategies and I think they are useful. My listening comprehension will improve.” (ST13)

> “I feel satisfied with the strategies because before attending this class, once mentioning listening skill, I felt anxious and scared, but I like listening in English now.” (ST10)

The students shared the same view in their group interviews. For example, one participant said: "I am most satisfied about the fact that I know a lot of methods to improve my listening comprehension although I do not feel satisfied with my performance in listening. I think I need more practice to use strategies automatically.” (ST6).

Furthermore, data reveal that the students were satisfied with the teacher's methodology, learning materials, and classroom atmosphere. Across the LSI course, it is not hard to see such statements like the following one:

> “When I attended this course, I saw that the way you instructed strategies was extremely different from my previous listening experience. Your teaching methodology was useful to us. Before that, the teacher of English at high school did not go deeply into listening

methods; therefore, we could not understand anything. But things changed in this course, you taught us explicitly and guided us specifically. Strategies were awesome." (ST13).

In general, the students reported in their diaries and interviews that although they did not feel satisfied with their listening comprehension, they were absolutely satisfied with the strategy instruction, teacher's teaching methodology, learning materials, and classroom atmosphere.

❖ *Students' self-confidence*

Data show that the students perceived themselves as more confident listeners as a result of using listening strategies. After being instructed how to listen in English, although the students still encountered a variety of difficulties in listening comprehension, most of them recognized the benefits provided by utilizing strategies to their confidence. In fact, the students reported in their diaries that as they employed listening strategies, they knew what to do in each step of the listening process; they were going on the right path; therefore, they felt more confident about a possible improvement in their listening comprehension. For example, ST10 stated that she became less nervous and scared when she was taking listening tests or communicating with foreign visitors with the help of strategies. When interviewed about her perceived listening comprehension improvement, ST10 at once replied that she could "picked up most of the information." In spite of the gap between her perceived and actual listening comprehension, the responses given by ST10 indicate that she obtained a great level of self-confidence in listening to the English language.

More importantly, the students show strong confidence about their potential improvement in their listening ability in the future. In other words, they felt more confident about the possibility that they may become proficient in listening if they apply strategies. Some excerpts from the respondents are as follows:

"I feel more confident about listening in English now that I have been using strategies to listen in English for some time. I think I can listen better in English, and I feel more confident about my ability." (ST12).

"I know that currently my listening comprehension ability is not good; but I will apply strategies you taught, and I believe I will improve my listening skill in the future. The matter is time only." (ST16).

Discussion

Overall, the current study participants have positive attitudes toward strategy instruction and learning English listening skills. The discussion mainly focuses on students' cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects in the students attitudes.

Cognitive aspects

Firstly, most of the students perceived listening skills as a very difficult but extremely important skill. This perception goes in line with that of participants in previous studies conducted by Graham and Macaro (2008), Kurita (2012), Siegel (2013), Graham (2017), and Nogueroles (2017). The participants in those studies were at a lower-intermediate level, similar to the students in the current study. Although they were aware of the importance of listening skills, they found that listening was the most difficult skill to learn and improve. According to Hasan (2000), the perceptions of foreign language learners depend on their experiences in learning that language. Importantly, the learners

often perceive listening skills as challenging if they use ineffective listening strategies, lack of exposure to that skill, students' limited knowledge in that language, learners' attitudes, and other challenges from the speakers. Hence, the reason why the students found listening the most challenging skill can be the fact that at the beginning of the project, they did not know many strategies to listen, their time of learning listening skills was not sufficient, and they still encountered many difficulties in this skill.

Secondly, regarding the difficulties encountered in the project, the students reported that they faced a great number of difficulties such as limited vocabulary, poor grammar, concentration loss, laziness, ineffective learning routines, ineffective use of strategies (internal obstacles); rate of speech, length of tasks, various accents, unfamiliar topics (external obstacles). These difficulties were also found in Underwood's (1989, cited in Oxford, 2017) study in which learners' difficulties in listening comprehension were categorized into seven groups: (a) speed of the talk, (b) insufficient repetition, (c) limited vocabulary, (d) unknown signal words, (e) unable to interpret input, (f) concentration loss, and (g) poor habits. However, the obstacles reported by the participants in the current study are different from those found in Chen's study (2005, cited in Oxford, 2017). Chen investigated listening strategies used by Taiwanese college EFL learners to overcome barriers in a listening strategy instruction using Anderson's cognitive information-processing framework (1983). This researcher found several obstacles encountered by his students, which were (1) their dysfunctional beliefs and habits in listening comprehension, (2) their anxiety, frustration, and resistance which reduce their motivation in strategy learning; (3) complex and unorganized listening materials; (4) information-processing challenges such as distractions, insufficient short-term memory, misinterpreting; (5) performing inconsistency. These difficulties were not reported by the participants in the current study; though; it is reasonable to agree with Chen's suggestion that to deal with the problems in the students' listening comprehension, both the teacher and the students need to analyze the problems and their causes straightforwardly, focus on making use of appropriate strategies for specific listening tasks. In other words, certain general strategies such as problem-identification and monitoring should be used to analyze the obstacles along with specific strategies corresponding to each type of obstacle.

Thirdly, these findings recommend that teachers of listening skills should carefully select strategies corresponding to each type of obstacle to aid their students overcome those difficulties. This also was advocated by other researchers in the literature, such as Hasan (2000), Li (2017), and Nguyen (2018). Moreover, it is advisable to extend the project to include another cycle so that the students can have sufficient time to get familiar with listening strategies and use these strategies to solve their problems.

Behavioral aspects

Overall, the students in the project had positive behaviors in the LSI, reflected in their increasing concentration level, their autonomy and self-regulation, and their willingness to learn and employ listening strategies.

Regarding the students' concentration, the students reported that they kept more concentrated on the listening tasks in comparison with before the LSI; however, sometimes, they still lost their focus because of the difficulties they faced during the listening process. They thought that they needed more practice in longer listening tasks. A number of students reported their ability to keep

concentration slightly increased in the finishing weeks of the project because they desired to achieve good marks in listening tests.

This finding supports other studies done by Istiyani (2014), and Yeldham and Gruba (2016) in indicating that the listening strategy instruction could develop language learners' concentration, motivation, and ability to control their listening. Moreover, "the strategy was useful in increasing their attention and being focus on teacher's explanation" (Istiyani, 2014, p.105). This finding suggests that to overcome difficulties related to learners' concentration loss, teachers should instruct their learners on how to employ such strategies as monitoring and problem identification.

In terms of students' autonomy and self-regulation, the students seemed to be active in expanding their learning environment and finding resources for listening. Specifically, their learning space went beyond the listening classes to the university library, at their home, in online applications, and in real life. Also, they made use of a wide range of listening materials such as library books, websites, paper, and electronic dictionaries, social media, modern learning tools, etc. Noticeably, some students were successful in creating opportunities to communicate with English speakers. They also became more independent of the teacher because they were aware of their active role in their learning process.

Furthermore, the number of students who were absent from listening classes was also reduced over time. If absent from listening classes, those students demonstrated a sense of responsibility by asking for permission or reporting the reasons. Most of the students submitted their assignments before the deadline and carefully prepared the lessons before listening classes. This finding is the evidence showing that after the LSI, the students became more autonomous and self-regulated.

In literature, learners' autonomy and self-regulation are defined as the learners' ability to control and perform the language tasks independently and take charge of their own learning regardless of situations (Benson, 2011; Little, 2007). More specifically, Cohen (2014) explained that autonomous language learning refers to a learning style whose primary goal is to make self-motivated students who can control of when, how, and what to learn and learn successfully, independently of their teachers and possibly outside the classroom environment. The learners' autonomy of strategy choice is reflected through their active role in determining the learning goals. Selecting strategies to deal with learning tasks without the presence of the teacher is "crucial for lifelong language learning" (Cohen, 2014, p.33). For these characteristics of autonomy and self-regulation, it is obvious that the students in the current study expressed all these identities.

One of the most important aims of strategy training is not only to develop the students' listening performance but also to increase their degree of autonomy (Irgin & Erten, 2020). This is the key purpose of the LSI (Oxford, 2017). On the other hand, strategic behavior encourages language users to be more responsible in their own learning and lets them deploy higher-level strategic thinking skills (Irgin & Erten, 2020). This finding suggests that listening strategy instruction is a great way to make the learners become more autonomous and self-regulated.

On the one hand, this finding supports many researchers such as Oxford (1990, 2017), Little (2007); Griffiths (2013); Irgin and Erten (2020) in asserting that autonomy has a very strong relationship with learning strategies. In turn, Oxford (2003, 2017) noted many times that autonomy contributes to learners' use of strategies, and the use of strategies also strengthens autonomy. Furthermore, Oxford (2017, p.34) added, "self-regulation and related terms, such as self-direction, self-responsibility, autonomy (…) is a key purpose of L2 learning strategy use; however, this aspect

had not been much mentioned in the literature". This finding calls for further investigation into the effects of LSI on the learners' development of autonomy and self-regulation.

On the other hand, this finding contradicts Kubota' (2001) theory because he attributed autonomy to features of the students from individualist cultures in Western countries and viewed students from collectivist cultures such as Asian learners, as "passive, docile, and compliant" (Kubota, 2001 cited in Oxford, 2017, p.19). Obviously, the students in the project were very proactive, critical, and responsible for their learning. It is advisable that EFL learners from similar contexts as those in the current study should be encouraged to seek "cultural alternatives" to such views of autonomy, as suggested by Pennycook (1997, cited in Oxford, 2017).

In terms of the students' engagement in the LSI, the students reported that they were eager to learn new strategies to employ them in their listening comprehension in listening classes and other circumstances until they can use them unconsciously. This finding indicates that the learners of the project, to some extent, pose a great motivation in applying strategies and learning listening skills. This finding supports what was found in Istiyani (2014), Siegel (2015), Li (2017), and Nguyen (2018). After using a number of listening strategies, the participants in these studies highly appreciated the usefulness of such strategies to their listening ability, then many of them acknowledged that they would like to know more strategies to transfer to other listening situations. However, this finding is opposed to what Cohen (2014) stated in his study that some students showed their reluctance to apply new strategies because they preferred to rely on the strategies that they already employed, or they might not be convinced of the benefits of the strategy instruction. Some other learners had negative reactions to the strategy instruction because of their cultural or personal beliefs about the teacher's role in the classroom and "resisted the increased responsibility for learning which accompanies strategy instruction" (p.151). This result also suggests implementing the strategy-based instruction model employed in this study for further study application because it helps create EFL learners' awareness of the listening process and fosters their independence in controlling their own learning. In this way, the learners become motivated and engaged in the listening process, as suggested by Zobler (2010) and Vandergrift (2004).

Affective aspects

In terms of students' satisfaction, most of the students reported that they did not satisfy with their listening comprehension level; however, they felt satisfied with the LSI, the teacher's methodology, listening materials, and the listening class atmosphere.

On the one hand, this finding echoes with Al-Qahtani's (2013) study, in which the participants revealed that they felt quite satisfied with their teacher's teaching methodology and the courses. Specifically, they were satisfied with the teacher's support, encouragement, constructive feedback, and the interesting learning materials and environment. Similarly, participants in Li's (2017) study also reported that they built up their satisfaction and confidence when they discovered that they were able to understand how to listen and apply listening strategies in various listening situations. A similar finding was also reported in Nguyen's (2018) and Irgin and Erten's (2020) study. After receiving LSI integrated into the syllabus, the participants shared that they felt more confident in their ability to comprehend English and were satisfied with it the listening course.

On the other hand, some opposing findings were also found in previous studies, such as Webb (2017) and Nogueroles (2017). After the LSI in 4-8 weeks, most of the participants in those studies reported being less satisfied with their ability to complete the activities properly, the listening

activities, and the strategy instruction. The researchers of those studies also explained the participants' dissatisfaction by their lack of motivation for the listening strategy approach, the short duration of the program, and the way of selecting the samples. Webb (2017) called for further research on how low motivation for learning affects the effectiveness of strategies and students' perceptions.

Regarding the students' self-confidence after the LSI, most of the students felt greatly confident about their listening ability and optimistic about their potential improvement in comprehending spoken English. This finding corroborates the results of many other studies (Vandergrift, 2002, 2004; Graham & Macaro, 2008; Irgin & Erten, 2020; Li, 2017; Nguyen, 2018; Ozeki, 2000; Yeldham & Gruba, 2016). In spite of using different data collection instruments to examine the students' perceptions and attitudes towards the strategy instruction, those studies reached a consensus that the LSI brought about many benefits to the students, both to their listening performance and their psychological changes. In other words, LSI might offer long-term benefits for learners in terms of both their listening comprehension and beliefs about their listening ability. Differently, this finding is inconsistent with what was found in some previous studies (Siegel, 2013; Nogueroles López, 2017; Webb, 2017). In his study, Webb (2017) investigated that students felt more anxious and less confident after the metacognitive listening strategy instruction. Also, Siegel (2013) shared that most students reported through the questionnaire that their confidence in their ability to listen to English remained fragile after the strategy instruction course. Similarly, the learners in Nogueroles's (2017) study reported that they lacked confidence in their listening capacity, although they still believed that their listening abilities bettered as a result of the strategy instruction. The failure of the strategy instruction courses was explained by factors outside of their control, such as being tired or hungry (Webb, 2017); students' lack of motivation, the nature of slow rate of development in aural abilities, the students' misassumptions of a good listener (Siegel, 2013).

Moreover, the students in the project highly appreciated the teacher's role in increasing their confidence in their listening ability. They determined that the success of the LSI was, to some extent, due to the teacher's willingness to spend time and effort on selecting materials, instructing strategies, giving them constructive feedback, and evaluating their use of strategies. This finding evokes what was highly appreciated in Ozeki's (2000) and Hoang's (2021) studies. This finding implies that the teacher's teaching methodology is very important for the success of the LSI. According to Oxford (2017), besides "inner context" such as self-regulation, motivation, prior knowledge, autonomy, and confidence, the role of "sociocultural context," which refers to the relationships between the learners and their peers or teachers, also contribute to the success of the language learners. Besides the learner-teacher exchanges, the interactions among learners were always encouraged in the project via organizing pair/group work activities and instructing social/affective strategies. Hence, this finding recommends that "learning strategy use should be considered in light of the sociocultural setting in which these strategies are deployed and the whole web of personal and cultural relationships in that setting" (Oxford, 2017, p.74). The result also suggests that the implementation of the LSI needs to take the collaboration among partners and with the teachers into consideration.

