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The Implementation of Blended Learning for English Courses at Higher Education in Vietnam: Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract

Advancements in technology and the Internet characterize the current English teaching and learning scenario. In this trend, the issue of blending face-to-face and online learning into English learning and teaching has drawn significant attention from teachers, researchers, and educators worldwide, including Vietnam, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this mode has been applied widely and shown its noticeable benefits, there have been relatively few studies regarding the perceptions of English lecturers at the tertiary level in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Therefore, the objectives of this research are to (1) critically review knowledge of blended learning (BL); (2) investigate the tertiary level English lecturers' perceptions of the BL model implementation in a college in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; (3) provide some practical recommendations for future research and implementations. Online questionnaires and interviews with 14 English lecturers in the Summer 2023 semester were used to collect qualitative and quantitative data. At the end of the paper, EFL lecturers' perceptions were revealed. Several educational implications and practical recommendations were suggested as well. The research findings are expected to contribute to a complete picture of BL in higher education in Vietnam.

Keywords: Blended Learning, CALL, Moodle, higher education, online learning

Introduction

In the last few decades, Vietnam's educational system has seen and experienced a visible and huge change with the assistance of the developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dao et al., 2021; Hanh, 2022;). There was a transition from learning in traditional classrooms to learning in online classrooms and even the combination of both traditional and online learning, namely blended learning (BL), to cope with the situation and solve the problems of school closures (Tran & Nguyen, 2023; Lien, 2022; Pham et al., 2021).

The notion of combining face-to-face classrooms with online classrooms in English courses in higher education has been applied in quite a lot of institutions in Vietnam and worldwide (Dao et al., 2021; Phuong et al., 2022; Hanh, 2022). The benefits and opportunities that BL has

provided teachers and learners cannot be denied. In the EFL context, there have been studies on the characteristics and effectiveness of BL on university students (Hung et al., 2023; Vu et al., 2022), students' perceptions towards the implementation of BL in English classrooms (Anh et al., 2022; Tran & Nguyen, 2023; Thao et al., 2021). However, the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL instructors about the implications of BL have been the subject of comparatively few investigations (Thao et al., 2021).

Therefore, this current study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of tertiary-level English teachers toward the implementation of the BL model in a college in Ho Chi Minh City. In particular, 14 English teachers in the Art and Science Department took part in the study as well as completed the online survey. Then, five out of 14 English teachers also joined in the semi-structured interviews. The study also revealed some practical recommendations for future research and implementations.

Literature review

Definition of blended learning

According to Lewis (2017), Dao et al. (2021), and Hanh (2022), BL is considered to be a broad term with a variety of approaches. Lewis (2017) emphasizes the flexibility and adaptability of BL, highlighting its capacity to combine traditional face-to-face instruction with online elements. Dao et al. (2021) delve into the pedagogical implications of BL, suggesting that a well-designed BL environment can enhance student engagement and provide a more personalized learning experience. Additionally, Hanh (2022) explores the cultural aspects of BL, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural contexts in the implementation of BL models.

Moreover, as defined by Allan (2007), the notion of BL was the involvement of technology in teaching and learning, which could also occasionally include a blend of technology-based and traditional classroom learning. BL was defined by MacDonald and Creanor (2010) as learning that takes place in both in-person and online settings. Reinders (2012), Bates (2015), and Hockly and Dudeney (2018) also agreed with this definition by stating that BL is the “combination of face-to-face and online teaching”. It means the teaching and learning process can take place both inside and outside the classroom (Harmer, 2015). Additionally, Huy et al. (2020) defined BL as a program that includes “traditional lectures, virtual or online lessons, multimedia contents especially videos and audios, email systems, discussion forums, and a chat system.”

Furthermore, this is also the synchronization of learning in conventional onsite learning and online learning, which can be presented on a continuum in Figure 1 below, with BL between the two ends, namely onsite and online learning (Allan, 2007; Phuong et al., 2022; Reinders, 2012; Stein & Graham, 2014; Vu et al., 2022). A course in the blended mode could fall anywhere in this spectrum in that the rate of onsite and online meetings is arbitrary (Stein & Graham, 2014).

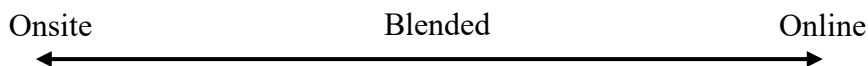


Figure 1. Overview of blended learning

In addition, according to Stein and Graham (2014), the types of synchronous and asynchronous interactions should also be considered in blended courses. The interactions that happen simultaneously are synchronous interactions, which implement web conferencing, chat, and instant messaging. Asynchronous interactions are interactions that do not happen in real-time but at any time, such as emails or discussion forums. However, these two kinds of interactions can be incorporated into a blended course since each of them has its own strengths and weaknesses.

In blended courses, apart from the classroom learning environment, there is a requirement for an online learning environment that offers the features of organizing and supplementing the course. Institutions can use simple websites or a toolset called a Learning Management System (LMS), which provides some features of class management, communication and interaction, organization and resources, and practice and assessment. There are some LMSs used commonly, such as Moodle, Canvas, Schoology, or Blackboard.

Types of blended learning

As Roblyer (2016) considered, any educational module involves a mix of online and in-person activities in the blended mode, so there are a variety of blended course models in practice. Thus, there are three models categorized such as (1) traditional classroom with online activities model, (2) online classroom with in-person events model, and (3) flipped classroom model. Graham (2006) classified BL into three types: Enabling Blends, Enhancing Blends, and Transforming Blends based on the primary purpose of BL.

Meanwhile, the four models presented by Staker and Horn (2012), which they considered to categorize most BL programs across the K-12 sector, are the most common BL models. The first type is the Rotation Model, wherein, in a course, students alternate between learning modes according to a predetermined schedule. This model is subdivided into four common implementations: the station-rotation model, the lab-rotation model, the flipped-classroom model, and the individual-rotation model. The second type is the Flex Model, where, in a course, students have control over their learning in that they can choose the learning modes according to their needs. In this model, while most of the content and instructions are offered online, sessions with teachers are also offered on-site as needed in some activities, such as small-group instructions, group projects, and individual training. The third type is the Self-Blended Model, where, within a program, students can enroll in one or more online courses apart from the traditional courses. The last type is the Enriched-Virtual Model, where, within a program, students divide their time between taking classes on-site and learning online.

Blended learning in the EFL contexts

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Hockly and Clandfield (2010) assert that compared to learners in purely face-to-face learning environments, those situated in classrooms that offer a blend of online and face-to-face learning experiences demonstrate enhanced

learning outcomes. BL is recognized as a common and successful option in this context. The authors highlight the multifaceted benefits of blending traditional classroom instruction with online elements, emphasizing its positive impact on student learning.

Furthermore, Hockly and Clandfield (2010) delve into the pedagogical considerations of BL in EFL settings. They underscore the importance of facilitating peer interactions and stimulating learner autonomy, even in the online component of the blended format. This acknowledgment of the need for active peer engagement and the encouragement of learner autonomy reflects a thoughtful approach to designing blended learning experiences that cater to the unique challenges and opportunities in EFL contexts.

According to Reinders (2012), BL is the mode that mixes the advantages and strengths of face-to-face and online learning. Its flexibility in lesson delivery offers learners flexible learning opportunities and environments and helps enhance learners' autonomy and motivation. In addition, there are some specific challenges in online and BL for both learners and teachers related to the manner in which they learn and teach online.

In a recent study, Ibrahim and Ismail (2021) investigated university ESL instructors' reflections on BL in their classrooms. They found that the teachers with more experience with technology and positive attitudes toward technology were more likely to implement BL effectively. Meanwhile, workload and technological infrastructure were the two major challenges.

In the Vietnamese EFL context, several higher education institutions have offered courses in the BL mode. It is suggested by Tang and Tien (2020) that BL should be employed to keep abreast of the current digital technology scenario and modify and improve education quality. In the article, these authors discussed how to choose forms and levels of BL and noted some important factors when implementing BL.

Another study conducted among English-majored students by Vu et al. (2022), which employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods, concluded that the students in the experimental group (N=20) performed better than those in the control group (N=20) after the experiment and that the experimented students had positive perceptions about blended online EFL writing activities. The authors also suggested several strategies for successful BL employment, including designing interesting tasks and discussion topics and establishing a collaborative and interactive learning environment.

A recent Hanh (2022) study also claimed that BL benefits from onsite and online learning. The study also concluded from the survey that BL positively impacted higher education. This study also employed both quantitative and qualitative methods; however, the collected data was gathered from books, studies in Vietnam and outside Vietnam, etc., and surveyed teacher participants.

Additionally, research conducted at a university in Vietnam to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions towards the implication of BL, by Phuong et al. (2022) brought a conclusion that when using BL in their classrooms, EFL teachers benefited a lot from BL and also faced different challenges in terms of appropriate devices, cheating issue, internet connection, technical problems and time constraints.

Based on Cao's (2022) study trying to explore how language teachers in a university in Vietnam perceived and adopted BL to adapt to the new normal, the teachers had positive perceptions of BL in terms of its usefulness, ease of use, necessity, feasibility, and their confidence in implementing BL lead to their active employment and intentional continuation. However, the teacher encountered some challenges related to their increased work burden and the students' lack of facilities.

TAM Model

It cannot be denied that teachers play an integral part in the implementation and use of BL, and their acceptance and use of technology should be adequately considered. The technology acceptance model (TAM), which has been developed by Davis et al. (1989), is seen as one of the most used models to predict and explore an individual's acceptance and use of technology. This model considers four factors: perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, behavioral intention, and attitude toward use. Accordingly, the 'actual system use' is the endpoint of the model. The users' behavioral intention, which is influenced by their attitude, leads to this use. In turn, the users' attitude is affected by how they perceive the technology's usefulness and ease of use. The Extended-TAM was suggested by some other scholars in that the factor of external variables is also considered to be a factor that affects users' acceptance and use of technology.

Sulistiyo et al. (2022) conducted research adopting TAM to investigate the TAM's determining factors toward the use of ICT tools for English learning. In this quantitative study, the TAM variables, namely Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and Attitude, were entailed and expanded by three external factors, including Equipment, Motivation, and ICT Skills, to explore the pre-service teachers' attitudes toward ICT use for English learning. The findings showed that the determinants of TAM influenced the ICT application in English learning. Moreover, the TAM's three main variables assisted the effect of the extended factors toward the use of ICT, and the actual use was only influenced by the attitudes, motivation, and ICT skills factors, not the equipment factor.

In the context of the implementation of BL, if the end-users believe that BL is useful for teaching and learning and it is easy for them to use technology during their implementation of BL, they will tend to be willing to adopt it. Hence, this study employed the TAM as its theoretical framework to explore teachers' perceptions of using BL.

Research Questions

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

1. What are English teachers' perceptions regarding their acceptance of blended learning implementation for English courses?
2. How do English teachers perceive the challenges of the use of blended teaching?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Saigon College in Ho Chi Minh City was the site of this study, and 14 English teachers in the Art and Science Department participated in it. Among these teachers (N=14), five teachers were willing to participate in the semi-structured interviews after the online survey.

English teachers and students in Saigon College have been provided with opportunities to approach new trends of teaching and learning thanks to the advancement of technology and the internet. Since 2023, Saigon College has offered courses in the rotational BL mode. The blended mode's onsite and synchronous online percentages are 80% and 20%, respectively. In addition, the number of online sessions for each course is not the same due to the courses' credits and the length of the courses. Moodle is used as the learning management system during the courses, where teachers upload learning materials, assign homework, create quizzes, tests, forum discussions, and so on. Apart from the onsite sessions, the online sessions take place on Google Meet.

The participants' demographic information is in the table below:

Table 1.

Participants' demographic information

Information		No.
Years of Teaching Experience	6-10 years	8
	11-20 years	6
Degree of familiarity with blended learning	Very familiar	7
	Somewhat familiar	7
Frequency of teaching in blended learning mode	Frequently	9
	Occasionally	5

As presented in Table 1, the study gathered vital demographic data from a sample of teachers, which provided insights into the diverse teacher landscape. Among the participants, 8 teachers had 6-10 years of teaching experience, while 6 teachers had a more extensive teaching background of 11-20 years. When it came to their degree of familiarity with BL, 7 teachers expressed being very familiar with the concept, while an additional 7 teachers reported being somewhat familiar. In terms of the frequency of incorporating BL into their teaching methods, 9 teachers were actively engaged, teaching in this mode frequently, while 5 teachers adopted it more sporadically, teaching in BL mode occasionally. These findings provide a comprehensive snapshot of the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the teachers involved in our study, shedding light on the varied perspectives they bring to the integration of BL in their classrooms.

Design of the Study

The mixed-method research design was defined as the method in which the researcher collects and analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). Hence, to answer the research questions, this research employed the mixed-method design, which is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods, to study the perceptions of tertiary-level English teachers towards the BL model implementation and the challenges they encountered.

Furthermore, the data collected for this study came from two sources, including online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which are going to be described in more detail in the next part.

Data Collection & Analysis

This study used online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as the data collection instruments. The questionnaire was piloted before the official administration in order to identify and clarify ambiguities in the instructions and the items.

According to Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009), questionnaires help the researcher to measure the factual, behavioral, and attitudinal data about the respondents. Mackey and Gass (2015) also advocated the benefits of using questionnaires in that it is convenient for the researcher to deliver in various forms. As a result, a set of questionnaires was put to use to answer the research questions.

The aims of the Likert questionnaire were to gather some demographic information about the teachers, their perceptions regarding their acceptance and attitude toward the use of BL, and the difficulties they encountered during the teaching process in the blended mode. The questionnaire items regarding teachers' acceptance of BL were adapted from Cao (2022), while those addressing challenges during the implementation of BL were sourced from the work of Phuong et al. (2022) and Ibrahim and Ismail (2021). The questionnaire items of this current study were modified to accommodate the study better.

The aim of the questionnaire in Cao's (2022) "Language teachers' perception and practice of adopting BL to adapt to the new normal" was to gather data about how language teachers in a university in Vietnam perceived BL and how they employed BL in practice. After considering 14 items from the original version, 10 items were adapted so as to suit the aim of the study's research question 1 about the teachers' perceptions regarding their acceptance of implementing BL.

Additionally, in "Teachers' Perceptions Toward Blended Teaching Applied in EFL Classroom," Phuong et al. (2022) used the questionnaire to explore EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the challenges of BL in a Vietnamese university. The purpose of Ibrahim and Ismail's (2021) questionnaire was to identify factors and challenges in implementing BL in ELT in a university in Malaysia. After taking the original versions into account, seven items on the aspects of instructional and tech-related challenges were adapted and modified to answer the second research question of this study.

This research questionnaire consisted of three parts with a total of 20 items. The three items in the first part of the questionnaire were to collect data on participants' demographics in terms of teaching experience, degree of familiarity with BL, and frequency of teaching in BL mode. The question items in section two and section three were designed based on the Likert five-point scale, which ranged from 1 to 5, specifically, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The second part of the questionnaire, comprising ten items, aligns with the four original factors of the TAM: perceived usefulness (PU1, PU2, PU3, PU4), perceived ease of use (PEOU1, PEOU2, PEOU3), attitude toward use (A1, A2), and behavioral intention (BI). In the third section, seven items were used to investigate the difficulties the

teachers had during their practice of implementing BL in regard to instructional challenges (items I1, I2, I3, and I4) and tech-related challenges (items T1, T2, and T3).

Moreover, to explore issues that are not noticeable in the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with five EFL teachers were conducted to collect qualitative data. The data from the interviews support the findings and conclusion of the questionnaire in that it provided a more in-depth understanding of teachers' teaching experiences during the course in the mode of BL, their attitudes, and further recommendations for future application.

The study was carried out at Saigon College, and the data was collected in the Summer 2023 semester, which is the second semester the institution implemented the BL mode in several courses. While the online survey was conducted via Google Forms for convenience, the semi-structured interviews were conducted offline and online at the respondents' convenience. In addition, the interviewees were given the names T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5 when being mentioned to protect their identities.

The quantitative data of the research, which was from the survey's close-ended items, was gathered, computed using the SPSS program (version 26.0), and then statistically presented. The Cronbach's Alpha was computed to check the reliability of the questionnaire. Table 2 below shows that all the values are over 0.5, which means that the questionnaire is reliable as a data collection instrument.

Table 2.

Reliability of the Questionnaire and Constructs

Constructs	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Teachers' perceptions regarding their acceptance of blended learning	10	0.94
Teachers' perceptions regarding the challenges of implementing blended learning	07	0.86

The qualitative data from the interviews was transcribed verbatim, categorized into themes, and presented in two main categories: (1) EFL teachers' acceptance of the implementation of BL and (2) EFL teachers' perceptions of challenges during the implementation of BL. After that, the data from the interviews were used to support the findings and assumptions from the survey to draw a conclusion.

Findings and discussion

EFL teachers' perceptions regarding their acceptance of blended learning

The participants were asked about their perceptions regarding their acceptance of BL implementation for English courses. The responses from some interviewees in the semi-structured interviews reinforce the data collected from the survey, which shows that the EFL teachers had positive perceptions towards the implementation of BL.

The ten items in the second section of the online questionnaires are associated with four factors that affect the teachers' acceptance of BL. Table 3 below presents a summary of those responses.

Table 3.

Teachers’ perceptions regarding their acceptance of blended learning

Code		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
		1	2	3	4	5	4.75
PU1	I think it is necessary to implement blended learning at my institution	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	50.0%	42.9%	4.35
PU2	I think it is feasible to implement blended learning at my institution.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
PU3	I think blended learning is useful for my teaching.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
PU4	I think blended learning is useful for my students’ learning	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	78.6%	4.78
PEOU1	I think it is easy for me to implement blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
PEOU2	I think there is enough equipment (both at home and at school) for me to apply blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	92.9%	4.92
PEOU3	I think I have enough technical knowledge and skills to apply blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	78.6%	4.78
A1	I find it interesting to apply blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	78.6%	4.78
A2	I think I have enough teaching experience to apply blended learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	78.6%	4.78
BI	I will support the implementation of blended learning in the future.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	92.9%	4.92

As can be seen from the table, the teachers’ choices ranged from ‘Neutral’ to ‘Strongly agree’. Besides, BL’s usefulness and ease of use factors are highly appreciated ($M > 4.0$). It seems that most of the teachers appreciated BL and have positive perceptions of the application of BL mode due to its benefits.

Regarding the teachers’ responses of the usefulness (PU1-PU4), many teachers (42.9% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 7.1% neutral, $M=4.35$) claimed the implementation of BL at the institution is necessary ($M=4.35$) and found it is feasible to implement BL at the institution (78.6% strongly agreed, 14.3% agreed, 7.1% neutral, $M=4.71$). It is evident that more than 90% of the teachers (PU1 and PU2) agreed that it is not only necessary but also feasible to implement BL in their institutions. Besides, most of the teachers agreed that BL is useful for their teaching (78.6% strongly agreed, 14.3% agreed, 7.1% neutral, $M=4.71$) and for their students’ learning (PU4) (78.6% strongly agreed, 21.4% agreed, $M=4.78$). Unsurprisingly, the results in PU3 and PU4 revealed that BL brings benefits to both teachers’ teaching and students’ learning. To justify this, all the teachers shared the same point in the interview that it was useful for their teaching in that they had a chance to design the lessons and adapt various teaching methods and approaches appropriately in two different modes, online and offline, keep track of the student's

progress via Moodle easily, and motivate them to find out about the application of technology in their teaching. Four respondents (T2, T3, T4, and T5) stated that BL was very useful for their students' learning because they could experience different learning environments and teachers' teaching methods. Meanwhile, Participant T5 shared that this BL was relatively useful for their students' learning, particularly the online sessions, because the students may be distracted by other things when they studied online.

In responding to questions about the ease of use (PEOU1-PEO3), the total percentage of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" replies were strikingly high, indicating that the implementation of BL is easy (92.9%), and there is adequate equipment, both at home and at school for the teachers to employ BL effectively (100%). Also, all participants claimed that they had enough technical knowledge and skills to apply BL (PEOU3) (78.6% strongly agreed, 21.4% agreed, $M=4.78$). Indeed, all the interviewees shared that it was easy when teaching in the blended mode. A respondent commented that it was a little challenging in the beginning, then became familiar with teaching online and changing teaching modes between online and on-site. Moreover, before the implementation, they were briefed on how to use Moodle and Google Meet effectively. Respondent T3 also shared:

“Besides the training from the institution, I also actively search for other teaching tools, approaches, and activities to use in my on-site and online classrooms.”

In addition, the teachers were asked about their interest in implementing BL as well as their ideas about their teaching experience in applying BL in the classroom (A1-A2). The 21.4% agreeing and 78.6% strongly agreeing showed that all the teachers found implementing BL interesting and had adequate teaching experience to employ BL. The follow-up interviews provided some insights into this tendency. Four out of five respondents claimed that they found it motivating when teaching in the BL mode. While respondents T1 and T5 shared the same opinion that it was very convenient for teachers and students because they did not need to go to school to work or study, T2, T3, and T5 agreed that BL mode gave them opportunities to teach in different teaching environments, employ different teaching methods and teaching tools in the on-site and online classrooms. As T3 said:

“This is an opportunity for me to employ online teaching activities that I know and have been trained in and change the teaching environments and atmosphere. I can also introduce my students to some other learning apps and websites and encourage them to self-study.”

Respondent T4 shared that teaching online was quite interesting and motivating. However, she preferred the offline teaching mode to the online one. She thought that the offline sessions were more effective than the online sessions. This was because when the students studied in the classroom, they engaged in teaching and learning more and interacted with others and the teacher more compared to when they studied online.

In terms of behavioral intention, the results in BL showed that most of the teachers are willing to support the implementation of BL in the future (92.9% strongly agreed, 7.1% agreed, $M=4.92$). All the teachers also claimed in the interviews that BL should be implemented in their institutions in the future.

Teacher T2 shared enthusiastically:

"Definitely! Information technology is developing and having a lot of impacts on education, specifically on English teaching and learning. So that, our school and other institutions should make use of technology advancement."

Teacher T3 also shared:

"Although in the beginning it might not be easy to teach in the blended mode and teachers might not be familiar with it, we should not let blended learning pass unnoticed. Besides, teachers and students should have adequate training to teach and study effectively during the blended learning courses."

The presented results are consistent with earlier studies, which have shown that BL is thought to have several benefits for both instructors and students. Firstly, it is in line with Hockly and Clandfield (2010), Reinders (2012), Vu et al. (2022), Hanh (2022), Cao (2022), and Phuong et al. (2022) in that BL is perceived by EFL teachers as applicable and necessary to be implemented and useful for both their teaching and students' learning in some extent. The EFL teachers confirmed that they had an opportunity to plan lessons and correctly adapt various teaching methods and approaches in two distinct modes, online and offline, easily monitor the students' progress via Moodle, and encourage them to learn about the use of technology in their instruction. Secondly, in terms of the teachers' positive attitude toward the implementation of BL, the present study agreed with Cao (2022), Hanh (2022), and previous studies. From the questionnaire's results, these teachers perceived BL as a mode of teaching that is easy to employ, convenient, and interesting, and believed that they could have adequate teaching experience to apply BL in their classroom, which is consistent with Phuong et al. (2022), Cao (2022) and Hanh (2022). Consequently, all the participants expressed their acceptance of using BL in the institution in that they acknowledged their enthusiasm and advocacy for the BL deployment in the future. The finding agreed with what Phuong et al. (2022) and Cao (2022) mentioned. The obstacles that EFL teachers perceived when implementing BL will be covered in more detail in the following section.

EFL teachers' perceptions of challenges during the implementation of blended learning

The participants were asked to give their perceptions in relation to the challenges they faced during the implementation of BL for the English courses. The ten items in the online questionnaires regarding two main factors, including instructional challenges (I1-I4) and tech-related challenges (T1-T3), were described statistically in Table 4 below.

Table 4.

Teachers' perceptions of challenges during the implementation of blended learning

Code		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
		1	2	3	4	5	4.40
I1	I find maintaining meaningful interaction with students in a blended learning environment is challenging.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	50.0%	42.9%	4.35
I2	The workload associated with blended learning significantly burdens my teaching responsibilities.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
I3	I have difficulties in monitoring and controlling students' cheating in testing and assessment.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
I4	During the blended learning mode, my students are not highly aware of their learning.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	35.7%	64.3%	4.64
T1	Many of my students lack the necessary technology skills for successful participation in blended learning activities.	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	78.6%	4.71
T2	It takes me a lot of time to solve technical problems in the teaching and learning process.	0.0%	14.3%	28.6%	7.1%	50.0%	3.92
T3	The poor internet quality hinders my efforts in implementing blended learning.	0.0%	7.1%	7.1%	85.7%	0.0%	3.78

In terms of instructional challenges from code I1 to I4, as can be seen from Table 4, it's evident from these statistics that a significant percentage of EFL teachers find it challenging to maintain meaningful interaction with students in a BL environment. The combined percentage of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" responses is quite high (92.9%, M=4.35), indicating that this is a substantial concern among teachers. This challenge likely stems from the shift away from traditional face-to-face instruction, where direct interaction is more natural. In fact, respondents T1, T4, and T5 made the same point in the follow-up interviews: It was more difficult for them to give explanations and examples when teaching online than teaching on-site. When the teacher wanted to write or draw something to give detailed explanations or examples in the classroom, they just needed to write or draw on the board quickly, but when they wanted to do it during the online sessions, they had to move back and forth between Google Meet, the PowerPoint slides of the lesson and the whiteboard platform. Teachers T4 and T5 further justified that the teacher-student interactions during online sessions were weak and interrupted since there were few students whose internet connections were not strong enough to keep up with the lessons. This leads to the fact that interaction between teachers and students was not effective, and the quality of the instruction and the lessons' content was not adequate compared

to the on-site mode.

Besides, the statistics show that the workload associated with BL is perceived as a significant burden by the majority of EFL teachers. With 78.6% strongly agreeing and 14.3% agreeing, it's evident that many teachers feel overwhelmed by the demands of BL. This could be due to the need to create and manage online content, facilitate online discussions, and provide individualized support to students.