In summary, the students in the study showed positive attitudes towards the LSI and their listening learning. Obviously, the LSI helped the learners feel more confident, satisfied, motivated, and eager to learn; in turn, when they possessed positive attitudes toward the LSI, their listening ability and

use of listening strategies also improved (Ozeki, 2000). Hence, though the strategy instruction project did not assist the students in gaining perfect achievements in their listening comprehension immediately, it helped make the students autonomous, self-regulated, and confident and equipped them with the necessary qualities to be successful listeners in the future.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to examine the impacts of the LSI on the learners' attitudes towards learning English listening skills through students' diaries and focus group interviews. The findings reveal that after the LSI, most of the students kept positive attitudes towards listening learning, which is illustrated through their cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects. Specifically, the students in the project perceived that listening is a difficult but essential skill. Although they encountered many difficulties in their listening process, they believed that listening strategies could help them overcome their listening problems. Moreover, the students also reported that listening strategies made them become autonomous and eager to study listening skills and feel more confident in their potential listening improvement. Also, they felt satisfied with the listening course in terms of strategy instruction, class atmosphere, teacher's methodology, and listening materials.

The findings of the study have some implications for EFL listening pedagogical methodology. Firstly, it is recommended that in listening lessons, the strategies should be presented to motivate the students and provide them with good equipment to overcome listening problems. Secondly, the collaboration between students-teacher and among students is encouraged in listening strategy instruction lessons through group work, pair work, sharing sessions, and project activities. Thirdly, to optimize the advantages of listening strategies, they should be instructed in the long term so that the students can have sufficient time to get familiar with the strategies and practice using them.

Despite the researcher's attempts, the study has some limitations. First, the population of the study was small and selected from only one university; therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized to a larger population. This limitation suggests further research implementing LSI as the intervention with larger population size. What is more, this study was conducted in only one 9-week cycle; thus, the participants of the students did not have sufficient time to practice listening strategies thoroughly. Hence, the study calls for a longitudinal action research project which consists of at least two cycles for the purpose of expanding strategy practice opportunities for the listeners.

Acknowledgments

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Biodata

Ngo Thi Thanh Huyen is currently a PhD student at Hanoi University and a lecturer of English at Hung Vuong University, Phu Tho Province, Vietnam. She is experienced in teaching listening, speaking, and translation. Her research interests are listening skills, listening strategies, and learning styles. She has published articles on EFL issues both in Vietnam and internationally.

Factors Affecting Students' Attitudes towards Learning English as a Foreign Language in a Tertiary Institution of Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

	The factor of students' learning attitudes undoubtedly affects their learning outcomes. This study investigates factors influencing Vietnamese students' attitudes toward English learning in a tertiary institution in the Mekong region to help local educators enhance the quality of teaching and learning English in this region, considered a "low-land" in the education of Vietnam. This study was conducted qualitatively, using structured interviews to collect data from 69 first-year students. The study revealed that internal and external factors affected the students' attitudes. Regarding the internal factors, students' self-confidence, risk-taking willingness, anxiety, curiosity, and awareness of the importance of English in their future considerably impacted their attitudes towards English learning. On the other hand, the study found some external factors, including teaching and learning materials, content, curriculum design, and teacher-related factors, including teacher personalities, professional knowledge, teacher communication, and teacher attitudes. Some discussions, pedagogical implications, and recommendations were displayed at the end of the current paper.
Keywords: factors, EFL students' attitudes, English as a foreign language, tertiary institution, Vietnam	

Introduction

Nowadays, English as an international language plays an essential role in all parts of the world. Remarkably, English is a compulsory subject at all levels of education in the Vietnamese context. The importance of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) requires the Vietnamese government to implement several educational reforms. However, the results of the reforms have been under-expected (Nguyen, 2013; Le & Nguyen, 2017; Tran & Marginson, 2018; Pham & Bui, 2019). Many reasons have been discussed to explain the causes why the interventions were unsatisfactory, such as student personality context, social context, educational context, and some other factors. The similarity of these factors is that they all affect students' attitudes towards learning English. Notably, several previous studies (e.g., Abidin et al., 2012; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Choy & Troudi, 2006; Getie, 2020) indicated that students' negative attitudes toward learning English are also the main reason why they lower their learning outcomes. There have been some studies examining the factors affecting EFL students' attitudes towards English learning (e.g., Abidin et al., 2012; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Choy & Troudi, 2006; Getie, 2020), but few of them investigated Vietnamese university students'

internal factors and external factors. As a result, the research team employed this current study to determine the factors affecting Vietnamese students' learning attitudes. After the study, some factors affecting students' attitudes towards English learning were found, including student-related factors, teacher-related ones, and others. Significantly, the research team chose a tertiary institution located in the Mekong region, considered a "low-land" in the education of Vietnam. The tertiary institution is expected to become one of the leading universities in the region and the country. Therefore, the teaching and learning quality has received much attention from local educators. Generally, sixty-nine EFL students agreed to participate in the current research. The findings of this study bring a glimpse of hope that it would help EFL teachers reduce negative factors affecting their students' English learning and enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the Mekong Delta.

Literature Review

The Conceptualization of Attitude

Undoubtedly, students' attitudes are necessary for their language learning. According to Weinburgh (1998), the attitudes toward English learning affect EFL students' behaviors in choosing books to read or practice English. Also, students' attitudes significantly impact their learning achievements (Weinburgh, 1998). Therefore, there is a strong connection between students' English learning and their attitudes towards language learning.

According to Triandis (1971), the conceptualization of attitude is a manner of consistency towards an object. Brown (2000) characterized the term attitude by several emotions, such as feelings, self, and relationships in the community. Otherwise, Ajzan (1988) defined attitude as a disposition to respond to an object, a person, an institution, or an event in positive or negative manners. Baker (1992) explained the concept of attitude as a hypothetical construct of human behaviors in accepting or rejecting something. In conclusion, attitude is an engine to drive someone to do something. In language learning, students' positive attitudes affect their willingness to try their best to improve their English, and vice versa. Therefore, it is recommended to foster the understanding of what factors affect EFL students' attitudes to help educators deal with the factors causing the students' negative attitudes towards their language learning and then enhance their positive attitudes towards it.

Factors Affecting EFL Students' Attitudes

According to Getie (2020), several factors affect EFL students' attitudes towards language learning. The current study's framework was developed by considering Getie's study. After the data analysis, there were two main factors affecting EFL students' attitudes towards their English learning in this study, namely internal and external factors.

Internal Factors

Students' confidence is defined as their beliefs in their capacities to do or complete tasks (Brown, 1994). According to Krashen (1998), students' confidence fosters learning achievements. Students' self-confidence and self-efficacy are often used interchangeably (Ehrman, 1996). Regarding the interaction between students' self-confidence and their attitudes towards English learning, Skehan (1989) indicated that EFL teachers who can encourage students' self-efficacy could boost their motivation for and positive attitudes towards English learning. Additionally, students' willingness to take risks and their learning achievements are positively associated (Dulay, 1982; Skehan, 1989; Larsen & Long, 1991; Brown, 1994). Students' willingness to take risks affects their tendency to participate in in-class activities (Larsen & Long, 1991). Specifically, students who fear disapproval from their friends and

teachers will reject participating in discussions or expressing their ideas. Therefore, students' risk-taking willingness affects their attitudes towards English learning. Besides, students' anxiety may decrease their positive attitudes towards English learning (Ehrman, 1996).

Additionally, anxiety, which often occurs in listening and speaking classes, hinders students' participation in English classes (Spolsky, 1989). Furthermore, according to Alemi et al. (2015), lacking sufficient vocabulary caused several problems with students' anxiety. Therefore, EFL teachers are challenged to create a supportive and collaborative to decrease students' anxiety and increase their positive attitudes toward their English learning.

External Factors

Learning time affects EFL students' learning outcomes and attitudes (Getie, 2020). Specifically, Getie (2020) claimed that the number of hours available for running English classes would affect students' attainment. In another aspect of the learning situation, students' opportunities to practice their English as the target language strongly affect their learning attitudes toward English (Pride, 1979; Krogh, 1990). For instance, the students who have more opportunities to practice English tend to learn it better than those who lack chances to use the target language.

Undoubtedly, the teacher plays a highly essential role in students' learning process. First, good interaction between students and their teachers can forge their attitudes towards English learning (Day & Ford, 1998). According to Spolsky (1972), teaching could not be effective if it lacked communication between teachers and students. Second, in addition to the interaction between students and teachers, other teacher-related factors, including their personalities, professional knowledge, enthusiasm, and commitment, strongly affect students' attitudes towards English learning (Spolsky, 1969; Dornyei, 2001; Getie, 2020). Dornyei (2001) explained that teachers are often considered a model for their students to follow. Therefore, students often adopt teachers' beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and associated behaviors. Third, how teachers perceive their students also affects students' feelings and attitudes towards English learning. According to Larsen and Long (1991), students tend to be grateful to their teachers when they feel their positive attitudes. Eventually, they will be more motivated to participate in in-class activities and improve their learning outcomes. In reverse, students' attitudes towards their teachers also affect their attitudes towards English learning (Krashen, 1998). Students' positive attitudes towards the subject would occur if they liked their teachers and accepted them as a knowledge source. As a result, students' learning outcomes and love for English learning will increase. Finally, a teacher's classroom management skills play an essential role in determining whether students are willing to learn or not. In some countries where the teaching and learning condition is not good, it highly requires teachers' abilities to deal with big or small, hot or cold adequate and functioning equipment, bright or dark class, airy or steady, students' misbehaviors, and more (Wilkins, 1974; Conteh, 2002). Consequently, the teachers capable of dealing with these problems may bring more effective teaching to the class and enhance students' learning attitudes towards the target language.

Getie (2020) ascertained that they are the stock of resources teachers use to exploit and transmit knowledge regarding teaching and learning materials to their students. Teaching and learning materials directly affect students' learning achievements (Wilkins, 1974). These materials include textbooks, workbooks, writing paper, pens/pencils, chalk, blackboard, wall pictures, tapes, tape recorder, television, radio, reading material, and a library. All those materials affect students' attitudes towards English learning (Wilkins, 1974; Wlodkowski, 1993; Tomlinson, 1998; Guariento & Morley, 2001). Consequently, developing materials to meet students' demands or needs may increase their attitudes towards English learning.

Related Studies

Several studies have investigated the students' attitudes towards EFL learning worldwide. Choy and Troudi (2006) employed a study in a Malaysian College to investigate its students' attitudes towards English learning. Furthermore, the study also attempted to check whether there is any change in students' attitudes when they move from secondary schools to college. A sample of 100 students was recruited to collect data using students' weekly journals and interviews. This study was designed as an interpretive approach. The study results found that students' attitudes towards English learning had changed. Specifically, these students showed more positive attitudes towards English learning in college than in secondary schools. They perceived the college social and classroom environment to be more conductive.

Chalak and Kassaian (2010) investigated factors affecting students' attitudes towards English learning in the Iranian context. The study included 108 students majoring in English translation. The authors used the Attitude, Motivation Test Battery consisting of eight domains: interest in English, parental encouragement, motivational intensity, attitudes towards learning English, attitudes towards English-speaking people, integrative orientation, desire to learn English, and instrumental orientation. The findings were that the instrumental and integrative orientations had highly affected their desire to learn.

In the Libyan educational context, Abidin et al. (2012) aimed to explore whether there is any difference in students' attitudes towards English learning regarding their demographics, including gender, field, and years of study English. There were 180 secondary students taking part in this study. The study results revealed that these Libyan students showed negative attitudes towards learning English. Besides, the study found that gender and field had affected the participants' attitudes.

Getie (2020) studied factors affecting Ethiopian high school students' attitudes towards English learning. The study used a questionnaire to gather data from 103 students. Moreover, group interviews were also employed to discuss the topic. The study found that these participants had positive attitudes towards English learning. Social factors were perceived to affect students' attitudes positively. On the other hand, educational context factors, such as EFL teachers, and learning situations, decreased students' positive attitudes towards English learning. However, textbooks encouraged students to gain higher learning achievements.
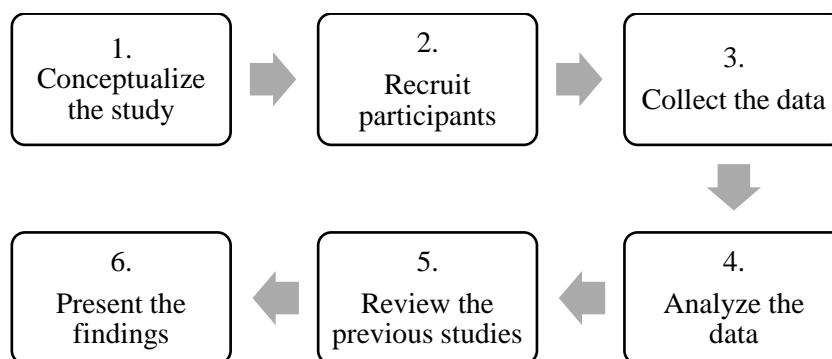
In the Vietnamese context, where students' language proficiency is not as good as expected, it is essential to conduct studies on what can help improve their language learning outcomes. As stated, the factor on students' attitudes significantly affects students' learning achievements. Therefore, the current study was conducted to understand better what factors affect Vietnamese students' attitudes towards their English learning. The study addressed one research question:

"What factors affecting EFL students' attitudes towards English learning in a tertiary institution located in the Mekong region?"

Method

This study was conducted qualitatively, using structured interviews to collect data. All members of the research team first read through the data. Then, they categorized the data into different factors. Then, the research team discussed the factors in their data analyses and agreed on what factors belonged to what clusters of factors, namely internal or external factors. Later on, the researchers searched on the internet to find out studies in this field and compared the current findings to previous studies. The skeleton of the study was then built and presented in the literature review section. These procedures allowed the researchers to explain clearly the factors

affecting EFL students' attitudes. The figure below manifests the theoretical framework of this study.