EFL teachers also faced difficulties in monitoring and controlling students' cheating during testing and assessment, as well as raising their learning awareness in a BL environment. A substantial 78.6% strongly agreed with these statements, indicating that academic integrity issues were a significant concern. Ensuring fair and honest assessment and increasing students' awareness of learning in an online context could be a complex task.

In addition, all the respondents (35.7% agreed, 64.3% strongly agree, $M=4.64$) assert that their students were not highly aware of their learning during the BL mode. In fact, teacher T4 acknowledged in the interview that:

"During the online sessions of the blended mode, some students did not concentrate on the lessons, and some others just showed up for the attendance check."

This could be because they did not receive adequate training in the BL mode, as well as being made aware of the attitudes towards learning. To address this issue, it might be beneficial to incorporate targeted training sessions for both teachers and students, emphasizing effective strategies for engagement and participation in the blended learning environment. Moreover, fostering a culture of communication and collaboration among educators and students could contribute to a more positive and interactive learning experience. Additionally, implementing regular assessments and feedback mechanisms may help in gauging the effectiveness of the blended learning approach, allowing for timely adjustments to improve overall learning outcomes.

In terms of tech-related challenges from code T1 to T3, a striking 78.6% of EFL teachers strongly agreed that many of their students lacked the necessary technology skills for successful participation in BL, highlighting a critical hurdle in the process. This issue could impede students' ability to navigate digital resources and platforms effectively. Consequently, from the interviews, the teachers supposed that the students should be instructed about BL and trained in technological skills and attitudes at the beginning of the semester. 85.7% of participants agreed that poor internet quality hinders their efforts in implementing BL, underlining the fundamental importance of reliable internet access for successful online education. The interviewees' responses were in line with this finding in that all of them claimed that they did not have any difficulties related to technology except for the poor quality of the internet connection. Therefore, the interviewees recommended that the internet connection quality at the school be improved before the beginning of the BL courses. Moreover, a majority of participants admitted that they spent a lot of time-solving technical problems in the teaching and learning process (7,1% agreed and 50 % strongly agreed, $M=3.92$), which could be detrimental to instructional continuity and efficiency. This complexity could create barriers to efficient course management

and content delivery. The challenges they encountered could be due to the weak internet connection and the teaching activities in which they used and moved between different online apps and platforms at the same time. The respondents in the interviews suggested that there should be more training sessions or workshops for teachers so that they could share the difficulties during the BL, learn from each other's experiences, and improve their teaching.

These statistics collectively illustrate EFL teachers' significant instructional and tech-related challenges while adopting BL. The majority of teachers perceived the difficulties of maintaining interaction, monitoring, and controlling students' cheating in exams, as well as the overwhelming workload, as instructional challenges in employing BL. The findings are concurrent with Phuong et al.'s (2022) and Ibrahim and Ismail (2021) findings. However, the findings are inconsistent with Hockly and Clandfield (2010) in terms of teacher-student interactions and students' learning autonomy. The lack of technology skills among students, the quality of internet connectivity, and time-consuming problem-solving underscore the need for robust technological infrastructure systems. These findings align with Phuong et al. (2022) and Ibrahim and Ismail (2021) about the challenges EFL teachers perceive in BL classrooms. Thus, ensuring a smooth and effective BL experience for teachers and students is crucial. Efforts to bridge these technological gaps through training, support, and infrastructure improvements are vital for successful implementation. Nevertheless, regardless of the challenges, the EFL teachers have a positive attitude and are willing to teach and support the implementation of BL in the institution in the future.

Conclusion

The research showed ample positive perceptions among teachers about the implementation of BL and some challenges they had during their practice. The teachers' acceptance of the employment of BL was affected by the factors of their positive perceived ease of use and usefulness of BL, which led to their positive attitudes towards the implementation of the blended mode. Understandably, BL was perceived to be useful for the teachers and students and necessary and feasible to be implemented in the institution. Due to the fact that the teachers had adequate teaching equipment, teaching experience, technical knowledge, and skills, they found it easy when teaching in blended courses. Therefore, the teachers had positive perspectives about BL and were willing to advocate the implementation. The main challenges, which were perceived by most of the teachers, were the problem of weak internet connection, the time-consuming in solving technical problems, and the students' shortage of IT skills. Thus, it was recommended by the teachers in the interviews that there should be an improvement in internet connection and instructions and training provided to the students. Interaction between teachers and students and increasing students' learning awareness were also admitted to be a challenge to teachers in BL environments. As a result, for a recommendation, instructors should implement various strategies to enhance interaction between teachers and students and to increase student's awareness of their own learning in BL environments. These efforts may include incorporating technology-mediated communication tools, fostering collaborative learning opportunities, and providing regular feedback to students to support their engagement and comprehension.

This study presents valuable insights into how EFL teachers at Saigon College in Vietnam perceive BL. However, it still has some limitations which can be solved in further research. Firstly, the limited applicability of the findings to a broader context is constrained by the small sample size (N=14) because it may not represent all tertiary EFL teachers in Vietnam. Secondly, although the teachers' demographics were explored in the survey, this study has not shown whether the years of teaching experience factor impacted teachers' perceptions of using BL and the challenges they encountered.

Future research endeavors should investigate larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal studies to monitor perceptions over time, and comparative analyses across various institutions in order to address these limitations. Incorporating student perspectives and investigating best practices can provide a more comprehensive comprehension of the impact of integrated learning, whereas intervention studies can assist in addressing specific challenges identified in this study.

Based on the above limitations, some recommendations for further research are provided. Firstly, to enhance the generalizability of the findings, future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample of tertiary EFL teachers in Vietnam. A larger sample size should provide a more representative picture of the population and allow for more robust statistical analyses. Secondly, future research should conduct a more comprehensive analysis of teachers' demographics, specifically investigating whether the variable of years of teaching experience significantly impacts teachers' perceptions and the challenges they encounter. This should involve regression analyses or subgroup comparisons to identify potential correlations or differences. Thirdly, future researchers should consider conducting longitudinal studies to explore how teachers' perceptions and experiences with BL should evolve over time. This should provide insights into BL's sustainability and long-term impact in the context of EFL teaching in Vietnam. Last but not least, future studies should extend to include an analysis of student outcomes in BL classrooms. Moreover, these studies should examine whether teachers' characteristics and perceptions have an impact on students' achievement and engagement.

By addressing these recommendations in future research, a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities of BL in EFL teaching in Vietnam can be achieved, ultimately leading to more effective and context-specific strategies for implementation.

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Translation in Language Teaching - The Need for Redefinition of Translation

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Abstract

Translation has been long excluded from language classes due to its association with the drawbacks of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). However, in recent years, translation has made a comeback with its positive impact on students' language performance. The effect of translation on the learner's language knowledge has been finite compared with other language activities. The paper presents a critical analysis of research on translation in language teaching. It is found that the limited results of studies on the impact of translation may involve linguistic focus. Generally, most of the studies did not focus on the meaningfulness of linguistic items, which can only be achieved by placing them in context. In other words, the linguistic view of translation is still common in studies supporting translation. The redefinition of translation should incorporate communicative aspects of translation and the function of translation in a communicative context. The literature-based paper reinstates the importance of a communicative view of translation in language teaching, and it makes proposals related to the inclusion of translation in language learning classes.

Keywords: Translation, language learning, communicative view

Introduction

The translation was well-known in language teaching in the 18th and 19th centuries through the GTM, which prioritized students' literature reading skills and their grammatical knowledge over oral skills. During the 20th century, a variety of teaching methods stressed oral skills, and translation lost favor in second-language pedagogy. In many classrooms, translation activities associated with the GTM disappeared. More recently, however, the role of translation in language classes has been reconfigured (Beecroft, 2013; Bonyadi, 2003; Carreres, 2014; Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011; Cook, 2010; Leonardi, 2010; Leonardi & Salvi, 2016). A myriad of studies have shown that translation can be an effective means of developing students' language knowledge and skills (Belpoliti & Plascencia, 2013; Pariente-Beltran, 2013).

In the meantime, translation can be considered a worthwhile skill in itself when learners use it in their daily and professional lives (Cook, 2010; Duff, 1989; Klein-Braley, 1996). Some authors, including Carreres (2014) and Leonardi (2010), also argue that translation should be regarded as the "fifth skill" in language learning in addition to speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Carreres (2014) indicates that there is a blurred line between translation as a means (to

help students improve their language learning) and an end (students knowing how to translate) in language teaching. A number of studies conducted in undergraduate language programs have attempted to enhance students' knowledge of and skills in Translation (Translation as an end) (see Section 2.2.2).

While there is insufficient research related to the shift from the traditional view of translation to the more communicative one, this paper attempts to explain this tendency. Specifically, this paper which reviews relevant journal articles and books describes a resurgence of translation in language teaching and re-examines how the role of translation is viewed and how it is taught in different contexts, which calls for the need to redefine translation in language teaching.

Literature review

Language teaching and translation teaching

Pedagogical Translation vs. Translation Pedagogy

A number of scholars (Davies & Kiraly, 2006; Holmes, 1994, 2004; Vermes, 2010) have agreed on a clear demarcation between pedagogical translation and translation pedagogy as they differ, mainly in function and audience. Firstly, the former kind of translation is a means of enhancing foreign language knowledge and skills and is a well-known concept in language teaching, while the latter equips students with knowledge, skills, and principles of translation as a profession and relates to professional translator training. Secondly, students who do pedagogical translation do not have to deal with any client or reader who needs to understand the target language (TT); the teacher, however, may use translation to assess students' comprehension and/or translation ability. This kind of translation is not a communicative activity in which a translator should fulfill the task of linguistic and cultural mediation, taking into account the needs of their readers or clients.

Some researchers advocate that translation in language teaching should reflect the principles of professional translation and enable learners to translate rather than just develop L2 competence (Carreres, 2014; Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011; Colina, 2002; Cook, 2010; Duff, 1989; Klein-Braley, 1996; Suparmin, 2003). Cook (2010, p. xx) argues that language learners need to be able to translate because translation is "part of everyday bilingual language use" both personally and professionally. Klein-Braley (1996, p. 24) adds that the aim of language courses "must be to enable all-round language professionals to tackle translation themselves for in-house and informal purposes, and also-and importantly-to supervise the translation of texts for public and formal purposes". Similarly, according to Duff (1989), who sees that translation is natural and necessary in the real world, when learners are introduced to a variety of oral and written text types, registers, and styles in translation, they will also develop the skills necessary in second language acquisition and the multilingual world.

The separation of translation as a means to teach languages and translation being taught as an end or a skill/profession is a result of diverging views about translation. Advocates of pedagogical Translation see translation as a linguistic activity in which learners learn language features by comparing and contrasting the first language (L1) and the second language (L2). On the other hand, through translation pedagogy, learners should learn to translate an ST, keeping in mind the target reader and the purpose of the translation. This means that translation

is seen as an act of communication in translation pedagogy. In an article titled "Translation as a means and as an end: Reassessing the divide", Carreres (2014) maintains that if we consider translation as a means to language learning and as a skill as two independent activities, we seem to acknowledge the "disconnection of translation from its natural goal of communication, which characterized the grammar-translation method" (p. 130). Carreres argues that "translation as a means is at its most effective and stimulating when learning objectives and pedagogical design are brought as close as possible to the realities of professional translation – that is, to translation as an end in itself" (p. 130). Meanwhile, Carreres indicates that the training of professional translators should also take into account the improvement of learners' knowledge of the languages involved.

In agreement with Carreres, who sees no difference between translating in language teaching and translation education, Colina and Lafford (2018) argue that the dichotomies, including pedagogical translation vs. translation pedagogy and language learning vs. translation learning, have "prevented fruitful interaction between these fields [translation studies and language acquisition], as the areas of overlap have been minimi(s)ed by prescriptivist and over-simplistic approaches" (p. 3). Therefore, I maintain that teaching translation in a language teaching context should not be only limited to pedagogical Translation (Translation as a means), but teaching translation should promote language learners' ability to translate (Translation as an end), adopting the view of translation as a communicative activity. The argument is supported throughout the rest of the paper. It will be first consolidated by a description of the similarities between language learning and translating, given the two activities are naturally part of communication. The next section compares language learning and translating before presenting the impact of language learning on translating.

Language learning and translating

Language learning and translating both emphasize learners' ability to communicate (Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011; Colina, 2002). Colina (2002) relates the concept of communicative language competence by Savignon (1972, 1983) and Lee and VanPatten's (1995) to communicative translation competence by Kiraly (1995). She maintains that both activities aim at improving learners' ability to express, interpret, and negotiate meaning in communicative situations. In other words, communicative language competence is achieved by interacting with the input rather than learning formal aspects of the language, while communicative translation competence enables learners to act appropriately in communicative translation tasks. In the same vein, Carreres (2014) referred to the concept of communicative competence developed by Canale (1983) and Canale and Swain (1980), including: grammatical competence (the knowledge of linguistic aspects of languages), sociolinguistic competence (understanding of the social contexts and cultures), discourse competence (knowledge of text types and text type conventions) and strategic competence (strategies to enhance communication). Carreres affirms its closeness with translation competence, particularly as defined by Kelly (2005, pp. 32-33): "macrocompetence that comprises the different capacities, skills, knowledge and even attitudes that professional translators possess and which are involved in translation as an expert activity". Kelly's notion includes aspects such as communicative and textual competence in at least two languages and cultures, cultural and intercultural competence, subject area competence, and

strategic competence (e.g., problem identification and solving and self-assessment). Kelly also refers to professional and instrumental competence (use of documentary resources including dictionaries), psycho-physiological competence (e.g., self-confidence and memory), and interpersonal competence (e.g., teamwork and negotiation skills).