1. Conceptualize the study	→	2. Recruit participants	→	3. Collect the data

6. Present the findings	←	5. Review the previous studies	←	4. Analyze the data

Besides, the study was conducted in a tertiary educational institution with advanced programs and high-quality one using English to give instructions. After the first semester of learning in the new learning and teaching context, all students learning in the high-quality programs were asked to access a Google Form link and respond to two structured questions to explore the factors affecting their attitudes towards their English learning. After two weeks, the research team informed the participants to stop collecting students' responses. Sixty-nine freshmen (23 information technology-majored students, five chemical engineering-majored students, seven advanced biotechnology-majored students, 19 international business-majored students, three electrical engineering-majored students, four advanced aquaculture-majored students, five finance and banking-majored students, and three construction industry-majored students) accessed the link and answered the questions.

The structured interviews aimed to gauge insightful information about the factors affecting the participants' attitudes towards language learning, both internal and external factors. The participants could answer the abovementioned questions in English and Vietnamese through the Google Form platform. Those who were confident in their English could use English to express ideas. Those who were not confident in their English could use Vietnamese as their mother tongue to share their opinions quickly and accurately. After two weeks of collecting data, the researchers started to transcribe the responses into English. The researchers directly contacted the participants via phone calls when there were uncomprehensive or unclear responses in the translation process.

Findings

In this section, the researchers presented the findings in orders from the most mentioned factors to the least mentioned ones.

Internal Factors of EFL Students' Attitudes towards English Learning

Students' Interest

First, the most mentioned factor, twenty-seven respondents, was students' interest. The lack of interest in particular English skills led to the students' pressure and negative attitudes towards English learning.

> "I do not like learning English very much. I feel tired even though I have finished all my homework. Some of my friends feel the same. Maybe, we are not interested in this subject."

> "Some of my friends are stressed. They were even truant from the English classes. Poor them!"

Compared to writing and reading skills, the students were willing to learn oral skills associated

with their real lives. The students were more interested in learning communication skills than reading and writing skills.

> "I like learning speaking and listening skills because I can use them in real life."

> "The classes for presentation skills are associated with real life. Therefore, it will help me deal with real situations, not just in-class activities."

According to Zulfikar et al. (2019), there are four positive points of students' emotional attitudes: interest, feeling, preference, and enjoyment of learning English. Consequently, the EFL students tended to show positive attitudes toward the skills scoping with their interests and vice versa. Therefore, it is necessary to figure out what EFL students feel interested in. Students' needs and interests analysis should be considered better to understand these components in English teaching and learning.

Students' Self-confidence

According to the student's responses, the following internal factor was their self-confidence. Twenty-five respondents related this factor.

> "I feel pressured when speaking English in front of many people."

> "I am confident in my English. Therefore, I like it so much."

> "Comparing to other subjects, I learn English more quickly. Consequently, I think I am good at learning English."

Similar to Getie's (2020) study, students' self-confidence plays an essential role in their attitudes towards English learning. Self-confidence could boost the students' motivation for their learning (Skehan, 1989). However, if EFL teachers could not encourage their students' self-efficacy, they might lose their desire to learn. There are many ways to boost students' self-confidence. One of these strategies is to use compliments when the students have excellent performances in the classroom, such as completing a difficult task in time, presenting well, sharing a valuable idea, or simply pronouncing a word accurately.

Students' Lexicon Knowledge

The following internal factor was students' lexicon knowledge, which there were fourteen students mentioned. The students shared that their insufficient lexicon knowledge prevented them from doing the tasks. As a result, they did not want to learn English anymore.

> "I do not have enough lexicon knowledge to answer my teacher's questions. Therefore, I am afraid of being in English classes."

> "I cannot understand what others say because I do not have enough vocabulary knowledge."

According to Tran (2020), whether Vietnamese EFL students can effectively use English depends on their lexicon knowledge. Therefore, a lack of lexicon knowledge prevented the students from participating in in-class activities. It was similar to the study by Ngoc and Mai (2020), which found that the factor of lacking lexicon knowledge prevented university students' participation in English-speaking classes. In order to help students have enough lexicon knowledge, providing input in the pre-stages of teaching skills is extremely helpful. However, it requires EFL teachers to plan carefully which types of activities should be used in these stages since the effectiveness of the input provision significantly depends on how students respond to the tasks.

Students' Anxiety

Twelve students stated that the anxiety also hindered their participation in in-class activities. As

a result, they might feel terrified when studying English, especially in terms of presentation skills.

> "I feel fear of presentations. Therefore, I am afraid of being in presentation skill classes. I want to stay at home."

> "I am not good at speaking. Whenever I am in class, I wish my teachers would not call my name."

It was similar to the study by Ehrman (1996), which stated that this factor decreases students' positive attitudes towards English learning. Students' anxiety might hinder the students' participation in English-speaking classes (Spolsky, 1989; Pabro-Maquidato, 2021). English is taught as the second language for Vietnamese students. Accordingly, similar to other students learning another language, they feel anxious when they do not have enough exposure to practicing the new language. Notably, students' chances of being exposed to using English in real life are somewhat limited. Therefore, the anxiety occurring in the classroom, especially for those who are not major in English, is unavoidable. However, EFL teachers are recommended to use some funny activities, such as games or singing contests, to reduce their students' anxiety and increase their participation in their English classes.

Students' Risk-taking Willingness

Next, five respondents showed that the students tended to learn English which is not one of their strengths, but they recognized its importance for their future. As inferred, the student's willingness to take risks was observed.

> "I want to improve my English, especially speaking skills, including public speaking and communication. They are essential for my future."

> "Although I am not good at English speaking, I want to communicate with others and get to know more friends. As a result, I like learning English."

Larsen and Long (1991) indicated that the factor of students' risk-taking willingness affects their tendency to participate in in-class activities. Even though the students were perceived to be not good at English, they significantly desired to participate in classroom activities to develop their skills. In Vietnam, English has been used to enhance the number of opportunities for Vietnamese people to find a good job. In school, EFL teachers are always expected to visualize that vital fact to help their students be aware of why they should try their best to acquire the language. Accordingly, no matter what majors the students learn, they know how important English is to their future.

Students' Curiosity

Two students stated that their curiosity about specific articles in English also encouraged them to pay more attention to their learning.

> "I want to understand more about the English articles which are about the cultures of other countries, so I learn English more seriously."

> "There are some topics that I am curious about, so I want to gain an in-depth understanding of them. There is no more option. So I desire to learn English."

There is a strong interaction between students' interests and curiosity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The Vietnamese students' eagerness to learn is not something new (Van Dang, 2006). Therefore, they desire to learn new things, and it increases their willingness to learn English to help them be more competent in reading English articles. It somehow draws a more precise picture that teachers' instructional strategies play an essential role in students' success in learning English. To increase their willingness to learn, EFL teachers must find a suitable way to increase their curiosity and better their awareness of how reading materials are helpful for them in learning

the language.

Students' Awareness of the Importance of English

Only one student stated that the student's awareness of the importance of English in their future jobs reflected the social effects in the research context, which highly requires the competitive candidates to have good English.

> "I want to improve my English, especially speaking skills, including public speaking and communication. They are essential for my future."

Zulfikar et al. (2019) indicated that students' thinking of the critical role of English and their attitudes towards English learning are positively correlated. Therefore, the more the students were aware of the importance of English for their future jobs, the more positive attitudes they showed toward English learning. Moreover, English has become compulsory in the Vietnamese and international contexts. The Vietnamese government implemented several educational reforms, although the reforms have been unsatisfactory (Nguyen, 2013; Le & Nguyen, 2017; Tran & Marginson, 2018; Pham & Bui, 2019). Therefore, students' understanding of this fact increases their attitudes towards their English learning. The students who have good English can take more advantage of competing in the job market in Vietnam (Sundkvist & Nguyen, 2020).

External Factors of EFL Students' Attitudes towards English Learning

Teaching and Learning Materials

The first external factor was teaching and learning materials. Due to the defective materials, seventeen students did not enjoy the classes, especially reading and writing skills.

> "I do not like reading a long text. It is exhausted."

> "I feel bored when studying English, especially reading skills. There are a lot of long texts with many words. So stressful!"

Other students found the materials used in their learning hard to follow.

> "The materials are sometimes too difficult. Sometimes, I feel like I am listening to the Martian language, not English anymore."

> "The used tasks are too challenging to me. Nobody likes the things that they cannot understand at all."

The students under-expected the used teaching and learning materials in the current context. As a result, they were not happy with what they had learned. This finding was in line with several previous studies (e.g., Wilkins, 1974; Wlodkowski, 1993; Tomlinson, 1998; Guariento & Morley, 2001). Specifically, EFL students feel stressed and overloaded if they read long texts. Therefore, the query on how to solve this problem needs its answer as soon as possible to prevent students from losing their learning motivation. It is suggested to divide the long texts into smaller pieces. In other words, EFL teachers should do some tasks requiring their students to work in groups and assign them to read their parts. At the end of the activities, the students are expected to share the main ideas of their parts and together draw the complete picture of the text contents.

Teaching and Learning Contents

There were eleven students' respondents related to teaching and learning content. The students tended to like practical sections more than theoretical ones. Therefore, they showed negative attitudes toward theoretical classes.

> "Yah…the contents of the class are theoretical, so I do not like it much. Therefore, I want my teachers to give us a chance to practice rather learning theory."

> "I am obsessed with theoretical sections even though I am aware of their values. However, I cannot swallow them at all."

Moreover, the students resisted enjoying the classes because these classes could not meet their needs. Consequently, they showed their negative attitudes towards the types which lack practical values.

> "Some English classes are not effective, and they do not meet my demand in practice. Therefore, I feel dissatisfactory with them."

According to Getie (2020), students' attitudes and interests are positively associated. Some theoretical classes might be compulsory according to the curriculum. Consequently, students may have some anxiety or anger in English classes due to their lack of choice (Ehrman, 1996; Littlewood, 2001). Learning theories without providing practicing chances might reduce the students' positive attitudes toward their English learning. English, which becomes extremely important to one's future jobs, is a compulsory subject in school in Vietnam. Therefore, students cannot decide whether they will study English or its alternative. As a result, students who dislike the language may feel inadequate and lose their learning motivation. Nevertheless, it somehow displays the critical role of EFL teachers in their classrooms more apparent. Specifically, EFL teachers are expected to establish a learning environment that helps students reduce their fear of learning a new language, a foreign language. The learning environment can be better by using language games or other fun activities.

Teaching and Learning Curriculum

Regarding the curriculum, one student stated that the heavy curriculum also reduced the enjoyment of English learning.

> "The curriculum is too heavy. Therefore, both my teachers and ourselves suffer during the semester. That is the reason I failed to enjoy the classes."

According to Wehman and Kregel (2004), curriculum design is highly demanded to help students gain higher competencies and independence. However, when the curriculum is heavy and ambitious, it becomes counterproductive. The Vietnamese education system has implemented many pedagogical reforms at all education levels, but the results have been under-expected. Therefore, the findings of this study related to curriculum design can be a reason behind the disappointing results.

Teacher-related Factors

In terms of teacher-related factors, this current study analyzed them into themes, including teacher personalities, teacher teaching methodologies, teacher communication, and teacher attitudes towards their students.

- ### *Teacher Personalities*

Thirty-eight students remarked on the factor of their teachers' friendliness.

> "My teachers are amicable. They help me understand in-depth the lessons, so I improve a lot."

> "My teacher is a humorous and supportive teacher."

> "Some teachers are so strict and not friendly. Therefore, I feel much stressed."

As observed, the student tended to cooperate with friendly teachers rather than with those who were cold or stonyhearted. It aligned with the study by Chen (2012), which found that

friendliness is one of an effective teacher's characteristics. However, it is not always related to the teacher's responsibility. Vietnamese teachers have to take care of many students in each class, their families, financial problems, etc. Therefore, these factors may somewhat affect how teachers behave in the classroom. It is expected to provide them with more support to help them gain more positive attitudes towards teaching and their students.

In terms of teachers' enthusiasm, twenty-eight students wrote that this factor encouraged them to learn English.

> "I like learning English thanks to my teacher's enthusiasm."

> "My teacher is very enthusiastic. In my opinion, writing is a tough subject. However, thanks to my teacher, I am more motivated to learn it."

EFL teachers are always required to show their teaching enthusiasm to gain their students' willingness to be in their classes. Getie (2020) also proposed that teachers' enthusiasm is influential in students' attitudes towards English learning. No one wants to study with a dead body-walker. In other words, students are sensitive to their teacher's attitudes and willingness to be in class. Accordingly, they tend to feel negative about those teachers who come to the class without enthusiasm for teaching.

Twenty-eight students mentioned the teacher's conscientiousness. Specifically, the students were grateful for those conscientious, thorough, and devoted teachers.

> "I want to say thank you to my teacher because she is so devoted. She helps me a lot in my vocabulary retention. For that, I keep learning English."

> "My teacher is conscientious, so it encourages me to improve my English. Besides, the teacher's conscientiousness energizes me a lot."

Like teaching enthusiasm, EFL students can feel their teachers' conscientiousness, which will decide whether they want to learn with those teachers or not. Otherwise, the students might lose their motivation for English learning when working with those teachers who are unconscionable and irresponsible in their teaching. Some complaints were collected from the students about the teacher's teaching irresponsibility.

> "Some teachers are not responsible for their teaching. I still remember that one of my teachers had just used two or three first classes to provide knowledge to us. Then, he asked us to exercises all the time without any feedback on our work. In some classes, he asked us to self-study then go home without doing anything useful. It wasted a lot of my time."

> "Some teachers are not devoted and responsible for teaching. Most of the time, I have to learn by myself. It is a bit ridiculous."

It was to see that the EFL students were well-aware of their teachers' behaviors that affected their attitudes towards English learning. Dornyei (2001) remarked on the importance of teachers' behaviors in students' motivation for learning. Teachers should always be aware of the role of guiding their students to become good people with proper behaviors. Every behavior that teachers make in their class contributes to forming how their students will behave in the future.

Four students started the teacher's rigidity contributed to enhancing their willingness to learn English.

> "My teacher is very rigid, but I like it. In my opinion, rigid or disciplined teachers will run the class better."

> "Other people may feel bad when studying with disciplined teachers, but I am not one of them. I think easy-going teachers are not really bad, but learning with rigid teachers makes me believe more in their knowledge."

Interestingly, some students were negatively affected by teachers' rigidity because they were willing to learn with friendly teachers rather than rigid ones (Winer, 1992). However, some students wanted to learn with rigid teachers due to their sense of self-discipline. The finding helped educators better understand how critical students' learning styles analysis is. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should have a good orientation about how the class runs, what kinds of teachers they are, and what they expect from their students at the beginning of the course. It will help increase the understanding as well as the teacher-student rapport.

The factor of teacher's unpunctuality and irrational absence was a problem that three students had a complaint.

> "Some teachers often come to class late or be absent without any notification. Sometimes, they just write a topic on the board, and nothing else then."

> "I feel good when studying with a teacher. However, she is swamped, so she is usually absent. Therefore, I have not learnt much from her. What a pity!"

Punctuality is essential in education. Alemi (2020) highlighted the importance of teachers' punctuality, which positively correlates with their commitment to the teaching profession. As mentioned, teachers play role models for their students to follow (Getie, 2020). Teachers' unpunctuality and irrational absence reduced the students' attitudes towards their learning.

- *Teacher Professional Knowledge*

There were forty-six respondents regarding teachers' teaching methodologies and techniques. Some students were satisfied with their teachers' teaching methodologies and techniques, which affected their attitudes towards English learning.

> "My teacher's teaching techniques are desirable. Moreover, these techniques create an active, collaborative, and friendly learning environment. I always enjoy the classes."

> "My teacher usually uses post-discussions to help us review the lessons. I think these discussions are helpful. Moreover, these discussions also make the classes more delightful."

However, boring teaching techniques might cause students to lose motivation for English learning.

> "I have no problem with the lessons. However, the ways some teachers run the classes are too bored and uninteresting."

> "I like English, but I often feel boring with my teacher's teaching technique. Therefore, English is no more interesting, I think."

Consequently, EFL teachers' professional knowledge was essential that affected the students' attitudes toward their English learning. It was similar to several preceding studies (e.g., Spolsky, 1969; Dornyei, 2001; Getie, 2020). No one, of course, wants to learn with a teacher who does not have enough professional knowledge and lacks abilities to answer the students' concerns. Consequently, before coming to class and conveying the knowledge to their students, teachers should be well-prepared with their lesson plans and predict what kinds of questions their students will have. Sometimes, only one satisfactory answer to students' questions can help.

Seven students shared that teacher's supplementary materials helped them better their English learning.

> "My teacher has many much-adding study materials. Thanks to them, I can practice at home to improve my English."

> "My teacher introduces a lot of useful materials for me to read at home. Moreover, he often shares with us mobile-assisted language learning applications. They are handy."

Supplementary materials provided the EFL students with valuable resources to promote their understanding of the teaching and learning contents. According to Kiliç and İlter (2015), authentic materials also positively affected EFL students' attitudes towards English learning. The finding highlights the importance of institutional support for EFL teachers to have good sources to introduce to their students.

Regarding the teacher's classroom management skills, three students complained that the teacher's lack of ability to supervise exams and detect cheating caused discontent among the students.

> "There is some cheating in class. However, some teachers cannot detect it, so that it may have caused much unfairness in grading."

> "Although my teacher is outstanding at teaching, sometimes she cannot detect the cheating in examinations. Therefore, many students get high scores, but the outcomes cannot show the students' abilities correctly. It is a bit unfair to me."

Moreover, the other three students appreciated their teacher's flexibility in dealing with students' problems, which played a vital role in encouraging them to learn English.

> "My teacher is flexible in both teaching and dealing with other classroom problems. Sometimes, she is sympathetic when we submit our assignments late due to unexpected reasons."

> "Learning with the flexible teachers is so much better than working with inflexible ones. I used to learn from an inflexible teacher. He has never given mercy even though we [students] had reasons for a late submission."

Teachers' classroom management skills are essential in determining whether students are willing to learn or not. In Vietnam, where the teaching and learning condition is not good, it highly requires teachers' abilities to deal with classroom problems (Wilkins, 1974; Conteh, 2002). EFL teachers, who were flexible in solving problems in their classes, enhanced their students' positive attitudes towards English learning.

- *Teacher Communication*

Eight student respondents showed that the students were grateful when getting the teacher's effective feedback.

> "I am so grateful for my teacher's feedback on my performance. The feedback helps me a lot, for sure."

> "My teacher always notes my mistakes and give me her feedback then. It helps me improve a lot."

According to Richmond et al. (2001), teacher feedback is an instructional communication strategy, and it plays an essential role in students' learning improvement (Richmond et al., 2001; Quoc et al., 2021). Simpson (2006) stated that EFL students trust their teachers' corrections because they can be aware of their learning improvement throughout these corrections.

For the factor of the teacher-student relationship, four students shared that the teacher's small talk was an effective way to encourage the students to develop their English.

> "My teacher spends her time talking with us outside of the classrooms about her learning and teaching experience. Therefore, I think these small talks decreased the distance between the teacher and ourselves."

> "I usually feel the distance between the teacher and students. However, I learned with a wonderful teacher this semester. She spent a lot of her time after the classes talking with us. There is no more distancing, I guessed."

A good teacher-student relationship forged the students' attitudes towards English learning. It was similar to the study by Day and Ford (1998). Moreover, Spolsky (1972) stated that teaching could not be effective if it lacked communication between teachers and students. Therefore, teacher-student small talk was an effective interactional strategy for enhancing their relationship.

Interestingly, the current study found that teacher humor affected the students' attitudes towards their English learning. Specifically, the teacher's inappropriate humor decreased two students' motivation for being in English classes.

> "Teacher's inappropriate humor is a problem in the class. Once upon a time, we discussed "Idols," but that teacher used bad words to talk about our idols. That was so disappointing."

> "I think some teachers should be more careful with their words. I am okay, but my friends sometimes get hurt by the teachers' inappropriate sense of humor. They feel it funny, but the others do not feel the same."

According to Petraki and Nguyen (2016), Vietnamese teachers are aware of teacher humor benefits, such as lightening the atmosphere and increasing their immediacy; as a result, they sometimes use their humor in EFL classes. However, the students had harsh reactions to their teachers' inappropriate humor. As inferred, the misuse of teacher humor is due to the lack of teacher humor audience consideration. Dickmeyer (1993) made a list of dangerous consequences due to this lack, such as hurting students' feelings, violating regional rules, or even isolating students from the learning community.

- *Teacher Attitudes towards Their Students*

Seven students indicated that the teacher's caring related to the ability to assess the students' levels helped them improve their attitudes toward English learning.

> "My teacher is very good at evaluating our abilities [students], so he can plan the lessons to guide us. It means he cares about us a lot. Based on his guidance, I can feel my English development. It is so incredible!"

> "My teacher is very good at assessing his students' English abilities. As a piece of evidence, to those students who are not good at English like me, my teacher will give more support. I have really appreciated it."

Rahimi and Karkami (2015) said that caring teachers show more empathy towards their students. According to Getie (2020), how teachers perceive their students also affects students' feelings and attitudes towards English learning. As a result, the students were grateful to their teachers when they showed empathy and caring. It was similar to the study by Larsen and Long (1991).

In sum, similar to previous studies, the current study also showed the vital role of teachers in their students' attitudes towards English learning. Specifically, teacher-related factors, including teacher's enthusiasm, friendliness, teaching knowledge and skills, professionalism, interactional strategies, attitudes towards learners and profession, behaviors, and teaching responsibilities, affect students' attitudes towards English learning (Day & Ford, 1998; Spolsky, 1972; Dornyei, 2001; Getie, 2020; Larsen & Long, 1991; Krashen, 1998; Wilkins, 1972; Conteh, 2002). It is easy to perceive the role of teachers in their students' English learning attitudes, especially in Vietnam. According to Howe (1995), teachers' expectations decide if Vietnamese students are active or passive.

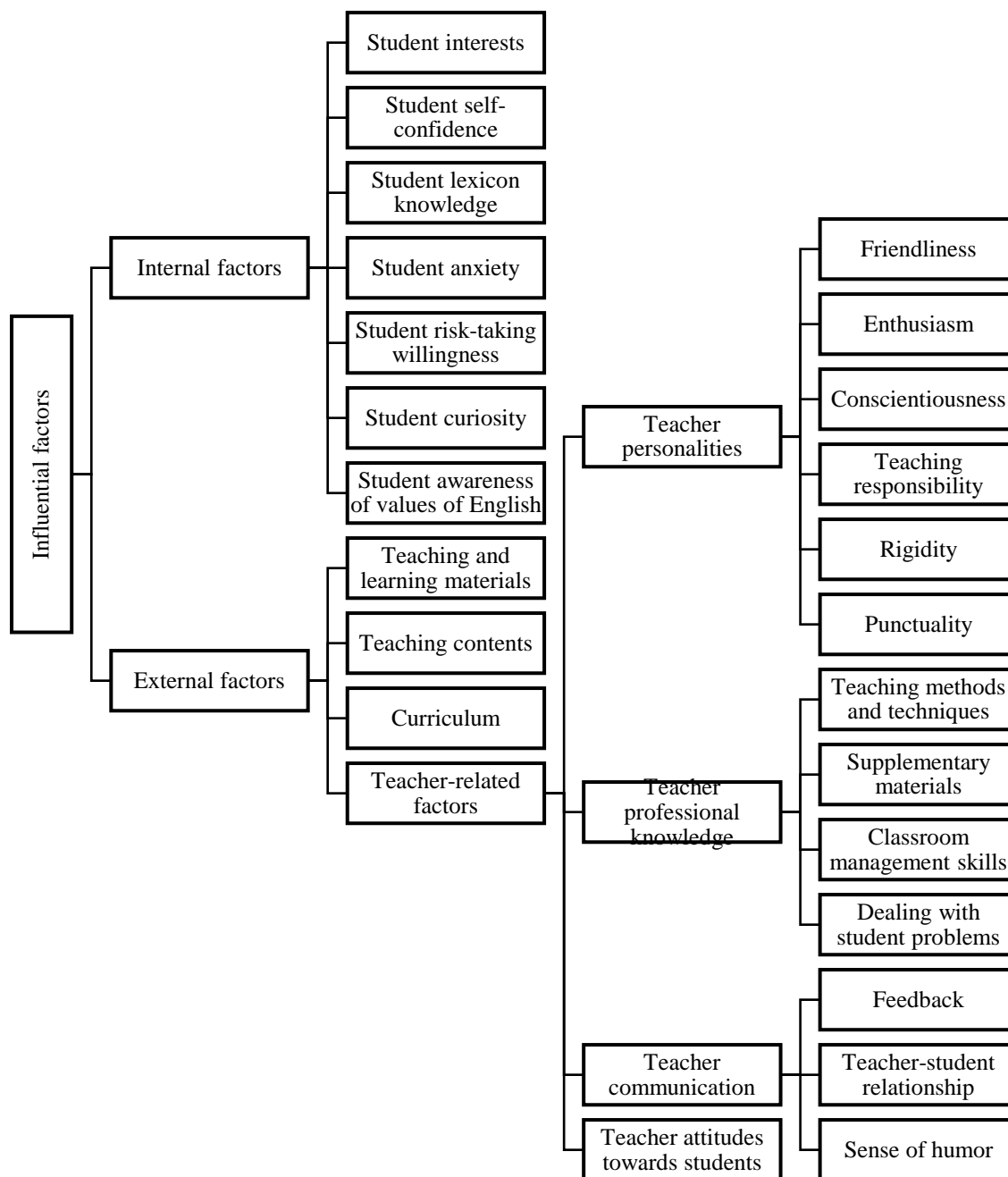The current study's findings were summarized and presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Finding summary

In a nutshell, the influential factors of EFL students' attitudes towards English learning included seven internal factors and four external ones according to themes. Internal factors were students' interest, self-confidence, lexicon knowledge, anxiety, risk-taking willingness, curiosity, and awareness of the English role. External factors consisted of teaching and learning materials, teaching contents, heavy curriculum, and teacher-related factors. Particularly, teacher-related factors included four sub-factors, namely (1) teachers' attitudes towards their students, (2) teachers' communication (feedback, teacher-student relationship, sense of humor),

(3) teachers' professional knowledge (teaching methods/techniques, supplementary teaching resources, classroom management skills, abilities to deal with in-class misbehaviors), and (4) teachers' personalities (friendliness, enthusiasm, conscientiousness, teaching responsibility, rigidity, punctuality).

Conclusion

The current qualitative study was designed purposefully to investigate what factors affect EFL students' language learning attitudes. A tertiary institution in the Mekong region was chosen to employ the study. As known, this institution plays a vital role in meeting the requirements of society in terms of human resources. According to the data collected from 69 first-year students studying in the chosen institution, many factors affected EFL students' attitudes towards their English learning. The factors were divided into two domains, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors included students' interest, self-confidence, lexicon knowledge, anxiety, risk-taking willingness, curiosity, and awareness of the English role. Besides, external factors, consisting of teaching and learning materials, teaching contents, heavy curriculum, and teacher-related factors, significantly affected the students' attitudes towards their English learning.

Implications and Recommendations

Many stakeholders benefit from the contribution of this current study. First, EFL teachers need to remind their influence on their students' attitudes toward English learning and their learning outcomes in general. They should avoid misbehaviors both inside and outside the EFL classrooms, including unpunctuality, irrational absence, and inappropriate humor. Besides, they need to develop their enthusiasm, friendliness, teaching knowledge and skills, professionalism, interactional strategies, attitudes towards learners and profession, behaviors, and teaching responsibilities.

Second, school administrators and policymakers have an opportunity to understand students' desire for language learning and what affects this desire. As a result, they can plan further EFL teachers' professional development training to avoid the factors lowering students' positive attitudes towards English learning and help teachers improve their teaching effectiveness. Moreover, they should clarify the students' dissatisfaction with the heavy curriculum and inappropriate teaching and learning materials. Consequently, they can adjust these things to match their students' abilities.

Finally, the researchers interested in investigating the factors affecting EFL students' attitudes towards their language learning can profoundly understand the Vietnamese educational context based on the current findings. Moreover, the current study suggests some further improvement based on its limitations. First, further investigation should be conducted with the participation of both students and teachers from all education levels, from kindergarten to post-graduate programs, in both private and public educational institutions. Second, the participants should be recruited from all provinces and cities of Vietnam so that the findings can be more significant. Finally, cross-cultural research should be employed to compare the Vietnamese educational context to other countries.