The strategic processes of language learning and translating are also similar. According to Bachman (1990), a language learning activity includes assessment, planning, and execution. In the assessment phase, language learners identify the situation in which communication takes place and determine the type of language competencies needed to achieve the goal of communication. The planning component allows them to retrieve relevant items from language competence, including linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge. Then they execute the plan in an appropriate way to fulfill the communication goal(s) (neurological and psychological processes involved). For instance, in comprehending a job advertising text, it is necessary for learners to assess the situation (e.g., the author, our background knowledge, and our reading expectations) before planning available resources (e.g., knowledge of vocabulary and the subject matter relevant to job descriptions) and adopting different reading strategies to achieve the goal of comprehension. In response to the advert, learners may write a letter of job application. Similar processes (i.e., assessment, planning, and execution) are involved. Learners should assess the communicative situation (e.g., who the reader is—the employer and what the purpose of the communication is—applying for a job) so that they can plan and execute relevant linguistic features and conventions of an application letter to succeed in applying for the job.

Similar phases of assessment, planning, and execution take place in the act of translating. In translating an advert, translators or translation students first assess the situation of the source text or ST (available from ST features such as author and place of publication) before planning and executing their available language competencies (linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge) to understand the ST. Then they go on to the production of the translation or the TT, which also involves assessment (the context of the TT is considered), planning, and execution (linguistic choices are considered and decided on depending on the target reader and the context of the translated advert).

Despite such similarities, language learning and translating differ in that the language learner directly produces a speech act in a communicative context, while the translator produces a speech act that is dependent on the context of its translation. In other words, both activities are focused on functional language use or functions of language. In language learning, comprehension may not necessarily be followed by production (reading the job advert is independent of writing a job application). If "production does follow comprehension, it is a reaction with a different Message, not a reformulation of the same Message" (Gile, 2009, p. 106). The production of a job application letter, which follows the act of reading, has a different message from the advert text. In the meantime, in translating, "comprehension and production follow each other systematically and act on the same message" (Gile, 2009, p. 106). In other words, the main difference between the two activities lies in the mediation of the ST in translating. The translator not only reads the text for their own comprehension, but they must also send the ST content and message(s) to target readers. Functioning as both the receiver and the sender of the ST, the translator must understand the ST and mediate differences in languages

and cultures to facilitate target readers' comprehension of the ST.

While the noticeable difference between language learning and translating involves the presence and the importance of the ST in Translation, the two activities can inform each other. It is assumed that language learners who have communicative language competence and an awareness of pragmatic features in communicative contexts are expected to perform well in translation. However, this is not always the case. Therefore, it is of great importance to understand language learners' behaviors in translation to apply appropriate pedagogical intervention in translation teaching (Colina, 2002).

Impact of language learning on translation

Given the analogy between language learning and translating, language learners are expected to assess, plan, and execute the translation task in a communicative way. However, in practice, they lack the awareness of pragmatic features or the situations of communication to perform a communicative translation task. Colina (2002) and Pariente-Beltran (2013) explain that while many language programs are oriented to communicative practices, the GTM is still prevalent, and learners' communicative competence (particularly sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic competencies) is not prioritized. As a result, learners lack an awareness of the communicative situation or pragmatic features in achieving the communication goal(s). Even when being taught by CLT methods, language learners usually have deeply rooted misconceptions about translation, and they consider translation as an activity in which they mainly achieve linguistic equivalence and/or grammatical correctness between the ST and the TT (Colina, 2002). Paying inadequate attention to ST and TT features, language learners may not properly understand ST meanings constrained by the author's intention or text type; neither do they produce a translation that meets the requirements of the TT.

Influenced by their language learning experience and/or their pre-existing conceptions about translation, language learners lack an awareness of the translation process as firmly supported by various studies on the behaviours of language learners and translators in Translation (Alves, 2005; Jonasson, 1998; Lørscher, 2005; Okonska & Kościałkowska-Okońska, 2013; Olk, 2001; Tirkkonen-Condit, 2005). Language learners often try to reproduce the ST as closely as possible, which does not always fulfill the communicative function of the translation. Unlike professionals who consider the situation of text and specific linguistic features in their top-down approach, language learners rely more on bottom-up processing, which is focused on the local level of words or phrases (Okonska & Kościałkowska-Okońska, 2013, pp. 227-228). They often rely on a heavy use of dictionaries to check the meanings of these lexical items (González-Davies, 2004). In other words, language learners take the "form-oriented approach in that they produce translations mainly by an exchange of language signs" (Lørscher, 2005, p. 605). This downplays the meaning of the translated text. They rarely use "sense-oriented procedures" (p. 605), which the translator frequently adopts to avoid the distortion of sense and violations of TL norms. Monitoring or checking the output with reference to the text type and discursive features is also lacking in their translation processes. In general, language learners' lack of awareness of texts and discursive features means that they disregard contextual factors in translating ST micro elements. Therefore, in seeking an effective method in teaching translation, language learners should be encouraged to avoid a total reliance on literal

translation, unlearn their misconceptions about translation, and develop an understanding of the translation process.

The discussion of the kinship between language learning and translating demonstrates the need to see translation as communication in language teaching and emphasizes language learners' ability to translate. This would, to some extent, resolve the differences between pedagogical translation and translation pedagogy. The urge to view translation as a communicative act will also be illustrated in the following review of translation in language teaching. Specifically, I elucidate how the status of translation has evolved in language teaching and how the issue of teaching translation has been discussed in language teaching in the next sections.

Translation in language teaching

Long-term neglect of translation in language teaching

The translation was first used to teach languages in the 18th and 19th centuries with the rise of the GTM; it went out of favor after the advent of subsequent language teaching methods, such as the Direct Method, the Audiolingual Method, and the Communicative Approach. The GTM promoted the students' ability to read classical literature rather than speak the target language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In the GTM, grammar rules were presented in the L1 in a graded sequence and were exemplified through the translation of isolated sentences. Lists of decontextualized vocabulary items, along with their corresponding equivalents, were also memorized.

With the advent of language teaching methods that prioritized speech and oral practice, translation disappeared from language classes. The Direct Method advocated that L2 learning should resemble the learning of the L1 as much as possible. Therefore, teachers were advised not to include translation in their language class due to its lack of focus on oral language and the excessive use of isolated and artificial sentence structures (Newson, 1998). Similarly, translation was excluded from the Audiolingual Method, which was based on the structuralist linguistic paradigm and behaviorism. Particular dialogues and structures were learned by imitation, repetition, and memorization. The L1 was considered to be a source of interference with L2 acquisition because, according to behaviorism, new L2 habits are highly influenced by old L1 habits. If there is heavy use of L1 in L2 language classes, there will be L1 interference or a harmful effect on students' acquisition of native-like language proficiency (Cook, 2010; Lado, 1964; Newson, 1998). In the 1970s, when the Communicative Approach focused on functional categories or the purpose of communication rather than language structures, the translation of isolated sentences played a minimal part in enabling learners to express meanings and develop their' communicative competence (Laviosa, 2014). In other words, translation was only considered acceptable when it facilitated the learning process or enabled students to understand class instructions. In fact, translation was not considered a communicative activity in communicative language teaching.

Leonardi and Salvi (2016) summarise the limitations of translation teaching associated with the GTM: its excessive reliance on learners' L1, its neglect of oral language, and its use of artificial sentences to illustrate grammatical points. With these focuses, the learners' acquisition of native-like competence and their development of communicative competence are hindered.

Malmkjær (1998) lists other arguments against translation in language teaching, claiming that translation

- is independent of the four skills which define language competence: reading, writing, speaking and listening
- is radically different from the four skills
- takes up valuable time which could be used to teach these four skills
- is unnatural
- misleads students into thinking that expressions in two languages correspond one-to-one
- prevents students from thinking in a foreign language
- produces interference
- is a bad test of language skills
- is only appropriate for training translators. (p. 6)

Many of the above-mentioned arguments are challenged by studies reviewed in Section 2.2.2. The major reason for the objection of translation in language teaching can be somewhat accounted for by its connection with the GTM (Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011; House, 2008; Tsagari & Phlōros, 2013; Vermes, 2010; Widdowson, 2003). There have been “equally fallacious interpretations of the translation task as the common attempt of finding lexical and structural correspondences among L1 and L2 (grammar-translation)” (Tsagari & Phlōros, 2013, p. vii). The role of the view of translation will be discussed in the next section, which describes the revival of translation in language teaching.

Resurgence of Translation and the need for redefinition

After decades of being downplayed in language teaching due to its association with the GTM, Translation has been reinstated in language teaching (Cook, 2010; House, 2008; Laviosa, 2014). At the least, it does no harm to language development and does not interfere with L2 acquisition (Duff, 1989; Harvey, 1996; Malmkjær, 1998). For example, Duff (1989) maintains that translation enables students to be aware of the L1 influence on L2 and to deal with problems caused by the interference. It enhances learners’ linguistic knowledge (Belpoliti & Plascencia, 2013; Hummel, 2010; Korošec, 2013; Pariente-Beltran, 2013; Valdeón, 2015), and develops their language skills (D’Amore, 2014; Kim, 2011; Lee, 2013). Translation enables students to develop confidence and self-esteem, and it is favorably regarded by both students and teachers (Canga-Alonson & Rubio-Goitia, 2016; Dagilienè, 2012; Fernández-Guerra, 2014; Kelly & Bruen, 2015; Kokkinidou & Spanou, 2013; Murtisari, 2016).

The matter of concern is not whether translation is useful or not, but rather, how to use it for what purpose and to what effect. I explore these issues further by examining recent empirical studies on translation in language teaching.

Belpoliti and Plascencia (2013) experimented with English-to-Spanish translation activities in which students were asked to read and analyze two newspaper articles (the original text in English and the Translation in Spanish). Groups of students found five pairs of equivalents in the two texts. The groups then looked for metaphors in the translated text and checked if they had equivalents in the English text. The students’ work was collected, and they discussed the exercises about problems in translation (e.g., word search) with their instructor. They finally

summarized the vocabulary learned. The authors found that learners improved their lexical awareness, but the effect was finite.

Valdeón (2015) asked students to render two episodes of a British sitcom into Spanish. The author noticed that the students' translations of taboos in the texts were close to the original. Valdeón found that the students were able to understand L1 and L2 differences in the use of taboos, and they were cautious in treating them in translation. Valdeón did not have a clear explanation for the students' caution except for his explanation that taboos were common in Spanish. The author did not emphasize the contextual factors in students' translation, even though they briefly referred to social contexts in the use of taboos.

Hummel (2010) experimented with three conditions: French L1 to English L2 translation, English to French Translation, and a rote-copying task. All the students were first given 15 unknown English words. Students of the first two conditions translated the English words into their L1, while those in the last group copied the words. After that, all the students were provided with booklets that contained L2 equivalents for the English words. The first two groups were asked to translate the provided sentences that contained the words into the L2 and L1, respectively, while the rote-copying group just copied the L2 sentences that contained the English words. Without previously having been informed that they would be tested on these words, all the students were then asked to recall the introduced words in a follow-up test. Hummel (2010) noticed that the three conditions all increased the learners' short-term lexical recall, but rote copying had a more significant impact. The author explains that the students in translation groups put more effort into translating the sentences in time-consuming tasks than in remembering the words, while the students copying sentences had more time to concentrate on memorizing them. This implies that the author adopted the perception of translation as a linguistic activity that focuses on contrasting isolated ST and TT items.

Korošec (2013) examined the role of Translation in English learning of first-year Slovene students. An experimental group was taught with the use of L1 and Translation. The control group was taught without L1 or Translation (there is no information about the teaching method used for this group). The teacher in the experimental group used the students' L1 to explain grammatical rules and provided them with homework in which they translated lexical items (e.g., nouns), sentences, or shorter texts that targeted particular structures from L1 into L2. The students then discussed these exercises in class. Even though the researcher mentioned discussions of appropriate solutions in contexts, there was not a clear elaboration on which factors they should focus on. The study revealed the usefulness of L1 and Translation to students' learning of linguistic knowledge. However, no significant differences in test results between the two groups were found. The author attributed the limited results to methodological flaws (e.g., statistical measurements on small samples and tests implemented long after treatment) rather than their limited focus on contextual factors of translation exercises.

Lee (2013) investigated whether translation enhanced students' scores on reading. The selected English and non-English-majors translated two passages of an English L2 reading passage into Chinese L1 before answering five multiple-choice questions in reading comprehension (three questions were concerned with the translated paragraphs). Even though the study suggested the benefits of translation in promoting students' text comprehension, the students did not have

correct answers for "text-based" or "inference-based" questions related to the meanings of words and phrases or general ideas expressed in paragraphs. This can be explained by students' lack of attention to textual features. In fact, in analyzing students' solutions, the researcher mentioned the application of the professional assessment criteria—accuracy and expression that focused on "student performance in accuracy, understanding of the original, expression, and language competence in using their mother tongue to represent the original meaning" (p. 15). This indicated the author's lack of emphasis on a communicative view of translation and contextualized translations. Therefore, these ideas could not have been engendered in the students.