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Biodata

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Use of Google Docs in Teaching and Learning English Online to Improve Students' Writing Performance

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: writing skill, technology, Google Docs, online learning	Writing is regarded as the most challenging skill for almost all English learners because it requires their knowledge of grammatical rules and English structures. Moreover, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students could not go to universities. Thus, they had to learn online instead of traditional learning, which created tremendous difficulties for both of them.
	Thanks to the development of technology, many vital tools, such as word processing and computer-based activities, have been employed to assist learners in producing high–quality writings. As a result, the researchers chose Google Docs as a medium for teaching writing. The authors conducted a case study to determine the usefulness of Google Docs in developing writing abilities and highlight the obstacles it faces. Additionally, this research focuses on investigating the participants' attitude toward Google Docs after they use it for their online writing course. The participants in this case study were 45 first-year English-majored students who enrolled in the writing classes at the Academy of Journalism and Communication. They had to study the traditional course for one month and a two–month online English course because of the pandemic. The two survey questionnaires and the assessment of writing samples were used in combination with semi-structured interviews to evaluate if the students' abilities could be improved or not and investigate whether they had a positive attitude after the course. The findings revealed positive results in students' writing performance as well as an optimistic view of using Google Docs.

Introduction

Nowadays, owing to advancements in information technology, there have been several significant advances in the widespread use of technology in many fields, particularly education. Due to modern technology such as the Internet, electronic dictionaries, and computers, many

educational approaches have been implemented. Hence, many helpful technologies like computer-based tasks and word processing have been developed to help learners study English more effectively.

Students in Vietnam could not attend school because of the Covid – 19 outbreak. As a result, conventional face-to-face classes are shifted to online classes due to the pandemic, posing significant problems for both teachers and learners. Like many universities in Vietnam, the Academy of Journalism and Communication had to switch from traditional learning to online learning to ensure that all courses were finished on time.

It is apparent that writing has a vital part in language education and learning. 'The pen is mightier than the sword', as the saying goes, and it wonderfully captures the power of writing. Macathur, Graham, and Fitzgerald (2006) mentioned that writing skill allows us to keep a personal connection with members in our family, our friends, and our coworkers who are separated by location or time. However, many language learners found it challenging to master English, particularly writing skills. Richards and Renandya (2002) said that writing is the most challenging skill for second language learners to acquire, stringing together grammatically accurate sentences. There are various techniques for producing academic writing, and one of them is collaborative writing. According to Gokhale (1995), learning in groups promotes the development of cognitive skills via discussion, clarification of concepts, and assessment of others' concepts. These critical thinking abilities enhance their memory and enthusiasm for learning more about the topic.

Moreover, Le (2021) stated that collaborative writing had an impact on writing accuracy. Despite these merits, there are still some drawbacks of collaboration learning, especially during the pandemic when students cannot meet in person. After evaluation, Google documents have been picked as a medium for this online course as it is a free software application. Additionally, Google Docs is thought to facilitate real-time students' participation when compared with some applications such as Microsoft Word. Besides, Google Docs is a fully-featured word processor, which is better than CryptPad because this app only allows text editing with some functionality. Thus, teachers and students may cooperate to achieve the desired outcome of their work regardless of geographic location at a particular moment without meeting face-to-face.

Moreover, Nguyen, H. T., & Chu, Q. P. (2021) carried out a study that was focused on investigating students' attitudes towards the use of information and communication technology (ICT) tools for learning English, and the findings revealed that the participants had positive opinions of using technology in learning.

For the reasons stated above, this case study was conducted during the writing course, which lasted one month for offline learning and two months for online learning during the second semester of the 2020 – 2021 academic year.

Literature review

There are several internet tools for producing and transferring files. Denton and Wicks (2013) discussed how add-on platforms, autonomous platforms, and social media networks are all instances of platforms. One of the several benefits of utilizing social media platforms to create and share files online is accessibility and flexibility. Google, which is considered a well–known platform, offers many elements that aid in the virtual learning process. Google Docs is one of Google's educational tools, a free platform for educators and learners. This application offers basic editing features but specializes in collaborative production instantaneously. This application allows many small teams or pairs to access and modify each document instantly through a link. The lecturers may provide rapid feedback by providing comments and amending as needed. After the lecturers leave their comments, they are available for learners to review. Additionally, learners can examine the work of other groups and the comments they received, which may help them improve their work.

In Suwantarathip and Wichadee's (2014) study, the two researchers aimed to investigate the usefulness of Google Docs by applying it in their writing lessons. They contrasted those who finished a writing task in a traditional classroom with the assistance of Google Docs to those who did not. The results indicated that the experimental group got a better score than the control group. In another study, Ambrose and Palpanathan (2017) also compared students who wrote on computers using Google documents in the computer lab to those who used pen and paper in class. The findings revealed a noticeable boost in their writing skills with the usage of Google documents. Almost all of the participants had a positive opinion about using Google Docs. Rahayu (2016) examined the effectiveness of using Google Docs as a collaborative writing tool for non-English-majored students. The purposes of this study were to ascertain students from the participants' perceptions of Google Docs as a new innovative tool for collaborative writing in English courses. From the results, it can be contended that collaborative writing in a non-English department through the use of Google documents has so many advantages, including increasing students' interest in learning to write, utilizing a variety of social skills that allow people to interact in a technological environment, reducing anxiety associated with completing assignments alone and increasing students' confidence in mastering English to their future career.

Hoa, N. T. N., & Lap, T. Q.'s (2021) study focused on investigating the impact of peer feedback and teacher feedback using Google Docs on EFL students' writing performance. The findings of this study reveal that the participants showed a positive attitude towards the effects of feedback from friends and teachers on their writing. In the same year, Fathi, J., Arabani, A. S., & Mohamadi, P. investigated the impacts of Google Docs on EFL learners' writing performance and writing self–regulation. The final results showed that the writing performance of the experimental group was higher than the control's one.

As mentioned above, many studies on using Google Docs to improve writing have been conducted; however, the prior research differed from the present one because the current study examined the effectiveness and students' perceptions of using Google Documents for an online

writing course during the COVID – 19.

Research Questions

In order to accomplish the objectives effectively, this case study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent can the use of Google Docs in teaching and learning English help to improve the first-year English majored students' writing performance at the Academy of Journalism and Communication (AJC)?

2. What are English-majored students' attitudes towards using Google Docs in their writing lessons?

3. What are the difficulties that the students had to deal with while using Google Docs in their writing?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

During the pandemic, all teachers and learners could learn offline for only one month, and then they had to follow the course online. As a result, the students studied in a traditional way for one month and then shifted to online lessons for the rest of the course. This case study was conducted in one of the English classes at the Academy of Journalism and Communication.

The target population was the 45 first-year English-majored students in their second semester of the academic year (2020 – 2021). There were forty females and five males in this class. In their first year of study, English – majored students have to study four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills before they learn specialized English. The students had to do a three-month writing course in the second semester. When observing the students in the previous course, the researchers found that they were all motivated, hard-working, and very good at technology. The students, who enrol in this program, have to reach at least level B2 after the two terms of studying English skills. During the writing lessons, the students were asked to write essays using Google Docs individually, and then they shared their essays and discussed them in groups via Google Docs, and the teachers could observe their discussion by using this tool. Sometimes, the teachers asked their students to write essays and gave feedback via Google Docs.

Design of the Study

The researchers used a case study to achieve their aims. According to Eisenhardt (1989), the process of a case study consists of 8 steps. The first step is to define research questions. After that, the researchers selected cases (sampling). The third one is to craft instruments and protocols, and then enter the field (data collection). In the fifth step, the researchers analyzed data, and in the next stage, hypotheses were shaped. The seventh and final steps are to compare to literature and reach closure.

Data collection & analysis

To make the case study's findings more reliable, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were applied, with a preference for qualitative examination of the situation. The researchers selected questionnaires as the primary data gathering tool. Besides, to investigate the effectiveness deeply after implementing this study, the pre-writing and post-writing essays were collected and marked based on a writing rubric. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were used to analyze the students' attitudes towards using Google Docs for a writing course. That is the reason why three main tools, survey questionnaires, pre-writing, and post-writing essays, and semi-structured interviews, were used to gather data.

First, the researchers used the pre-and post-survey questionnaires to collect the data, which were adapted from Ambrose and Palpanathan (2018). In Palpanathan's research, he divided this questionnaire into smaller parts, such as students' perception of using the features of Google Docs, using this app and computer to edit their writing, and its reliability. In this study, the researchers only focused on the awareness of students towards using Google documents in learning writing skills in general. That was the reason why the researchers only picked some relevant questions from Palpanathan's questionnaire. The questions in the two questionnaires mostly used a Likert rating scale. The researchers used questionnaires to survey the students' answers about their attitudes towards Google Docs before and after it was applied in writing lessons. The pre-and-post – questionnaires were delivered to the participants after the English lesson finished and they had 15 minutes to complete them.

Pre-writing essays were done using pen and paper, whereas post-writing ones were collected from Google Documents. The type of essay that the researchers asked their students to write was an opinion essay. They had forty minutes to finish their writing. The VSTEP writing criteria were used to assess the students' essays.

As for the interviews, before the writing course finished, semi-structured interviews were also used to get more comprehensive comments from the participants about their experiences using Google Docs to study writing skills online. However, the researchers randomly selected only eight students to interview due to the limited time. Each student was questioned for about ten to fifteen minutes via Microsoft Teams. This platform would allow them to express ideas freely and spontaneously.

Results/Findings and discussion

After the data from students 'responses were collected, the data were analyzed based on three research questions. The pre-and post-questionnaires answer the first question: To what extent can the use of Google Docs in teaching and learning English help to improve the first-year English majored students' writing performance at the Academy of Journalism and Communication (AJC)? and the second question: What are English-majored students' attitudes towards using Google Docs in their writing lessons? Moreover, the researchers used the pre-

writing and post-writing tests to find out the answer for the two first research questions. Finally, the data of the interview covers the third research question: What are the difficulties that the students had to deal with while using Google Docs in their writing lessons?

Pre-writing and post-writing analysis

Table 1

The pre-and post-writing scores of first-year majored students

Vstep writing level	The pre-writing scores		The post-writing scores	
	No of students	%	No of students	%
B1 (4-5.5)	15	33.3%	10	22.2%
B2 (6-8)	28	62.2%	29	64.4%
C1(8.5 -10)	2	4.5%	6	13.4%
total	45	100%	45	100%

In this case study, pre-writing and post-writing were conducted to assess students' writing performance before and after the implementation of Google documents. As can be seen from the table above, these results were classified into three categories of Vstep writing levels: B1, B2, and C1. Based on the Vstep writing level, students can get B1 if their writing score is from 4 to 5.5, a B2 if their score is between 6 and 8, and a C1, if their score is above 8.5. There is a slight decrease by 11 % in the number of students who arranged in B1 level while the figure for B2 level students remained almost stainable. By contrast, the percentage of C1 level students rose threefold in the post-writing. Since then, the researchers have realized the effectiveness of using Google Docs in students' writing assignments. Moreover, the results of table 2 and table 3 below clarify the positiveness of applying the tool. Most of the students agreed Google documents helped them focus on what they wrote, check the grammar as well as the spelling, and they felt interested and comfortable producing the writing products.

Questionnaire analysis

Table 2

The awareness of students towards using Google documents in learning Writing skills (in percentage) (Pre-writing questionnaires for Students)

	Statement	Yes	No
1	You enjoy using Google Docs during English lesson.	89%	11%
2	Using Google documents in learning and teaching writing can enhance the interaction between the teacher and the student.	84%	16%
3	You would like your teacher to use Google Documents more often in writing lessons.	76%	24%
4	Writing essays on Google documents can make me become an independent learner.	89%	11%
5	Google documents is a powerful tool to work in groups in writing lessons.	82%	18%
6	Using Google documents in writing can help you with your spelling.	89%	11%
7	Using Google documents in writing can help you with your grammar	89%	11%
8	Using Google documents in writing lessons can help you brainstorm the topic you want to write about.	76%	24%
9	Working with google documents is time-saving and useful.	84%	16%
10	You tend to be relaxed when you are writing on Google documents.	78%	22%
11	Thanks to Google documents, you tend to write essays more than on papers.	76%	24%
12	The quality of Google documents can be relied on.	84%	16%
13	Using Google documents in writing lessons may distract you from staying on task.	62%	38%
14	You tend to write more when writing on Google documents.	89%	11%
15	Using Google documents can better edit your written work.	89%	11%

The second instrument that the researchers used to collect the data is the survey questionnaire, including table 2 above, to answer the second research question, "*What are English-majored students' attitudes towards using Google Docs in their writing lessons*?". According to the results from the table, it can be seen that students had a very positive attitude towards the use of Google documents in English writing lessons, with more than 80% (40) agreeing that they enjoyed using Google documents. Similarly, the same percentage of participants agreed that writing essays on the tool could help them develop independence, and 84% of the students saw that using Google documents to learn and teach writing could improve teacher-student interaction.

However, there was a slightly smaller proportion of students who expected their teacher to use Google Docs more frequently in writing lessons, at 76 %, and the same rate of participants who

tended to write more on the tool than on paper. Five to eight survey questions assessed students' awareness of the benefits of writing in Google Docs. The results indicated that 82% of students believed that group work could improve the effectiveness of writing classes, while 89 % of them supposed that using Google Docs could help them improve their spelling and grammar. Additionally, it demonstrated that the tool could assist participants in brainstorming topics for their essays with 76%, while the figure for students who agreed that Google docs was a time-saving and useful tool and they felt relaxed writing their essays on it was 84%, and 78% respectively. Interestingly, 62% of the students stated that using Google docs distracted them from staying on the task, whereas only 16% of them felt the tool was unreliable. According to the survey, the percentage of students who wrote essays on Google Docs rather than on paper and pens and agreed that their written work could be improved was the same, at 89%.