Another study by D'Amore (2014) on the role of translation in reading combines reading comprehension and translation in the form of contrastive analysis to improve students' English L2 reading skills in Mexico. Students discussed their comprehension of English texts before they translated them into Spanish. In class discussions, the students read aloud sentences they had translated. D'More explains that by reading aloud their translations, the students could improve the coherence of Spanish versions. D'Amore also indicates that literal translation highlighted structural differences. The author criticized the translation of isolated sentences as advocated in the GTM and referred to authentic texts and communicative, collaborative translation tasks. However, how communicative tasks were implemented was not described. Exercises that used authentic texts mainly focused on matching extracts with their book covers. In fact, D'Amore employed translation mainly as a tool to learn English vocabulary and grammar. Raw data indicated that during semesters from 2009 to 2013, more students achieved a higher level of reading (from B1 to B2+ and C1 as described in the European English proficiency framework).

In a study that investigated the impact of translation on students' writing skill, E. Kim (2011) required students to translate verbatim sentences of their own writing in English L2 into Korean L1. Based on the students' reflections after translating their own English writing and that of their peers' into L1 or Korean, Kim concludes (with reference to anecdotal data) that translation enables the students to "look at their own writing more objectively, which they failed to do without the aid of their first language" (p. 158) and understand that "grammatical accuracy is vital for successful written communication" (p. 158). In other words, E. Kim employed translation as a linguistic activity to assist students in learning English.

In the above studies in support of translation in language teaching, translation has been used as a contrastive analysis activity in which sentences in the L1 and the L2 are compared and contrasted. The purpose of such an activity has been to enable students to learn isolated vocabulary items and grammatical sentential structures rather than focusing on contextual features of translation tasks or treating translation as a skill by itself. Most studies have prioritized students' memory of linguistic items to their functional use of language. The effect of translation on the learner's language knowledge has been finite compared with other language activities. Authors of some of these studies have not presented sound methodologies (e.g., results obtained from raw data or anecdotal data) and they did not have satisfactory explanations for the limited results of their studies. Generally, most of the studies did not focus on the meaningfulness of linguistic items which can only be achieved by placing them in contexts. In

other words, the linguistic view of translation is still common in studies supporting translation, which is similar to those against translation. In fact, House (2008) claims that a linguistic view of translation is held among those who plead against and for the use of translation in language teaching.

Linguistic approaches to translation (based on contrastive linguistics) do not consider the contextual use of words and sentences. It is important to note that translation is not the same as contrastive linguistics. Emphasizing the need to understand the differences between the two fields, House (2008) explains how "langue" or the language system differs from "parole" or concrete utterances in texts and insists that translation is performed at the level of parole rather than langue. This means that translators must choose among various target equivalents. According to House, "(w)hile contrastive linguistics tends to focus on the language system, translation is concerned with the reali(s)ation of that system in acts of communication" (p. 136). In fact, translation tasks based on contrastive analysis do not offer learners opportunities to improve their ability to achieve communicative goals in using a L2 language, as identified by Colina (2002), who mentions the drawback of associating translation with contrastive analysis as follows:

Translation is often associated with contrastive analysis since translation exercises are used to learn structural differences between languages and to test the student's knowledge of these differences. Students exposed to behaviorist/contrastive methodologies learn about the language rather than how to use it: there is no creation or exchange of meaningful information. (p. 3)

Colina (2002) explains that the GTM and audiolingual methodologies based their language learning theories on structuralism or behaviorism which focuses on linguistic forms rather than communicative aspects of language. Colina points out that due to the "formalist, non-communicative views of language" (p. 4), translation for the purpose of language learning, which is different from professional translation activity, has been frowned on by communicative language teachers.

Notably, avoiding the contrastive or behaviorist approach to learning, an increasing number of scholars who recognize the synergies between the two fields suggest that translation in language teaching should be defined from the perspective of communication (Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011; Leonardi & Salvi, 2016). "Translating means mediating a message between two different linguistic and cultural communities, and the same applies to language learning" (Leonardi & Salvi, 2016, p. 336). In other words, both language learning and translation should aim at getting the message across over linguistic and cultural differences. Obviously, the need to see translation as a communicative activity is emphasized. Many recent studies on translation in language teaching, including Phat (2022), have emphasized the role of contextual factors and communicative aspects in teaching translation.

Generally, translation has made a comeback in language teaching, as evidenced by a myriad of studies on the use of translation in language teaching. However, the impact of translation in language teaching is still limited partly due to the adopted purely linguistic view of translation. Similarities between language learning and translation and discussions on the communicative aspects of the two types of activities can justify the proposal to define translation from the

communicative viewpoint.

Conclusion

Translation as a means of language teaching has had a resurgence in recent decades. Concurrently, there has been a demand for training in translation as an end or a skill by itself to meet the need for translation services. The paper reported that the dominant view of translation among teachers and learners in language courses in language programs was a linguistic one. When compared to other language exercises, translation has a limited impact on the learner's linguistic understanding. Some of these studies' authors have not provided sound techniques (such as conclusions derived from raw data or anecdotal data) or adequate justifications for the study's restricted findings. The meaningfulness of linguistic items—which can only be attained by placing them in contexts—was generally not the focus of most studies. Due to the limited view of translation and similarities between translation and language learning, a number of scholars have advocated for translation both as a means and an end in language teaching and indicated similarities between language teaching and translation studies based on communicative views of language and translation.

In tertiary language programs, it is necessary to broaden students' view of language in English classes so that by the time they enter translation courses, they will have an understanding that a range of factors influences all language use. Language and translation learning should be driven by a common communicative view of language and translation, and the two should be mutually informative. Students will then be less focused on the idea of language as a linguistic code than they are now. This will facilitate the teaching and learning of translation in subsequent translation courses.

It is the role of a language program to enable students to broaden their views of language and translation. Language teachers can be first introduced to diverse evidence for the resurgence of translation in language teaching so that they consider adopting a translation component in language classes. They should then be made aware of the role of a communicative view of translation in the teaching of translation before discussing the selection of texts for translation and the planning of effective translation activities in language teaching.

More empirical research is needed to justify the usefulness of a communicative view of translation in yielding satisfactory results in teaching a language as a means and an end. Studies that adopt this view of translation can be carried out in a larger scope and in greater depth. Comparison of the results of translation with those of other language learning activities in different contexts can be useful in enhancing the role of translation in language learning and teaching. This may help promote language proficiency in Vietnam, where foreign languages, particularly English, are used for different purposes (Truong & Le, 2022).

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EFL Students' Perceptions of E-learning Tools' Effects on Students' Engagement in English Speaking Skill Online Classes

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore Vietnamese students' perceptions of the effects of e-learning tools on student engagement in English-speaking skills online classes. With a survey design and a mixed-method approach, the study investigated 100 participants, including sophomores and juniors, at the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University of Ho Chi Minh City. Descriptive statistics and qualitative data gleaned from a questionnaire and 10 semi-structured interviews were analyzed using SPSS and thematic analysis. Findings show e-learning tools enhance student engagement by facilitating speaking discussion, evoking comfort, and contributing to students' investment in the tasks. On the contrary, e-learning tools hinder student engagement by causing boredom, stress, and distraction. The study results suggest pedagogical implications for teachers in the design of more engaging English-speaking online lessons. Further, faculty and school leaders can consider the research findings when revising and updating their curriculum to meet the increasing demands of online learning and teaching, with learners' engagement as the centrality. Future research can delve more into inferential statistics on the effects of online classes on students' engagement in English speaking, listening, reading, or writing skills.

Keywords: e-learning tools, online classes, speaking skills, student engagement

Introduction

There has been large-scale implementation of e-learning tools in online English classrooms worldwide. Chhabra (2012) claims that many colleges and universities have integrated tools such as YouTube, Skype, blogs, and smart boards into English courses to improve students' in-class performance and engagement. Moreover, technology applications have also come into play in the Vietnamese education industry. Following Decree 1215/2013/QĐ-BGDĐT, the Ministry of Education and Training enacted an action program, one of the core missions of which is to update teaching contents and pedagogical methodologies. This core mission aims to increase the use of information technology in academic subjects at schools and universities, for example, English. Accordingly, Nguyen (2016) emphasizes the importance of English teachers integrating technology into teaching, as well as learners knowing how to exploit and apply information technology to their learning. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the end of

2019 marked the transition to online learning at most universities around the world, and Vietnamese universities were not an exception. A global survey report from the International Association of Universities (IAU) reveals that in May 2020, 98% of the universities and higher education institutions from 109 countries were heavily affected by COVID-19, and 67% of them employed online platforms for their schooling. Besides, during the first few months of 2020, universities in Vietnam were also in transition from conventional schooling to virtual classrooms, which implemented a variety of online platforms to ensure students' consistent learning experiences (Hoang & Tran, 2022).

Regueras et al. (2009) point out e-learning tools applications over the past few years as an example of active learning methodologies in the classroom. Undoubtedly, the utilization of the tools has numerous effects on student engagement in online English classes. Two main strands of research on e-learning tools have been identified through comprehensive analysis. The first strand involves the applicability of e-learning tools in teaching English. For example, the study of Nguyen and Le (2012) demonstrates the effectiveness of Moodle for English writing courses, with students and teachers valuing its use. Ngo (2018) evaluates how the Internet impacts English as a Second Language (ESL) speaking skills, while the studies by Dao (2018) and Pham (2019) report students' feedback on implementing information technology in learning and teaching English. Additionally, Nguyen (2021) investigates students' engagement through specific classroom technology use. Further, Truong and Le (2022) examine students' perceptions of the YouTube platform in boosting English speaking skills. The other strand of research focuses on students' learning experiences in classes equipped with e-learning tools. For example, Hamouda's study (2020) explores students' experiences using the Blackboard Collaborate software program, a Learning Management System (LMS) component. Meanwhile, Huang (2021) examines students' learning experiences in a remote English-speaking class at a Canadian university during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Halimatusyadiyah's study (2022) looks into students' perceptions of engaging their speaking skills using the Google Meet platform. Research conducted at a Vietnamese university with the integration of the Zoom platform by Ngo (2021) reveals non-English majors' perspectives on how e-learning tools can affect their engagement in learning English. Finally, Van et al. (2021) examine students' opinions on the effectiveness of employing technology in studying English.

In summary, previous studies highlight two main research gaps that foreground our research. Firstly, there exists a lack of further insights into types of engagement in online learning environments and their efficiency to students, despite an increase in the implementation of e-learning tools into language teaching, as Cheung (2021) puts it. Likewise, while the online learning environment is a common research goal, specific language skill classes have yet to be focused on. Al Hosni (2014) claims that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners still struggle with their speaking performance despite having extensive knowledge of the English language. Secondly, little is known about the integration of advanced technologies into online English-speaking skills courses, especially in the Vietnamese teaching and learning context. Thach (2020) states that in Vietnam, though the integration of advanced technologies into teaching English has occurred in a few online speaking skill courses, it has not received considerable attention. Considering these factors, this current study examines how integrating e-learning tools affects students' engagement in online English-speaking classes in Vietnam. The research question frames the study: *What are EFL students' perceptions about the effects of e-learning tools on students' engagement in online English speaking skill classes?*

Literature Review

This section deals with synthesizing definitions of e-learning tools and student engagement and reviewing previous related studies. This establishes the foundation for the formulation of the conceptual framework of the study as well as for the discussion of the study findings in Section 4.

E-learning tools

Kigundu (2014) defines e-learning tools as any software or computer programs, ranging from sophisticated online video games to basic applications such as Microsoft PowerPoint and Microsoft Word. Meanwhile, Chugh (2010) defines e-learning tools as tools that facilitate learning through Information and Communications Technology (ICT), the Internet, and the World Wide Web. Besides, Border et al. (2006) classify e-learning tools into four categories: (1) learning management system (e.g., Google Classroom, Schoology, and LMS-HCMUSSH), (2) synchronous collaboration applications (e.g., Google Meet and Zoom), (3) all other computer tools/applications including asynchronous communication applications) (e.g., videos, blogs, and Gmail), and (4) simulated games and software (e.g., Kahoot and Quizizz). Unlike Border et al. (2006), Chugh (2010) provides two broad categories of e-learning tools: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous e-learning tools (e.g., Google Meet and Zoom) create an environment where all the students must be connected simultaneously to communicate. In contrast, asynchronous tools (e.g., Gmail and BBC Podcast) do not require them to be connected simultaneously. Furthermore, according to Son (2011), e-learning tools are composed of 12 categories based on their different functions, including (1) learning/content management system, e.g., LMS and Elearning, (2) communication, e.g., Gmail and Skype, (3) live and virtual worlds, e.g., OpenSimulator and ActiveWorlds, (4) social networking and bookmarking, e.g., Messenger and Facebook, (5) blogs and wikis, e.g., WordPress.com and Wikispaces, (6) presentation, e.g., Prezi and Google Slides, (7) resource sharing tools, e.g., Google Docs and Slideshare, (8) website creation, e.g., Google Sites and Jimdo, (9) web exercise creation, e.g., ContentGenerator and ESL Video, (10) web search engines, e.g., Google, Firefox, and Bing, (11) dictionaries and concordancers, e.g., Oxford Learners' Dictionaries and Cambridge English Dictionary, and (12) utilities, e.g., Mindmeister, CalculateMe, and Doodle.