Table 3

The effectiveness of using Google documents in the teaching process for students (in percentage) (post -writing questionnaires) (for students)

	Statement	yes	no
1	Using Google documents in writing lessons is interesting.	89%	11%
2	You feel you've learnt more writing in English in the classes that used Google documents than others.	82%	18%
3	You can get more individual attention from the teacher in writing lessons on Google documents	82%	18%
4	You can think of more ideas for your writing when you use Google documents.	84%	16%
5	Using Google documents can make you focus on what you're writing about.	80%	20%
6	Using Google documents helps you less worried about writing because you can make changes easily.	76%	24%
7	The tools in Google documents helped you a lot in writing essays.	91%	9%
8	You are more careful about grammar when using Google documents.	84%	16%
9	You focus on spelling when using google documents	88%	12%
10	You can write longer essays on Google docs	87%	13%

Table 3 indicates the effectiveness of using Google Documents in the teaching process for learners. Thanks to the table, the researchers found the answer to the first research question, "*To what extent can the use of Google Docs in teaching and learning English help to improve the first-year English majored students' writing performance at the Academy of Journalism and Communication (AJC)*?". The survey was administered after the students used both their pen and paper writing and writing using Google Docs. It was stated that 89% of them felt interested in using the tool in writing lessons, whereas the figure for participants who thought that they learnt more writing in English in the classes using Google Docs than others was slightly smaller, at 82%. As can be seen from the survey, 37 out of 45 students felt that they got more individual attention from the teacher than in non-computer writing classes. However, surprisingly, the vast

majority of students thought the tool in Google documents supported them a lot in writing essays, at 91%, while 76% of them said that they were less worried about writing because they knew they could make changes easily. Moreover, only 84% of students supposed that they could think of more ideas to write when they used Google Docs, and the figure for participants that could pay more attention to what they were writing about on the tool was 80%. The results from the survey questions 8 and 9 illustrated the big majority of students were careful with the grammar and spelling of the essay when they wrote using Google Docs. Particularly, 84% of the students said that they would be more careful with the grammar they used, and nearly 90% said that they focused on spelling when using the tool. In fact, 39 out of 45 participants were able to produce longer essays on Google Docs. In short, the students' writing performances have become easier and more comfortable when applying them to the tool.

Interviews

For further justification and understanding of students' awareness and attitude towards the use of Google Docs in writing classes, the interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. There are four questions in the interview. Particularly, the first question was used to answer the first research question, "*To what extent can the use of Google Docs in teaching and learning English help to improve the first-year English majored students' writing performance at the Academy of Journalism and Communication (AJC)?*", the next three questions helped the researchers find out the answer to the second research question, *" What are English-majored students' attitudes towards using Google Docs in their writing lessons?"* , and the third research question *" What are the difficulties that the students had to deal with while using Google Docs in their writing?"*. The researchers randomly interviewed eight students from the class and asked them in their first language to create free information and guarantee the truthfulness of the information.

After the recordings of the interviews were transcribed, the analysis was started by identifying the varieties of the perceptions. The semi-interviews with eight students revealed their positive views of using and practicing writing by Google Docs. Significantly the students recognize the value of feedback through Google Docs.

For the first question, all of them agreed that the familiarity of Google Docs' appearance to the word-processor application made them comfortable to use it. Moreover, five of them shared that the feature that had similarities with the word-process application is a beneficial point for Google Docs and could be saved online. Therefore, it was an effective way to keep safe.

> S1: *"It is the same as the word office. I can understand and use it easily. Moreover, it can save my documents automatically."*

> S4: *"I feel comfortable using google documents for the first time. It helps me save time."*

Additionally, it could increase collaboration effectiveness and combine several practical free applications for writing skills such as drawing mind maps. However, two of them shared there were interesting apps, but they had to pay a lot of money for the apps.

S2: "apart from the internet connection, it is easy to use, and it is good for collaboration activity."

S3: "I love using the features of Google Docs, especially it helps me brainstorm ideas via mind maps. It's great."

S7: "There are only available simple features, if you want to use more you need to pay for the apps."

For the third question, all of them agreed that they used Google Docs to write essays on a laptop or mobile phone was not something sophisticated. In addition, the editing-traceable in the tool allowed the users to use highlight colors, so it helped them to revise their written work. However, half of them claimed that there were some issues when using Google Docs because of an unstable internet connection.

S2: "The internet is sometimes not stable …. rather slow and it also affects my online learning."

S8: "I use my own mobile phone or laptop rather easily, and for me, it seems I cannot live without my electronic devices, so I have no difficulties in writing essays on them."

S3: "I can find out simple grammatical or spelling mistakes when I see highlight words and phrases… and I can fix them. Moreover, I am able to avoid making the mistakes for the next time."

In terms of the last question, they all agreed that using Google Docs could increase the interaction with the lecturers. Students could easily track changes teachers made, encouraging them to write more and improve their writing.

S5: "I can say that Google Docs is a perfect tool to help me connect with my teachers in learning writing skill. They often give me the feedback or comment for my written work on the tool more than with traditional ways."

S8: "I could ask teachers how to improve my writing tasks on Google Docs which enable me to understand my mistakes and avoid making them."

S1: "I receive teachers' feedback and encouraging comments that make me feel motivated in writing essays.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the improvement of the writing skill acquisition process and attitudes based on the effectiveness of Google Docs. According to the authors, several previous studies aided them in acquiring the necessary knowledge and provided optimistic perspectives on the tool. For instance, in Suwantarathip and Wichadee's (2014) study, the authors compared students who used Google documents to those who did not. Although there was some improvement in the results of the group assisted by the tool, a single test was insufficient to determine the tool's effectiveness. Additionally, the author's selection of the experimental and control groups reflected their subjective viewpoints. This was considered as a shortcoming for the current researchers to conduct the other study. As a result, the researchers utilized a pre-and post-writing test on a distinct group of participants. That is, they could see an improvement in their students' writing abilities in each of them. Additionally, the authors used

additional data sources such as questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to attempt to increase the research's validity. The findings revealed the majority of the participants used the tool in writing lessons because it was a powerful tool that assisted students in learning without being confined to a particular time and place. They could help strengthen the bond with the teachers. Particularly, they may easily receive assistance from teachers with their written work. Students were able to improve their knowledge by comparing the results of the opinion essay to two types of pre and post-tests, such as increasing their understanding of how sentences, grammar, and vocabulary should be corrected. According to the questionnaires, there was even a significant difference in their perceptions of the usefulness of Google Docs as compared to writing in school classes. They felt more confident in producing numerous longer essays due to brainstorming topics and, if necessary, correcting their spelling and grammar. Additionally, collaboration among classmates increased significantly. Although Google Docs supported and facilitated the written work, it sometimes posed challenges for students that may impact their positive view of this tool in writing. Even though they were relatively familiar with the feature, some students encountered a few obstacles due to the slow internet connection and the formatting issue. Nevertheless, those challenges may not seem to be serious. In comparison to previous research, the researchers discovered numerous similarities and differences in using Google Documents for developing writing skills. Suwantarathip and Wichadee's (2014) study, as well as Ambrose and Palpanathan's (2017), compared students who wrote on computers using the tool to those who wrote on paper in class. The findings indicated a significant improvement in their writing ability, and they all expressed a favorable opinion of Google Documents. However, the small sample size prevented us from generalizing to other contexts, and learners faced similar issues. Interestingly, the researchers discovered some positive perspectives that differ from previous research. During COVID -19, learners spent two-thirds of their time learning online. This indicated that they spent most of their time using technological devices to practice their writing skills on Google Docs. They have significantly improved their written tasks and their computer skills as a result of the benefit. Moreover, they still kept in touch with each other in order to discuss or share their opinions which were relatively similar to what they did in class. In summary, Google documents appear critical in assisting and motivating students to engage in writing activities.

Conclusion

The current study examined the use of Google Docs in teaching and learning English to improve first-year English majors' writing performance and attitudes toward using Google Docs in their learning at the Academy of Journalism and Communication. The findings imply that Google Docs is a valuable tool for enhancing students' writing abilities and encouraging them to produce more written work. Apart from some disadvantages, such as a slow internet connection and formatting issues, the authors hoped that university students would have a firm grasp of the material and be well-prepared to write the essays effectively and comfortably. However, due to time constraints, a scarcity of resources, and the researchers' capacity, drawbacks are

unavoidable. The study enrolled a small number of participants, took place at a single university and was completed quickly. As a result, it cannot be assumed that all of these findings are valid for every student. Additional research should be conducted on diverse learners from diverse fields, and additional items and statements should be added and given to the participant.

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APPENDIX A

Table 4

Interview protocol

No	Questions
1	What is your first impression when writing on Google Docs?
2	What do you think about the feature in Google Docs?
3	How is your experience of writing on Google Docs?
4	What is your opinion toward the lecturer's feedback on Google Docs?

APPENDIX B

Student 1	Q1: Em thấy Google Docs cũng dễ sử dụng vì các chức năng của nó dung khá giống với Word. Em có thể hiểu và sử dụng dễ dàng. Hơn nữa, nó có thể giúp em tự lưu các tài liệu.
	Q2: Như em đã trình bày, các chức năng của Google Docs khá giống với Word. Cho nên sau một buổi được hướng dẫn cách sử dụng, em dùng khá thoải mái. Đặc biệt, khi bọn em cần làm bài tập nhóm, việc chỉnh sửa các ý kiến trên một văn bản khá thuận tiện.
	Q3: Sử dụng Google Docs giúp em kiểm tra được một số lỗi cơ bản của ngữ pháp và từ vựng. Các lỗi được đánh dấu nên cũng dễ nhìn và em sửa được ngay. Ngoài ra em cũng có thể sử dụng được bản đồ tư duy để đưa ra các ý tưởng trong bài viết. Em thấy điều đấy rất thú vị.Tuy nhiên, việc kết nối mạng không ổn định cũng ảnh hưởng đến việc viết bài của em.
	Q4: Khi nộp bài trên Google Docs, em nhận được phản hồi và những lời động viên tích cực của cô làm em cảm thấy có thêm động lực để viết bài.
Student 2	Q1: Với em, Google Docs khá dễ dung vì các chức năng của nó giống với Word. Tuy nhiên, nó giúp em trao đổi bài với giáo viên và các bạn trên một văn bản, đặc biệt trong quá trình học trực tuyến làm em cảm thấy khá giống trên lớp ạ.
	Q2: Với em, công cụ này dễ dùng, và nó phù hợp với hoạt động cộng tác, ngoài trừ việc kết nối mạng. ý em là mạng không ổn định đôi khi làm ảnh hưởng đến tiến độ làm của em và các bạn ạ.
	Q3: Như em đã nói, vấn đề khi em gặp trong quá trình sử dụng là mạng internet, đôi khi nó chạy chậm, làm ảnh hưởng đến việc học viết trên mạng của em.
	Q4: Trong quá trình học online, em vẫn có cơ hội tương tác với giáo viên. Cô giúp

	em sửa bài và cho em những lời động viên tích cực. Điều này làm em cảm thấy viết không còn là áp lực lớn như trước đây nữa ạ.
Student 3	Q1: Sử dụng Google Docs làm em cảm thấy thoải mái ngay từ lần đầu sử dụng. Công cụ này dùng khá giống Word, nó có thể lưu lại bài làm một cách tự động.Em không phải lo mất file bài của mình. Q2: Em thích sử dụng các công cụ của Google Docs. Nó giúp em viết nhanh hơn, sửa những lỗi cơ bản đôi khi em nhìn không ra. Q3: Em có thể nhìn thấy các lỗi về viết từ và ngữ pháp khi phần mềm này nó bôi đậm các từ và các cụm từ. Nhờ đó, em có thể sửa các lỗi nhanh. Hơn nữa, em có thể tránh mắc phải những lỗi như vậy cho các bài viết lần sau. Q4: Em cảm thấy có những cải thiện đáng kể khi các bài viết của mình cô giáo sửa khá kỹ, cả về bố cục, cách triển khai, các cụm từ nên thay thế.Đôi khi em thấy viết online còn tương tác với cô nhiều hơn viết trên lớp.
Student 4	Q1: Em cảm thấy thoải mái khi dùng Google Docs ngay từ lúc đầu. Nó giúp em tiết kiệm thời gian. Q2: Em thấy Google Docs cũng dễ dùng, các chức năng của nó dùng khá giống Word ạ. Q3: Mạng không ổn định đôi khi ảnh hưởng đến quá trình làm bài của em. Tuy nhiên, viết trên Google Docs giúp em tiết kiệm được thời gian ạ. Q4: Em cảm thấy may mắn khi sử dụng phần mềm này vì em nhận được hỗ trợ và giúp đỡ của cô giáo khá nhiều. Có những bài em phải viết lại hai lần theo hướng dẫn của cô.
Student 5	Q1: Khi mới dung Google Docs, em cũng cảm thấy chưa quen lắm vì giao diện của nó, nhưng khoảng một lúc sau khi cô hướng dẫn em thấy dùng khá nhanh và thoải mái. Em cũng thấy công cụ này hỗ trợ nhiều trong việc viết bài của em ạ. Q2: Em yêu thích việc sử dụng các tính năng của Google Docs, đặc biệt nó giúp em đưa ra các ý tưởng qua các bản đồ tư duy. Điều này giúp em có dàn bài rõ ràng để viết được lô gic hơn ạ. Q3: Em cảm thấy sử dụng công cụ này giúp em tiết kiệm được thời gian, khi thảo luận với các bạn, bọn em nghĩ ra ý tưởng gì thì đều viết lên nó và thảo luận ý kiến nào phù hợp hơn. Q4: Một trong những tính năng tuyệt vời mà em nhận ra khi sử dụng Google Docs đó là em nhận được nhiều phản hồi từ cô giáo. Nhờ đó, việc viết của em cũng có những thay đổi tích cực hơn ạ.
Student 6	Q1: Dùng Google Docs em thấy thoải mái vì giống với Word mà em vẫn dùng lâu nay. Q2: Các chức năng của Google Docs chỉ sửa được các lỗi cơ bản. Nếu muốn dung nhiều hơn là phải mất phí. Em nghĩ với sinh viên, đây cũng là một vấn đề cân nhắc ạ. Q3: Khi mới viết, em thấy cũng hơi gượng, nhưng sau đấy theo dòng chảy của bài viết thì em cảm thấy quen hơn ạ. Đôi khi, máy tính của em bị trục trặc nhưng bài viết của em vẫn không bị mất. Trong khi đó, viết trên Word là em có thể bị mất bài rồi ạ.