In this study, the definitions provided by Kigundu (2014), Chugh (2010), and the categorization by Son (2011) and Border et al. (2006) were adopted because they best characterize the nature and features of e-learning tools in the current research context. Accordingly, in this study, *e-learning tools refer to any essential computer software or programs that can aid online teaching and learning*. E-learning tools are divided into four main types, namely (1) *learning management systems (LMS)*: applications that administer, archive, and deliver online lessons, such as Google Classroom or Schoology (adopted from Border et al., 2006), (2) *synchronous e-learning tools*: tools that facilitate simultaneous communication in online classrooms, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom, and synchronous collaboration tools like Google Docs or Jamboard by Google Meet (adopted from Border et al., 2006; Chugh, 2010), (3) *asynchronous e-learning tools*: tools that do not require students to be connected simultaneously to communicate in class, for example, BBC Podcast, ESL Podcast, Facebook groups (adopted from Border et al., 2006; Chugh, 2010), and (4) *searching tools*: tools that allow students to search information, knowledge and vocabulary, including Google, Firefox, and online dictionaries such as Oxford Learners' Dictionaries and Cambridge English Dictionary (adopted from Son, 2011).

Student Engagement

Student engagement plays a vital role in education in online classes (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). The term “student engagement” is described by Lamborn, Newmann, and Wehlage (1992) as the student’s investment of mind and effort to learn, understand, or master knowledge or skills. The engagement requires the student’s focus and attempt to acquire knowledge. To measure student engagement, Lamborn et al. (1992) use indirect indicators, including students' amount of participation such as attendance, tasks finished, time spent on academic work, level of students' attention, interest, and care shown in task completion. However, these indicators can sometimes be seen as students' willingness to follow class rules instead of the actual investment in study, comprehension, or mastery of knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, Moore (1989) divides student engagement into three types: *learner-to-learner engagement*, *learner-to-instructor engagement*, and *learner-to-content engagement*. *Learner-to-learner engagement* refers to the interaction among class or group members when the students participate in group work. This type of engagement can be in the form of synchronous means, such as video conferencing or chatting, as well as asynchronous means, such as discussion boards or e-mails (Banna et al., 2015). *Learner-to-instructor engagement* describes the interaction between the instructor and students in classes. This type of engagement in online classes can appear by means of synchronous communication, such as video-based meetings or message services, and asynchronous communication, such as online forums or e-mails. In this process, the instructor attempts to arouse students’ interest in the lessons or maintain it, thereby encouraging students to study and be self-motivated (Revere & Kovach, 2011; Robinson & Hullinger, 2008). Finally, *learner-to-content engagement* is defined as the interaction between the students and the information provided, which leads to changes in students' understanding and perspective. This process includes reading informational texts, using study guide books, watching instructional videos, interacting with multimedia on the computer, searching for information, and completing tasks and projects (Abrami et al., 2011).

In addition, student engagement is defined by Bomia et al. (1997) as the willingness, needs, desire, and motivation when they participate in the learning process. Moreover, Gunuc and Kuzu (2014) describe student engagement as the quality and quantity of students' psychological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions to the learning process as well as to in-class/out-of-class academic and social activities to achieve successful learning outcomes. Cognitive engagement includes investment in learning, value given to learning, learning goals, self-regulation, and planning (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2014). Emotional engagement involves students' responses to the teacher, peers, course content, and the class, including attitudes, interests, and values (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Gunuc & Kuzu, 2014). Behavioral engagement includes students' academic participation, efforts, class attendance, and class participation (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2014).

The definition of student engagement by Gunuc and Kuzu (2014), which is the most comprehensive and overarching one, was therefore adopted. Therefore, in this study, *student engagement refers to the quality and quantity of students’ behavioral, emotional, and cognitive reactions to the learning process and in-class/out-of-class academic and social activities to achieve successful learning goals*. In an online class of English speaking skills, behavioral engagement consists of students' class participation in class activities. Emotional engagement mentions student's feelings in online classes and in the learning process, such as interest, tension, and boredom. Cognitive engagement includes students' investment in speaking practice, goals, and clear plans in the course of their learning process. The working definitions of e-learning tools and student engagement are constitutive of the study's conceptual

framework. Prior research has also shown relevant findings in relation to the current research topic.

Previous studies

Ten articles, with six conducted in international contexts and four in the Vietnamese context, were selected for review. The review inclusion criteria consist of (1) university student participants, (2) English speaking skill online classes/courses, (3) the use of e-learning tools in the class, and (4) the effects of e-learning tools on students' engagement.

First, Hussein's (2016) study explores how Blackboard, a Learning Management System (LMS), enhances the English listening and speaking skills of 37 female English-majored students at the University of Hail, Saudi Arabia. The findings reveal advantages such as easy access to audio-visual material, improved communication and language skills, and challenges consisting of unfamiliarity with the system and submitting assignments. Similarly, Hamouda (2020) studied the impact of the Blackboard Collaborate software on 70 Saudi EFL students' attitudes towards and experiences of using this tool as an LMS. The results show that LMS positively influences students' enjoyment and enthusiasm, reduces stress and fear in speaking English, increases motivation in completing assignments on time, and gives good access to learning materials. In addition, Shukri et al. (2020) examined the views of 250 student participants from Universiti Kuala Lumpur Malaysian Institute of Industrial Technology on synchronous learning via information and communications technology (ICT) tools for English education. The results indicate the benefits of online learning, such as generating students' interest despite challenges in concentration. Furthermore, Huang (2021) conducted a case study of ESL students' remote speaking class learning experiences at a Canadian University during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings show that students expect more collaborative and interactive discussions on online platforms to encourage communication. The participants also raised concerns about low self-regulation in the virtual learning environment.

Meanwhile, Halimatusyadiyah (2022) investigated the perceptions of student participants from Ciamis, Indonesia, of speaking skills using Google Meet as a synchronous and asynchronous learning tool. The findings suggest that Google Meet provides students with more English-speaking opportunities and increases students' confidence to speak English and speaking practice time without the teacher's help. Despite these benefits, some concerns about making mistakes were also raised by the participants. Last but not least, Fauzi (2022) explored 127 students' perceptions of online learning for ESL speaking activities at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia, with the support of synchronous and asynchronous tools such as Google Meet, Google Classrooms, Zoom, and WhatsApp. The results show positive perceptions in terms of convenience and practicality of the tools during the COVID-19 pandemic and negative ones, including pressure to complete speaking tasks and lack of confidence to speak.

Research conducted in Viet Nam has shown similar findings. Dao (2018) surveyed 60 students in English courses at Hanoi Law University on the implementation of e-learning tools in creating an engaging English classroom. The findings suggest that all the participants agreed on the usefulness of technology in English classes, and 87% of the participants used e-learning tools regularly, using online dictionaries or web browsers to participate more in class activities and feeling excited about using Kahoot in class. In a different vein, Ngo (2018) published a review paper on 31 studies investigating the use of web-based technology to improve learners' speaking performance. The results indicate that when utilized with communication tools and learning management, web-based language learning plays a vital role in student engagement in terms of the student's anxiety and motivation. Additionally, the study by Nguyen (2021) examines the roles of e-learning tools in promoting collaboration among English as a Foreign

Language (EFL) students at university. The results indicate that there is a frequent use of technologies in teaching-learning activities, and e-learning tools are useful for creating a collective learning network, thus also boosting learners' confidence. Besides, Vo (2021) investigated the use of Google Classroom (GC) in an authentic teaching environment for 30 students in the Foreign Language Department at Phu Yen University. The findings suggest that GC helps create a collaborative learning environment where the teacher and their students can freely discuss the lessons and the schedule and promote students' learning autonomy.

In general, although the 10 previous studies above have given insights into students' perceptions of the diverse effects of e-learning tools on student engagement, they reveal two main gaps. First, most studies do not focus specifically on English-speaking online classes. Second, most studies were conducted on relatively small samples. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge such gaps by focusing on the specific online classes of English speaking skills and increasing the sample size in order to thoroughly investigate different aspects of students' perceptions about the effects of e-learning tools on student engagement in online classes of English speaking skills.

Research Methodology

Participants & research setting

With the convenience sampling method, which facilitates the data access for the researchers, the chosen participants of the study are 300 second-year and third-year students of the high-quality program of the Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City. At the time the research was conducted, the Faculty was implementing online learning owing to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Therefore, all these participants had relevant online learning experiences. Moreover, their courses are related to speaking skills, namely Listening-Speaking B1, Listening-Speaking B2, Advanced Listening-Speaking C1, and Language Proficiency. After the questionnaire was delivered to those 300 participants, only 100 responses were returned for data collection and analysis.

Study design

The research took the form of a survey and utilized the mixed method, comprising both quantitative and qualitative methods. Surveys are systems for collecting information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (Fink, 2003). The reasons for the selection of the survey design in this study are two-fold. First, the survey is a practical and convenient means of gathering data from a large sample size. Second, using survey research means being able to use polls, questionnaires, open-ended questions, and multiple-choice questions. With these various means, it is easier for the researchers to compare results from the participants, make generalizations, analyze the data, and gain more insights into the participants' points of view. Specifically, the questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, and the interviews were used to obtain qualitative data.

Data collection methods

Two main methods of data collection were designed in this study. The first method is a questionnaire (via Google Forms) that centers around four types of e-learning tools and three types of student engagement. The questionnaire includes two main sections, encompassing the participants' background information (5 questions) and their perceptions about the effects of e-learning tools on their engagement respectively. The second section, whose responses are

recorded based on Likert-scale statements, consists of three sub-sections covering the benefits of the e-learning tools (9 statements), the drawbacks of the e-learning tools (8 statements), and alternative ways to utilize e-learning tools (8 statements) effectively. These statements derive from the findings of previous studies and from the researchers' pilot interviews. An open-ended question is added to each section to obtain other opinions or ideas from the participants. After data from the questionnaire were collected, 10 semi-structured interviews, whose data reached a saturation point, were carried out on the participants' voluntary basis to gain the participants' deeper insights into their thoughts about the effects of e-learning tools on their engagement during English-speaking skill online classes based on their responses to the questionnaire. That is the reason why semi-structured interviews were selected in this study.

Data analysis methods

Descriptive analysis was employed to analyze the quantitative data from the questionnaire with the application of SPSS, while thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. The procedure for data collection and analysis is summarized and described in Table 1.

Table 1

Procedure for data collection and analysis

Data collection	1. Review the previous studies and pilot interviews to design the questionnaire
	2. Distribute the questionnaire, collect the questionnaire's responses to formulate the interview questions and conduct semi-structured interviews
Data analysis	Use descriptive analysis to analyze the quantitative data and thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data for interpretation and discussion.

Results and Discussion

After the data were collected, they were analyzed concerning two main parts, namely the participants' background information and their perceptions about the effects of e-learning tools on student engagement in online classes of English speaking skills.

Background information

Based on the responses from the questionnaire, 67% of the participants were female and 33% male. In addition, 57% of the participants were currently sophomores and 43% juniors. Table 2 summarizes the percentages of participants taking online English-speaking-related courses. Specifically, 78% and 77% of the participants took Listening-Speaking B2 and Advanced Listening-Speaking C1, respectively; 35% took Listening-Speaking B1, 71% took Language Proficiency, 2% took all those courses offline, and 2% took other courses not covered in the scope of the study.

Table 2

The online English speaking-related courses that the participants attended

Courses	Count/Percentage (%)
Listening - Speaking B1	35
Listening - Speaking B2	78
Advanced Listening - Speaking C1	77
Language Proficiency	71
We do offline classes for all those	1
All are offline classes	1
Intercultural Communication, Introduction to Linguistics, Business English	1
Intercultural Communication, Introduction to Translation, Introduction to Linguistics, English for Tourism, Business English	1

Table 3 presents the percentages of the types of e-learning tools utilized in the above English-speaking online courses. Specifically, 90% of the participants selected LMS in their classrooms, 78% selected synchronous e-learning tools, 77% asynchronous e-learning tools, and 71% searching tools

Table 3

Types of e-learning tools used in the above online English-speaking courses

Types of e-learning tools	Count/Percentage (%)
Learning management system - LMS (e.g., Google Classroom, EF Learning, and Schoology)	90
Synchronous e-learning tools (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet, and Google Docs)	78
Asynchronous e-learning tools (e.g., Gmail and Facebook groups)	77
Searching tools (e.g., Google, Firefox, and online dictionaries)	71

Overall, more female than male participants and more sophomores than juniors took part in the survey. A high percentage of participants attended online English-speaking courses ranging from Listening-Speaking B2, Advanced Listening-Speaking C1, and Language Proficiency to Listening-Speaking B1 in order of the prevalence of the courses.