	Q4: Em nhận được nhiều sự giúp đỡ của cô giáo. Thông qua các lỗi được bôi đậm và nhận xét kèm theo, em cũng hiểu ra vấn đề và sửa lại ạ.
Student 7	Q1: Em không cảm thấy khó khăn gì khi sử dụng Google Docs. Em biết đến công cụ này từ hồi cấp ba. Em dùng khá nhiều trong việc viết bài và thảo luận nhóm ạ. Q2: Em chỉ thấy tiếc là Google Docs chỉ hỗ trợ các chức năng đơn giản. Mình sẽ trả phí nếu muốn dung thêm các tính năng khác ạ. Q3: Viết bài trên công cụ này , em cảm thấy tốc độ viết nhanh hơn. Em viết theo suy nghĩ của mình trước, sau đó em mới sửa lại các lỗi mà Google documents đã đánh dấu. Q4: Em cảm thấy thoải mái khi nhận được các nhận xét của cô. Cô nhận xét được kỹ hơn và em cảm thấy không bị ngại với bạn bè ạ.
Student 8:	Q1: Em nhận thấy Google Docs dễ hiểu và cũng dễ dùng. Em thích viết bài trên công cụ này. Nó giúp em tiết kiệm thời gian và tự lưu lại bài cho em ạ. Q2: Các tính năng của Google Docs làm em thấy thoải mái khi viết. Nó tự báo lỗi thông qua các từ được gạch chân. Em chỉnh lại và bài được lưu tự động luôn ạ. Q3: Em sử dụng trên điện thoại hay máy tính khi viết bài khá dễ dàng.Với em, nó dường như em không thể sống mà thiếu các thiết bị điện tử, vì vậy em không gặp khó khăn trong việc viết bài trên công cụ này. Q4: Em có thể hỏi các giáo viên cách để cải thiện các bài viết trên Google Docs mà điều này giúp em hiểu các lỗi của mình để tránh mắc phải cho lần sau ạ.

Biodata

Nguyen Thi Hong Nhung is an English teacher at the Academy of Journalism and Communication. She has nearly 10- year experience of teaching English. She graduated from the University of Languages and International Studies in 2011 and her major is English teaching. Then, she did a Master's Degree in the English language at Hanoi University and finished the course in 2014. Her research interests are methodology and the English language. She always wants to learn new things and adapt them to make her lessons more effective and attractive.

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Using TBLT Framework in Technology-mediated Environments to Enhance Students' Vocabulary Retention and Interpreting Skills

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ABSTRACT

	Interpretation is a demanding skill, especially for specific fields in business such as marketing, accounting, trading, etc. Students majoring in Business English Language at Van Lang University reported that they are faced with the dilemma of choosing the right definition for a keyword. This has prevented them from understanding and analyzing the message before rendering it into the target language. To remedy the problem, vocabulary quizzes were administered on the university's Learning Management System (LMS) platform. The focus is on enhancing vocabulary retention. The course followed the Tase-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework to maximize the comprehension of the context of the vocabulary and the students. Code-mixing was used to design vocabulary quizzes. The study is a quantitative experiment with the aim of finding a correlation between the use of TBLT and the improvement of students in their vocabulary retention. The results indicate that there is a direct and positive connection between them.
Keywords: vocabulary retention, LMS platform, code-mixing, TBLT	

Introduction

Teaching a high level of language skills, as in the case of teaching interpretation in the business sector, requires both teachers and learners to have a clear understanding of the foundational skills required for this course. In a conventional classroom, where students and teachers work directly with each other, group-work activities and scenario-based tasks are carried out easily. These activities help to improve interpreting and problem-solving skills. For instance, the requirement of listening to a chunk of information and interpreting it under the pressure of time is usually met when learning activities run well in class. Although the problem of memorizing specific sets of vocabulary and mastering the uses of these sets is often an issue in the students' practice within the space of face-to-face classes, this issue is not at a severe level. The nature of the issue shifts when students take these kinds of courses via online platforms. When the class is held online, more problems arise than in a regular classroom, which can greatly affect

the quality of student learning (Chau & Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Ngo, 2021; Vu & Dao, 2021, Luu, 2022). Issues with class connections, group activities, and group management all contribute to the overall quality of a lesson (Chau & Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Ngo, 2021; Vu & Dao, 2021, Luu, 2022). For language interpreting skills, students can use help from translation apps instead of actively listening and interpreting content based on their own abilities. In learning specific sets of words based on specific-purpose situations, students can also use help from these translation apps to search for meanings quickly (although often the wrong ones). These learning aids, combined with some of the inherited difficulties of online learning, require teachers to evaluate and restructure the interpretation course. The requirement is to not only help solve the problem with vocabulary (students search, not learn) but also to help students build up their own analytic and evaluating tools instead of depending on the accessible information.

Interpreting is a skill that requires a lot of mental energy in listening to information, processing information, and rendering information (Ma, 2013). As mentioned briefly above, an important component to interpreting a source language into a target language well, especially for a particular field, is the need to have a relatively good vocabulary in that field (Ma, 2013). This aspect is known as part of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP is defined as teaching and learning materials that serve specific purposes, and vocabulary is an important factor in shaping learners' success for these purposes (Maryam et al., 2018; Sarre, 2013). Wilkins (1972, as cited in Jia, Chen, Ding & Ruan, 2012, p. 63) argues: "Without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". The problem we are facing today is that vocabulary is not considered necessary enough to be taught as a skill (Barabadi, 2017; Gorjian, 2011; Khezrlou, 2017; Maryam, 2017). We focus on reading skills and other basic languages and believe that vocabulary is accumulated from them (Barabadi, 2017; Ender, 2014; Khezrlou, 2017; Maryam, 2017). Second, the more specific problem is that interpretation courses are usually taught in the third and fourth years of the training program at universities. We often assume that students already have some sort of good enough basic knowledge when they reach through these years of learning. This assumption is valid, but it may create a false perception that as long as the student understands what they have just listened to, they can interpret it well. This is true of interpreting skills for common situations when students only need to have vocabulary accumulated from previous semesters along with general social knowledge. For interpreting skills courses for specific areas, as in the case of this study, the business sector, students need to expand their vocabulary at a broader and deeper level. With a solid vocabulary repertoire - understanding the meaning of words in specific cases and having a quick and appropriate choice of words - listening and interpreting from L1/L2 to L2/L1 will no longer be a big obstacle (Maryam, 2017). In summary, the central issue in vocabulary teaching in general and in subject-teaching situations is the need to rethink the ESP and the classroom tasks and how these teaching materials and activities can contribute effectively to the students' learning progress.

With the introduction of the big picture of the study, the structure is as follows: The Literature

Review will be an in-depth analysis of discussions on vocabulary teaching and vocabulary retention, the use of code-mixing and code-switching, and the use of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) as is the key framework for restructuring the course. Building on this in-depth discussion, a methodology is constructed to allocate the key issues in evaluating the redesigned course's effectiveness. Next, an analysis of the collected data and a discussion will be presented to draw a complete conclusion about the use of TBLT in the study. The results indicate that study's approach is applicable to other types of classes related to vocabulary and listening skills.

Literature review

The discussion about whether vocabulary should be taught as a separate skill or as a skill developed through direct training of other skills is still discussed to date (Alamri & Rogers, 2018; Ender, 2014; Ghobadi, 2016; Grant & Nguyen, 2017; Jiang, García & Willis, 2014; Maryam & Mohammad, 2018; Shen, 2003; Veliz, 2017). Regardless of which direction the discussions go, a clear consensus can be reached about the importance of vocabulary as in: "Vocabulary to a very large extent affects an individual's language proficiency. When new words are not taught or learned properly, it becomes a major obstacle to an individual's further education, no matter what major they choose" (Infanta, 2018, p. 28).

In today's language courses, teachers often focus more on the four basic skills such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing, and sometimes consider pronunciation as the fifth skill. With this outlook, vocabulary does not get the attention it deserves. Many discussions consider that teaching vocabulary can be achieved through incidental learning, such as when learners read books for recreation and if they teach words on purpose, possibly through some reading courses (Barabadi, 2017; Gorjian, 2011; Khezrlou, 2017; Maryam, 2017). This is called a 'vocabulary processing strategy' (Ender, 2014). This strategy often goes in the direction that when encountering an unfamiliar word, the reader can temporarily ignore it and continue reading (Ender, 2014). If this unfamiliar vocabulary continues to appear, it is possible to start using a dictionary to find out the meaning or to guess the meaning based on other words within the text and/or based on the context of the text (Ender, 2014).

There is no denying that the tactic mentioned above is suitable for training reading skills, especially with the aim of improving L2 reading speed. However, it is clear that this strategy for vocabulary acquisition through reading is only suitable for reading skills, not necessarily for listening skills. And with listening skills, whether vocabulary is introduced first through vocabulary explanation or vocabulary exercises, it takes time to identify and get familiar with the words and their pronunciation, and again, the introduction of vocabulary before listening exercises is to serve listening skills (Alamri & Rogers, 2018; Staehr, 2009). In the case of interpretation courses for a specific field, where two basic skills - listening skills and vocabulary – are the two pivots, the regular approach in vocabulary teaching does not look supportive. As vocabulary teaching is a key contributor to interpreting skills, teachers need to deliver it before going to interpreting skills.

Teaching specific sets of vocabulary for specific purposes can be done through activities inside and outside the classroom in the direction of bilingualism. The bilingual approach to teaching has been discouraged in the past due to people's beliefs that this approach could hinder the natural acquisition of languages (August & Shanahan, 2006; Jiang et al., 2014). With university students, we need to use 'combat' methods to help them learn vocabulary effectively instead of depending heavily on the usual process. Bilingualism through the use of code-mixing and code-switching is an excellent way to develop a good combat strategy (Berthele, 2011; Brice, 2000; Celik, 2003; Grant & Nguyen, 2017; Jiang et al., 2014; Kustati, 2014; Park-Johnson, 2019; Zarei et al., 2012). This strategy fits well with an interpretation course at a level that requires students to produce a natural and correct interpretation under the pressure of time. The use of bilingualism at this stage is to provide an opportunity for learners to demonstrate that they have both the flexibility and subtlety in L1 and L2, and it should not be seen as 'broken' languages or an expression that separates themselves from the mother tongue (Celik, 2003; Grant & Nguyen, 2017; Veliz, 2017).

An important principle of using code-mixing is that it must be used for a specific language purpose. Teachers become facilitators to help learners when they face unknown or unfamiliar Vocabulary (Celik, 2003; Grant & Nguyen, 2017). In addition, the context of the teaching materials must be clearly defined so that learners can easily recognize the correct usage of meanings in the context (Celik, 2003; Grant & Nguyen, 2017). To ensure learners improve the speed at which they process lexical information and determine the appropriate definition in a similar situation, there must be a reinforcement step to consolidate the newly established knowledge (Celik, 2003). Code-mixing is of its full usefulness when these steps are carefully crafted. With code-switching, it is used as an intentional transition between two languages during speaking or writing, and it carries a broader meaning compared to code-mixing, which lies heavily on the correlation of syntax between L1 and L2 (Eneko, Guillaume, Alexander, Jon & Andoni, 2016; Celik, 2003; Grant & Nguyen, 2017; Kustati, 2014; Park-Johnson, 2019; Zarei & Abbas, 2012).

Code-switching can be used in a classroom setting when the teacher introduces a specific topic and helps students engage with the topic through tasks. Code-mixing, in a more specific sense, is an approach to helping students grasp the semantic and syntactic elements of a language in specific situations, and as such, it becomes relevant in supporting vocabulary retention in students. Within the space of an interpretation course, this purposeful back-and-forth interaction between L1 and L2 using code-switching and code-mixing requires students to actively develop their analytical skills to produce the right translation (Hummel, 2010). Teaching vocabulary with the use of code-switching and code-mixing in specific applications shows enhancements in vocabulary retention (Hummel, 2010, Csabi, 2004). Besides, since online learning has risen to prominence in Vietnam, using code-switching and code-mixing in language teaching can help aid the learning process of students (Grant & Nguyen, 2017), especially when the support of body language or learning tools is limited and technical difficulties and emotional struggles are around the corner (Blake, 2021; Chau & Nguyen, 2021; Gluchmanova, 2016; Ngo, 2021;

Nguyen & Ngo, 2021; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Vu & Dao, 2021; Pham & Vo, 2021; Tu & Luong, 2021).

Restructuring an interpreting course for a specific field to fit well with changes in context and in students' learning styles requires purposeful teaching of vocabulary besides training students the interpreting skills. Through the new teaching context, it is appropriate to use code-switching in the communicative language and the use of code-mixing in vocabulary exercises. Manyak, Manyak, Cimino, and Horton (2018) propose the quality-quantity-strategy approach to create the relationship between vocabulary learning and vocabulary retention. They explain that with quality, it means providing carefully selected materials to meet the requirements of English for Specific Purposes (as explained before). In terms of quantity, it means to let learners see and familiarize themselves with the vocabulary as much as possible. By strategy, it enables learners to use word meanings independently in a similar context. Thus, this approach is suitable to be an indicator for setting objectives and time budget for the learning materials and activities. However, at the level of a learning course, strategies in teaching and creating tasks are not enough to solve the current problems. Having a good framework for the whole course is critical to make sure all the teaching materials and tasks are in sync. Task-based language teaching as a general framework seems to be the most appropriate of all.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been discussed and implemented in the classroom because of its flexible and holistic approach. Tasks themselves are an obvious part of learning, especially in language learning and teaching. However, with the TBLT framework, authenticity is key when teachers design tasks for students (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014, as cited in Kessler, Solheim & Zhao, 2020). To enhance the authenticity of the tasks and instructional materials, teachers must be able to recognize the likelihood that these tasks will be encountered in their daily life to maximize the applications for learners (Kessler et al., 2020; Lai & Li, 2011). The starting point of TBLT can trace back to the research of Prabu (1987, as cited in Thomas, 2015) to develop authentic problem-based activities. This approach focuses on using authentic language to help learners' process of receiving and processing linguistic information between L1 and L2 and to help them handle real-life situations rather than simply having the language proficiency that may not be performed well in some specific situations.

At first glance, the main purposes of TBLT and some of the other approaches mentioned before seem to be similar. However, what makes TBLT stand out is the authenticity factor lying at its heart. For example, we have two people learning English. One is learning English for the specific purpose of essential communication, and the other is learning English for the purpose of learning computer programming. Obviously, the purposes of these two are significantly different. The application contexts are also almost irrelevant to each other. Therefore, if the common goal is to communicate fluently and use that as the main outcome for both learners, they will not receive suitable approaches to the vocabulary and language uses relevant to the situation they are aiming for (Thomas, 2015).

TBLT also faces certain concerns, such as whether this approach is exclusive. Sarre (2013) pointed out that TBLT is a flexible and highly integrated framework. TBLT's locus is on tasks,

and its spirit is authenticity. Thus, it is highly compatible with ESP and Scenario-Based Learning (SBL) language courses (Sarre, 2013). As described earlier, ESP and SBL are highly student-centered, purpose-oriented, and contextual, but TBLT is more universal because it focuses on learners on a deeper level. John Dewey's famous quote - "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself" – captures well the nature of TBLT.

Another concern with TBLT is about its' starting point for conventional classrooms and its' heavily theoretical nature. It is true that with the help of technology, teachers and learners have more choices and more vehicles for accessing authentic content. Learning materials are also more diverse, and learners can actively get access to resources without waiting for teachers' lectures or going to the library. However, these do not reduce the usefulness of TBLT; on the contrary, it shows the practicality and good adaptability of this framework.

The TBLT framework can go hand in hand with the development of technology to diversify language tasks not only for language learning but also to the overall requirements of the age of digital literacy (Ziegler, 2016). Moreover, the theoretical character of this framework also lies at the core of being deeply student-centered and the authenticity of learning tasks, and this gives TBLT the flexibility to adapt well to technological inventions in individualizing learning. Building on the background provided by González-Lloret and Ortega (2014), Ziegler (2016) provides a discussion on aspects of TBLT in technology-mediated contexts such as Affective Factors and Individual Differences, Task Complexity and Sequencing, Pre-task and During-Task Planning. He also emphasizes that although much research has been done for aspects such as task complexity or task sequencing, there is still very little research on this framework in terms of affective factors and individual differences. The focus of the article is currently only on the level of complexity and sequence and cannot delve into the third aspect.

Restructuring an interpretation course and delivering it on the online mode is a challenge. With support from the school's Learning Management System (LMS), managing online teaching and learning activities becomes easier and more effective. Teaching materials are prepared based on the ESP, and SBL approaches. These materials are deployed through code-switching language teaching in class, code-mixing language learning in quizzes, and authentic tasks focusing heavily on interpreting skills. The quality-quantity-strategy approach is applied to measure the right amount of time for each activity and create the right mix between them. TBLT is the backbone for these things to be materialized and for all the other administrative tasks in the class.

Research Questions

The study focuses on restructuring the interpretation course using the TBLT framework to primarily address the vocabulary learning problem among students, which has become more pressing due to some of the unexpected by-products of online learning (technical problems related to internet connections or devices' capacity, tendencies to rely on translation apps, limitations of having group work on the online setting, etc.). Improving interpreting skills is considered an inherent outcome when vocabulary learning is solved. Therefore, within the

scope of the study, the research questions are as follows:

1. Does code-mixing vocabulary quizzes help students improve their vocabulary retention?

2. What is the relationship between the study approach and the results of the students' vocabulary retention?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The research was carried out at Van Lang University. Participants are senior students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, majoring in business English, business English Chinese, and translation-interpretation. The students were taking a course named Business Interpretation 2 - a course that requires interpreting skills in typical commercial situations rather than the level of casual and simple communication situations. It is a skill-based course that requires active engagement from students on both vocabulary and interpreting skills. Before taking this course, students also took Business Interpretation 1, Interpreting Techniques, along with other courses on translation and business. Different courses serve different learning outcome expectations, although they may share some similarities in knowledge and skills. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, classes were held face-to-face in schools, and specific practice activities were often organized in the form of groups, pairs, and individual work. The basic skill is listening actively and interpreting consecutively. Since the Covid-19 pandemic has set a new context, teachers and students are required to be proactive in adapting to the new setting to ensure the quality of teaching and learning. Participants were formed by assigned groups from the Training Department. Group 1 has 40 participants, Group 2 has 37 participants, and Group 3 has 43 students.

Design of the Study

The objective of the Business Interpretation 2 course is to train students in interpreting skills for specific business situations, and the vocabulary retention quizzes are justified as a springboard for that. Based on the TBLT framework, the entire course focuses on having synchronized tasks and serves the specific purpose of teaching students sets of vocabulary in a well-defined context with the use of the code-mixing method in designing quizzes. However, with the scope of predetermined groups, the main concern of this study is the use of vocabulary quizzes and TBLT. Thus, a quantitative method is designed to measure the level of effectiveness of the quizzes and to study the correlational relationships between the change of framework and the students' vocabulary retention.

Essentially, all three groups that received the same teaching materials were assigned the same quizzes, just under slightly different conditions. Conditions were carefully instructed within the range of a weighted 30% of the final score. To have a base for measuring students' vocabulary retention, all three groups took a pre-test. The test includes 35 multiple-choice questions and must be done within 25 minutes. The content of the test is the specific vocabulary that students

would encounter during the course. Students from the groups retook this test at the last online session of the course (week 8). The process of vocabulary retention training was carried out as follows: A total of 10 learning content, including 10 economic articles and 10 specific commercial topics. In a typical session, after a series of tasks to engage with the vocabulary through code-switching and the practice of interpreting skills in the class had been completed, three groups were asked to do homework. Homework is fill-in-blank exercises designed in a code-mixing style for a specific set of vocabulary and multiple-choice questions on a specific business topic. There was a small grammatical challenge in designing the questions. Most of the Vocabulary used in the exercises was in the noun or gerund forms and could either be a subject or an object in a sentence. The passive–active voice in both languages can cause confusion for Vietnamese learners in recognizing the real subject/object. To avoid this problem, especially when exercises were based on the code-mixing approach, strategies in translating discussed in the study of Nguyen (2022) about passive sentences were applied. With the support of the school's LMS platform, setting up the requirements was quite simple, and collecting learning data was also relatively convenient. The conditions for the groups were as follows: Group 1, with the regular start of a session at 9:35 a.m., was required to complete homework with a passing grade above 5. This homework activity equals 10% of the course grade for Group 1. Group 2, with the starting time at 7:00 a.m., was assigned to complete their homework without being pressured to pass a certain grade (meaning that even 0 points would still be considered passed)*,* and the homework activity equals 10% of the course grade for Group 2. Group 3, with the starting time at 1:00 p.m., received no specific request for a passing grade, and the homework accounted for 5% of the course grade. The time a class of these groups started as mentioned in order to consider whether starting time of an online class could be an indicator for groups' vocabulary performances overall.

Data collection & analysis

As mentioned in the previous section about the Pre-test, the Post-test's content and time limit were the same as of the Pre-test's (35 multiple-choice questions within 25 minutes). The results of the vocabulary test at week 1 and week 8 are used to assess students' vocabulary retention at the group level; also, only results from students who did the test on both times were collected. The overall outcome of these results is to answer the first question of the study.

To assess the level of effectiveness of the homework to students' vocabulary retention performance, students within a group would be classified into three grade distinctions. The first distinction is test results under 5, the second distinction is test results from 5 to 7, and the third one is test results from 7 to 10. The choice for such grade segmentations is based on the usual grading system and the conversion of competencies based on that scale, which is already common in the school environment.

Collecting students' full learning activities data is not difficult, thanks to the school's LMS. However, because the amount of the raw data that needs to be processed is larger than the scope of the study, this type of data was not used for analysis. Instead, it was used for classroom management to assess each student's level of attendance and learning attitude.

Results/Findings and discussion

Table 1. The average grade and the average amount of time to take the tests from the three groups

	Pre-test	Avg. Time Pre-test	Post-test	Avg. Time Post-test
Group 1	6,4	17 mins 48 secs	7,3	11 mins 35 secs
Group 2	6,5	14 mins 57 secs	7,3	10 mins 29 secs
Group 3	6,7	16 mins 35 secs	7,6	13 mins 51 secs
Avg.	**6,5**		**7,4**	

From Table 1, it is justifiable to say that there is a positive outcome in the finding. On average, the retake of the test after eight online sessions demonstrates a better grade compared to the first time. Although the numbers can not reflect at the deeper level on how significantly different it is on the individual level in a particular group, they are still solid enough to emphasize that the vocabulary retention did occur and was slightly improved among groups. Thus, for the first question of the study, the obvious answer is that doing vocabulary exercises improved vocabulary retention. One might argue that students may be just remembered the vocabulary without doing any homework, and with that argument, there may be no correlation at all between the homework and the word retention. Based on the administrative data from the LMS, most of the students did their homework consecutively, so there exists a strong correlation between word exercises and word retention. In fact, to achieve this improvement is not simply through the individual act of doing the homework. Even in the case of not using the administrative data to justify the correlation, the act of merely remembering without doing homework manifests the effectiveness of other classroom activities such as code-switching activities from the lecturer and group-work activities from students. This interpretation is compatible with the study by Manyak et al. (2018) mentions quantity and strategy factors in maximizing the interactions between students and the learning materials. While the average amount of time to take the test within groups does not contribute a direct voice in explaining the connection between homework and vocabulary retention, it helps illustrate that students processed the vocabulary information better within a shorter amount of time.

Table 2. The performance of groups following the grade classification

	Group 1 (40 students)		Group 2 (37 students)		Group 3 (43 students)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
0-5	4	2	6	2	3	0
5-7	28	12	17	11	22	10
7-10	12	26	14	24	18	33

One thing to take away from Table 2 is that students within groups had a significant shift to a better grade. The prominent trend from these numbers is that students moved away from the low/average grade from the first time and headed to a higher grade drastically in the second time of the test. In the same line with the interpretation from Table 1, the positive outcome

presented here demonstrates the effectiveness of the course on the vocabulary retentions of students overall. One important inference from these two tables is that the reconstruction of the course in this study did help remedy the vocabulary learning issue. With the TBLT framework, authenticity is the core value, and so the tasks were designed to be highly practical and relevant to the students. Within the small scope of the study in vocabulary retention, the fill-in-blank exercises designed in the style of code-mixing and multiple-choice questions are suitable in practicing vocabulary skills and knowledge accumulation. Besides, the types of quizzes are strongly useful for processing information and enhancing the speed in rendering information as students are required to shift back and forth between L1 and L2.

Throughout the study, vocabulary teaching and interpreting skills training are separated into two isolated islands, yet it is incontestable that vocabulary skills smooth the interpreting process and that their relationship is reciprocal. Other studies briefly mention this link between vocabulary and interpreting skills, and they are in agreement about this connection and their impacts on each other during the language acquiring process (Alamri & Rogers, 2018; Ma, 2013; Maryam & Mohammad, 2018; Staehr, 2009). Although to measure the improvement of interpreting skills in terms of speed, verbal data such as recordings are critical, it is safe to assert that vocabulary retention advances the decoding and rendering processes between languages, especially when new and technical words are introduced in a known context. Besides, with the context of Covid and of technology enhancement in learning languages, especially the English language, measuring vocabulary retention contributes a more critical voice than ever before in teaching skills-based subjects like translation and interpretation. The code-mixing approach is in a vulnerable position if students use the technology support right at the beginning. To improve the authenticity of the performance, participants in the study were encouraged to not use any support from translating apps unless they failed to get the correct answers after several attempts. While this piece of advice was not written in the instruction for exercises, it was repeated multiple times during the teaching sessions. There are not many available studies discussing at length about this issue in teaching interpretation skills up to date, but it is worth noticing the integrity aspect in designing some task-based activities related to interpreting/translating skills and also to this study itself. Bearing that in mind, this is when the TBLT framework shows its strong suit around the concept of student-centered approach and authenticity in learning, especially in the technology-mediated environments, as discussed in the studies of González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) and Ziegler's (2016). Code-mixing, code-switching, scenarios-based tasks, context-based tasks, etc. discussed and used in this study are not randomly chosen and sequenced; they were in a sequence following the TBLT framework to maximize the students' contribution to their own learning process.

Conclusion

This study shows that the designed quizzes have had to improve the students' vocabulary retention. This improvement is critical as it helps students process information better and faster in interpreting business content. Before having the new approach, not being able to use suitable words in interpreting business content was an 'endemic' problem among students. With the TBLT in use, learning materials and the sequence of tasks carry a refreshing and impactful meaning. For instance, before TBLT is applied, the learning materials have been used as a small vehicle for interpreting. Students had no foundational understanding of the context use of the material; vocabulary explanation was sporadically available, and vocabulary quizzes were not available.

After studying the TBLT framework, the Author had a strong reason to redesign the whole course. The nature of the course is skills-based, and vocabulary retention is not the main learning outcome, but TBLT has given a good justification for teaching vocabulary. As TBLT is about providing authenticity in learning materials and the sequence of tasks (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Solheim & Zhao, 2020), vocabulary teaching is now seen as an integral part of training interpreting skills because it helps remedy the main problem that students usually encounter. Moreover, TBLT is flexible in helping create an effective online teaching and learning environment with the support of the school's LMS. Besides, TBLT is not a rigid framework. It can be utilized for online learning settings. For example, the new educational setting due to COVID forces teachers and students to engage in full-time online synchronous classes, and this is not sustainable physically and mentally in the long run. The use of asynchronous activities like vocabulary quizzes on the school's LMS has helped bring half of the regular workload of the online classes, and lets teachers and students have time to focus on tasks that work best when in the classroom space. To let this situation happen, the TBLT framework must be used in the initial stage of designing a course.

Studies about TBLT and Vocabulary retention, respectively are not rare. However, studies about the use of TBLT as the main framework in which vocabulary retention has a role in it not many to date. Thus, the author believes that the study of 'Using TBLT Framework in Technology-mediated Environments to Enhance Students' Vocabulary Retention and Interpreting Skills' has brought a reasonable voice to the table. The study demonstrates the positive results of vocabulary retention quizzes and the correlational relationship between them and TBLT. Although the study has certain shortcomings, such as the relatively small number of data samples, the direction of this study indicates potential in using TBLT in a technological-mediated environment to solve problems arising in teaching and learning in the new settings.

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