Participants' perceptions about the effects of e-learning tools on their engagement

From students' perspectives, the implementation of e-learning tools in online English-speaking courses has two main effects on students' engagement. They both enhance and hinder student engagement regarding their cognition, emotions, and behaviors.

Ways e-learning tools enhance student engagement

Descriptive statistics of how e-learning tools positively affect student engagement are presented in Table 4. Behavioral engagement refers to students' class participation in class activities (Items 1 to 4). Emotional engagement is shown through students' interest (Items 5-6). Cognitive engagement involves students' clear plans, investments, and goals (Items 7 to 9). Besides, students' responses were recorded, using the scales of 1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, and 5-Strongly agree. The percentage, mean, and mode for each Item were calculated to show the response frequency, central tendency, and the most selected response, respectively, among the participants.

Table 4

Factors that enhance student engagement

		1- Strongly disagree	2- Disagree	3- Neutral	4- Agree	5- Strongly agree
1. I can discuss speaking ideas easily with my teacher(s) and classmate(s) by using Google Docs, Google Meet, Zoom, etc.	Count / %	1	12	37	36	14
	Mode	3				
	Mean	3.50				
2. I search for speaking materials and vocabulary quickly by using searching tools (Google Chrome, Firefox, etc.) and online dictionaries (Cambridge, Oxford, etc.).	Count / %	1	2	10	44	43
	Mode	4				
	Mean	4.26				
3. I can easily give feedback on LMS when discussing speaking topics with my classmates.	Count / %	11	40	29	16	4
	Mode	2				
	Mean	2.62				
4. I can easily share pictures, videos, links, etc., to illustrate, explain and justify my opinions through synchronous tools	Count / %	1	8	18	46	27
	Mode	4				

(Google Meet, Zoom, etc.) or asynchronous tools (Google Docs, Facebook Messenger, etc.) or LMS (Google Classroom, etc.).	Mean	3.90				
5. I feel comfortable when practicing speaking in class (using Google Meet, Zoom, Messenger, etc., for discussion or online dictionaries when encountering new words).	Count / %	3	14	33	36	14
	Mode	4				
	Mean	3.44				
6. I feel excited when watching videos on LMS provided by teachers or videos on YouTube of candidates performing a speaking task (Cambridge, IELTS, etc.).	Count / %	11	20	35	25	9
	Mode	3				
	Mean	3.01				
7. I put a lot of effort and time into speaking practice with teachers and friends (thanks to using Google Meet, Zoom, etc., for an online discussion and using Google Search, Firefox, etc., for finding ideas).	Count / %	6	20	43	26	5
	Mode	3				
	Mean	3.04				
8. I am well-prepared with ideas and mistakes correction for my speaking (by getting support/ideas from teachers and friends on Google Meet, Zoom, Facebook groups, Google Classroom, etc. and using Google search, Firefox, etc. for ideas).	Count / %	6	12	32	37	13
	Mode	4				
	Mean	3.39				
9. I can track deadlines for my speaking assignments easily. (e.g. when the teachers post an assignment on Google Classroom, Facebook groups, etc.).	Count / %	3	4	20	45	28
	Mode	4				
	Mean	3.91				

Regarding behavioral engagement, 37% of participants held a neutral attitude to Item 1 concerning using Google Docs, Google Meet, and Zoom to discuss speaking ideas with their teachers and classmates (mode = 3). However, they generally show their agreement with this Item (mean = 3.50). Item 2 received the highest agreement rates (87%), i.e., searching tools and

online dictionaries contributed to students' searching for speaking materials (mode = 4). The statistics also display a tendency for agreement among participants (mean = 4.26). In Item 3, 40% of participants did not agree that they could easily provide feedback on LMS when discussing speaking topics with their classmates (mode = 2; mean = 2.62). Item 4 concerning data sharing for speaking tasks through LMS, synchronous and asynchronous tools showed the second highest agreement rate of 73% (mode = 4). There is also a tendency towards agreement (mean = 3.90). The tools allowed them to review the data, which was useful, convenient, and time-saving. In terms of emotional engagement, 50% of participants agreed with Item 5. However, together with Item 5, Item 6 was also highlighted as they both showed fairly sizable neutral rates (33% and 35%, respectively, modes = 4 and 3, respectively). There is a tendency towards neutral options likewise for these two Items (means = 3.44 and 3.01, respectively). For cognitive engagement, participants' response to Item 7 was neutral concerning their investment in speaking practice with their teachers and friends (43%; mode = 3; mean = 3.04). Regarding Item 8, 50% of participants agreed that searching tools and other tools such as Google Meet, Zoom, Facebook groups, Google Classroom, etc. provided them with thorough ideas preparation and mistakes correction for their speaking performance (mode = 4). However, with a fairly sizable neutral rate (32%), the tendency for agreement is not marked (mean = 3.39). Item 9 mentioned deadline tracking functions in Google Classroom and Facebook groups, which witnessed a fairly high rate of agreement (a total of 73%; mode = 4; mean = 3.91).

Data from the interview show an alignment between the interviewed participants' opinions and their responses to the given items in the questionnaire regarding the positive effects of e-learning tools on their engagement during English-speaking online classes without much further elaboration from the interviewees. Specifically, regarding emotional engagement, the interviewees agreed that online dictionaries and discussions held on video conferencing platforms created a comfortable speaking environment for all learners to join and that YouTube speaking videos or videos assigned by teachers on LMS succeeded in drawing learners' attention. In addition, as to cognitive engagement, all the interviewed participants considered Google Classroom useful since the platform is connected through users' email, thus reminding them of upcoming deadlines.

Discussion 1

The results of this study suggest students' perceptions of the positive effects of e-learning tools on student engagement in English-speaking online classes. Regarding behavioral engagement, through the high percentage and the mode, searching tools facilitated student participation in class the most. With easy access, searching tools created a favorable environment for students to find materials supporting their speaking performance. It echoed the findings of Hamouda (2020) that LMS was reported to give good access to learning materials. Regarding emotional engagement, most students expressed interest when using searching and synchronous tools to engage in speaking activities. Particularly, they felt comfortable practicing speaking since they could use Google Meet, Zoom, Messenger, etc., for discussion or online dictionaries when encountering new words. The study of Hamouda (2020) shared some similarities as the results showed that LMS positively influenced students' enjoyment and enthusiasm, reduced stress and fear in speaking English, and increased motivation in completing assignments on time. However, most participants held a neutral viewpoint when being asked about the tasks on YouTube. In contrast to the neutral attitude of the participants of the current study towards YouTube, Dao's study (2018) showed a positive attitude, as 20 students of the course all felt satisfied with the in-class activities. Regarding cognitive engagement, most students had the

same viewpoint that learning management systems (typically Google Classroom) and asynchronous tools (typically Facebook) helped them to have clear plans for their speaking tasks. This result aligned with the study by Vo (2021), as Google Classroom was proven to encourage students' learning autonomy, thus facilitating their learning and fostering cognitive engagement.

Ways e-learning tools hinder student engagement

Apart from positive effects, the study results show negative effects of e-learning tools on student engagement, which are displayed in Table 5. Negative behavioral engagement is demonstrated through students' difficulties in participating in class activities (Items 1 to 3). Negative emotional engagement is demonstrated through students' boredom and tension (Items 4-5). Negative cognitive engagement is reflected in the absence or small amount of students' investment in their studies or that they do not have clear plans or goals for class activities (Items 6 to 8). Besides, students' responses were recorded, using the scales of 1-Strongly agree, 2-Agree, 3-Neutral, 4-Disagree, and 5-Strongly disagree. The percentage, mean, and mode for each Item were calculated to show the response frequency, central tendency, and the most selected response, respectively, among the participants.

Table 5

Factors that hinder student engagement

		5- Strongly disagree	4- Disagree	3- Neutral	2- Agree	1- Strongly agree
1. I feel demotivated because the voice disconnection or image lag from video conferencing apps (Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, etc.) prevents me from participating in the discussion.	Count / %	0	3	28	48	21
	Mode	2				
	Mean	2.13				
2. I may get distracted and have difficulties with my speaking performance because of the echo sounds or background noise in Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, etc.	Count / %	0	6	23	46	25
	Mode	2				
	Mean	2.10				
3. I find it slow to receive my classmates' feedback on LMS.	Count / %	3	12	38	32	15
	Mode	3				
	Mean	2.56				
4. Raising my voice in a large group of video conferencing (such as Google Meet, Zoom, etc.) makes me feel stressed.	Count / %	3	19	27	34	17
	Mode	2				

	Mean	2.57				
5. Watching the same videos of others performing a speaking task (Cambridge, IELTS, etc.) via YouTube makes me feel bored.	Count / %	5	16	48	18	13
	Mode	3				
	Mean	2.82				
6. As I practice speaking, I use Google to search for information irrelevant to speaking practice (like news of my idols or personal concerns) or spend some time checking Facebook, Messenger, Zalo, etc., because there may be updated news/notifications on them.	Count / %	2	6	31	39	22
	Mode	2				
	Mean	2.27				
7. I have problems preparing for my speaking because of a huge amount of information or some inaccurate information on Google searches.	Count / %	3	22	39	24	12
	Mode	3				
	Mean	2.80				
8. I may submit my speaking assignments late. (Google Classroom only reminds the deadline 1 day before; Facebook Groups cannot remind the deadlines).	Count / %	14	31	30	18	7
	Mode	4				
	Mean	3.27				

Regarding behavioral engagement, 71% of the participants agreed with Item 2 that the echo sounds or background noise in Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, etc., distracted them in their speaking performance (mode = 2). The statistics also revealed a tendency for agreement with this Item (mean = 2.10). Besides, item 1, emphasizing demotivation due to voice disconnection or image lag from video conferencing apps, was agreed upon by 69% of the respondents (mode = 2; mean = 2.13). In addition, 47% of the respondents agreed with Item 3 concerning the slowness of receiving classmates' feedback on LMS (mode = 3). However, they tended to stay neutral (mean = 2.56). For emotional engagement, a little more than half of the participants, 51%, were in agreement on Item 4 that they felt stressed when raising their voice in a large group of video conferencing (such as Google Meet, Zoom, etc.) (mode = 2; mean = 2.57). Meanwhile, a small number of respondents, 31%, agreed with Item 5 regarding the boredom when they had to watch the same videos of others performing a speaking task (Cambridge, IELTS, etc.) via YouTube. Further, 48% of participants also responded with "Neutral" towards Item 5 (mode = 3). The tendency for this Item was placed on the neutral option (mean = 2.82). Regarding cognitive engagement, most participants agreed with Item 6 (61%) that Google search or social media were so tempting that they could not invest their effort in practicing speaking but instead spent time using those tools (mode = 2; mean = 2.27). Besides, a few

participants (25%) agreed with Item 8 regarding assignments' late submission, while 45% of the respondents expressed their disagreement (mode = 4), and the tendency for disagreement stayed pretty high (mean = 3.27). In addition, many participants, 39%, chose the "Neutral" option for Item 7, revolving around problems when they prepare for speaking performances because of a huge amount of information or some inaccurate information on Google search (mode = 3; mean = 2.80).

The reasons for the participants' choices were elaborated in the interviews. In terms of behavioral engagement, interviewed participants (IPs) 3, 5, and 6 found background noise distracting because *"it could make me forget what I was going to say."* Sometimes, they could not follow the class, but background noise appeared and made them feel more irritated and demotivated. Further, 69% of the participants agreed with Item 1, saying that they all felt demotivated to participate in discussions because of voice disconnection or image lag from video conferencing apps. IP 3 said, *"When technical problems such as voice disconnection or image lag occurred, I would easily get in low spirits and be demotivated and just want to turn off the laptop."* IPs 7 and 8 also shared the same views that they became demotivated when voice disconnection or image lag happened. Moreover, these disturbances also caused students to forget what the teacher had just said since they could not pay attention to the key information, which also discouraged them from participating in the class activities. Moreover, to further explain the choice for Item 3, IP 7 said, *"LMS is not a friendly-user website. It may prove possible to post feedback on LMS; however, I think it was rather time-consuming to discuss it."* In terms of emotional engagement, interviewees explained their choices for Item 5, and they expressed that the format of these videos is similar to one another. They just wanted to know the format and requirements for practicing speaking for IELTS. Hence, in particular, IPs 5 and 7 assumed: *"...watching one or two videos is enough; too many videos may be time-consuming and boring."* Besides, to explain the relatively high percentage of Neutral options for Item 5, participants mentioned that they thought there could be different situations. If the videos were *"interesting and meaningful with useful vocabulary, intonation, or speaking style that I could learn from"* (IP 3), they could spend time watching them. However, if the videos had *"boring or repetitive content and format,"* there was no need to watch them again and again (IPs 7, 8, and 9). Besides, IP 1 shared, *"Watching those videos again would be dull and boring because they had watched them during their practice for IELTS in the past."* Yet, if they were for class activities, students would pay more attention to them. Regarding cognitive engagement, many participants disagreed with Item 8, claiming that each person must be responsible for submitting the tasks on time. Google Classroom had reminded them, but if they did not *"prioritize submitting assignments,"* they would *"never submit the tasks on time"* (IPs 1 and 3). Furthermore, Item 7 received a high percentage of Neutral options, and it was clarified that interviewees thought searching tools still proved convenient regardless of problems they may have (IPs 4 and 8).

Discussion 2

The results suggest that from the participants' perspectives, various factors related to the implementation of e-learning tools in online English-speaking classes hinder students' engagement. Regarding behavioral engagement, echo sounds, or background noise from synchronous e-learning tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, etc., were thought to hinder student participation the most. Little is known about this in previous studies. In terms of emotional engagement, students experienced stress and tension when they had to raise their voices through synchronous tools such as Google Meet, Zoom, etc. This result aligned with the

study findings by Fauzi (2022) in relation to the pressure students experienced to perform online speaking tasks. The study participants also experienced boredom when they were asked to watch videos with repetitive content and format on asynchronous tools such as YouTube, which seems to be scarcely discussed in prior research. Concerning cognitive engagement, the participants admitted that asynchronous tools such as Facebook, Messenger, and searching tools distracted them from practicing speaking. This result corroborates the findings by Shukri et al. (2020) regarding the challenges students face in concentrating on and comprehending online lectures. It also echoed the findings by Huang (2021) related to students' expressed concerns about their low self-regulation in the virtual learning environment. On the other hand, the study results suggest a relatively high disagreement on learning management systems (typically Google Classroom) and asynchronous tools (typically Facebook) as attributed to students' late submission of school tasks, contrary to the findings about assignment submission challenges as put forward by Hussein (2016).

All in all, although the current study results are generally supported by previous studies on EFL students' perceptions about the effects of e-learning tools on their engagement during English-speaking online classes, very few prior studies provided a conceptual framework encompassing the two main concepts of e-learning tools and student engagement and specifically focused on the Speaking skill online classes. Therefore, this current study contributes to bridging such gaps and laying the groundwork for further and future research in the field.

Conclusion

Summary

To address the research question, *What are EFL students' perceptions about e-learning tools' effects on students' engagement in English speaking skill online classes?*, based on the conceptual framework, consisting of the working definitions of e-learning tools and student engagement presented in Section 2, two main conclusions have been reached. First, from the EFL students' perspectives, e-learning tools enhance three types of student engagement. In terms of behavioral engagement, these tools facilitate students' materials and vocabulary searching, illustration sharing, speaking ideas discussion, and feedback provision. Regarding emotional engagement, the tools effectively evoke students' feelings of comfort, which is much higher than the feeling of excitement. Regarding cognitive engagement, these tools enhance students' effort and time investment, speaking preparation and mistake correction, and deadline tracking. Second, the four types of e-learning tools brought about eight main negative effects on student engagement. The tools create demotivation, distraction, and slow feedback in connection with behavior. Moreover, regarding emotions, they substantially cause students more stress than boredom when speaking English in online lessons. In relation to cognition, the tools cause students more problems with distraction than with their speaking preparation and late assignment submission.

Research significance and implications

Overall, this study has made significant contributions, both theoretical and practical, to the field of online English teaching and learning, particularly in the Vietnamese context. Theoretically, this study has shed light on EFL students' perceptions of the effects of e-learning tools on students' engagement in English-speaking online courses. The study also directs its practical contributions toward three main stakeholders: students, teachers, faculty, and school leaders. Research results offer students a multidimensional perspective of how e-learning tools affect their engagement in an online English-speaking class, which provides teachers with insights

into pedagogical implications in designing more engaging lessons, especially online speaking ones. Further, faculty and school leaders can consider the current study findings regarding their future revision or update of the curriculum to meet the increasing demands of online teaching and learning with learners' engagement as the centrality.

Study limitations and suggestions for future research

The study has one main limitation. Due to the time constraint, the sample size is not as large as expected. However, the quantitative and qualitative data gleaned from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews adequately addressed the research question. Future research can delve more into the effects of online English-speaking courses on students' engagement through inferential statistics or investigate how students' engagement can be influenced in online English classes focusing on other skills such as listening, reading, or writing.

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Exploring English Vocabulary Learning of Vietnamese Secondary School Students with VoiceGPT Assistance

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Abstract

With the advent of AI chatbots, many teachers' teaching practices of English as a foreign language have undergone many changes. Many of them have become accustomed to employing ChatGPT to assist their work, bringing many benefits and potential challenges that, to date, have yet to be fully tested in any aspect. Particularly, two notable research gaps involve how Vietnamese secondary school students use VoiceGPT, the Vietnamese version of ChatGPT, to assist them in learning new English words and how they perceive this support. The current case study aimed to address these gaps by employing a quasi-experimental design at Lam Son Secondary School in Ho Chi Minh City with the participation of ten sixth-grade students in two English-intensive classes. In this investigation, the teacher used the Presentation-Practice-Production teaching method to teach vocabulary to her students, who were randomly assigned into two groups with the same number of members in each group, and the data for analysis was collected from their writing samples and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that sixth-grade students had different ways of using VoiceGPT to help them learn English words. The participants with VoiceGPT assistance outperformed those without this A.I. support in terms of lexical performance in the writing productions on five topics surveyed. In addition, they expressed favorable attitudes toward VoiceGPT's benefits, but some concerns were raised about login difficulties, vocabulary range, and long response time.

Keywords: *chatbot, English vocabulary learning, secondary school students, personal experiences, perceptions*

Introduction

ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) is one of the most advanced A.I. chatbots, which brings many positive effects on language learning. Kohnke et al. (2023) studied that replicating natural interactions could help language acquisition. For example, it could recognize the meaning of a word in context, correct grammatical errors, generate writings in many genres, and provide dictionary definitions, examples, and translations. Additionally, it could be used to compose dialogues or generate several types of texts about a single topic and then alter their

difficulty to make them more suitable for learners according to their proficiency levels. Besides, Su and Yang (2023) explored the potential of this chatbot to offer students a more tailored learning experience, in which they could receive specialized training such as customized suggestions and virtual tutors. They could also benefit from a more engaged and pleasurable environment. Moreover, Guo and Wang (2023) found that this interactive web-based tool could produce a significantly greater amount of feedback compared to teachers for learners' writing tasks and that it fairly divided its attention among the three feedback foci consisting of content, organization, and language in contrast to teacher feedback, which primarily concentrates on issues about language and content. The researchers also suggested that educators collaborated with this chatbot to provide feedback on students' writing, aiming to enhance the writing skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

Although Vietnamese people showed considerable interest in ChatGPT, its Vietnamese version was not widely used and well-adopted even by Vietnamese educators and learners. It needs to receive more attention from EFL learners at Vietnamese secondary schools. In maximizing the benefits of using VoiceGPT for teaching vocabulary to teenage students, VoiceGPT use by Vietnamese secondary school students to support their English vocabulary learning and their perceptions of this use create two notable research gaps that need more investigation. This is the rationale behind conducting this exploratory research, entitled "*Exploring English Vocabulary Learning of Vietnamese Secondary School Students with VoiceGPT Assistance*".

Literature review

VoiceGPT: A Vietnamese version of ChatGPT

In recent years, chatbots have grown in popularity because they are advanced by natural language processing and machine learning, enabling them to interpret and respond to user input in a more human-like manner, resulting in more natural interactions (Lin et al., 2023). Smutny and Schreiberova (2020) advocated that they could communicate with humans at a particular level via text or voice by using artificial intelligence (A.I.) and natural language processing.

ChatGPT, a kind of artificial intelligence chatbot, was launched by OpenAI and released in October 2022 in beta mode. It belongs to the natural language processing model, employing algorithms to produce novel texts. Additionally, it is programmed to create human-like text from a massive corpus of text data, and therefore, it can conduct several linguistic tasks such as answering questions, writing tales, writing code, and so forth. Furthermore, when Schmidt-Fajlik (2023) compared ChatGPT as a grammar checker for Japanese English language learners with Grammarly and ProWritingAid, they believed that this tool excelled at detecting errors, giving detailed explanations and advice, and having a user-friendly visual interface.

VoiceGPT is considered the Vietnamese version of ChatGPT, developed by startup Tesse, residing in Phu Nhuan District in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam with three programming engineers since January when ChatGPT sparked many conversations around the world, including their nation. Nguyen Pham Tuan Anh, the founder of Tesse, said that ChatGPT did not enable Vietnamese citizens to register accounts at that time. In this circumstance, many people were tricked into buying accounts on social networking websites. Wishing to have a

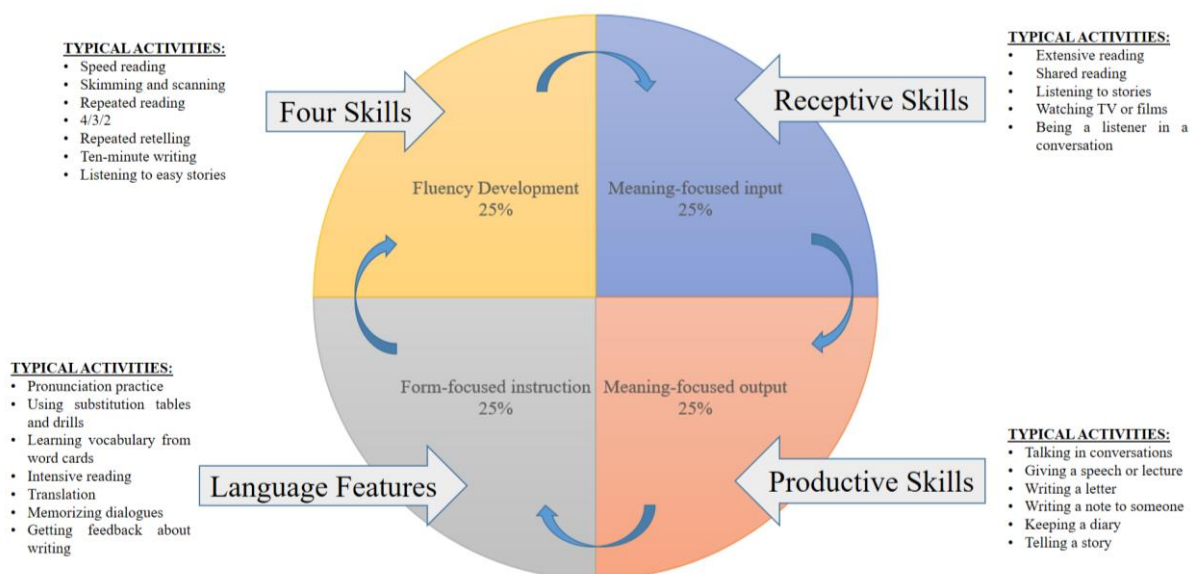
“ChatGPT” for Vietnamese people motivated the team members to contact OpenAI, the chatbot developer, to deal with a version for the Vietnamese (An, 2023).

The VoiceGPT interface with intuitive features is similar to ChatGPT and is convenient to operate. In addition, it is also integrated with a painting feature through suggestions from the text. Its innovative features also allow users to deliver messages in English and Vietnamese through written and spoken channels. To do this, the team bought Google’s A.I. tool to recognize the users’ voices and switch them into text and vice versa. Its voice recognition capacity has an accuracy of over 98% in both English and Vietnamese. Tesse wants to develop voice communication to help disadvantaged and digitally illiterate who cannot type texts (An, 2023).

Learning L2 Vocabulary

Nation (2007) determined four strands into which activities related to learning L2 vocabulary in a language course were categorized, including meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. According to Nation (2010), most first-language word acquisition occurs through meaning-focused input or incidental learning from reading and listening. The term “meaning-focused” refers to the notion that learners’ primary attention and interest should be on comprehending and acquiring knowledge and/or achieving pleasure from what they read and hear. Learning from the meaning-focused output acts as a precursor to transforming receptive into productive knowledge through speaking and writing. Language-focused learning is also known as focus on form, form-focused instruction, deliberate study, and deliberate teaching. It entails the purposeful learning of linguistic features such as pronunciation, spelling, lexicon, syntax, and discourse. The fluency development strand should involve all four skills, which learners are assisted in to maximize the use of what they already know.

Nation (2007) and Nation (2010) claimed that each strand in a well-balanced language course should be presented at approximately equal time. It should account for about 25% of the total training duration. This is the rationale behind why the writers use a circular shape with four equal pieces to demonstrate the four strands. Half-circle-shaped arrows illustrate mutual effects among these strands. Elgort (2007) studied that including deliberate vocabulary learning in a vocabulary learning program was essential. As a result, it could lead to a very rapid (and sustained) increase in lexicon size, which must then be enhanced and solidified through meaning-focused input and output and fluency development. It could produce both explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge, which are necessary for normal language use.

Figure 1. Learning L2 Vocabulary (Adapted from Nation, 2007)

Related Studies

The potential benefits and challenges of ChatGPT use in assisting vocabulary learning were found by antecedent studies such as Kohnke et al. (2023), Bin-Hady et al. (2023), and Farrokhnia et al. (2023), and the EFL learners' perceptions toward this chatbot was studied by Thái (2023) and Ho (2024).

Kohnke et al. (2023) conducted qualitative research to explore the use of ChatGPT in language teaching and learning. They did not propose a conceptual framework and their research methods. This article came up with initial ideas on how ChatGPT could support language teaching and learning. The findings revealed that it could provide linguistic inputs, stimulate learners' interests, provide real-time assistance, and allow students to practice their language skills anytime and anywhere. The authors also discussed ChatGPT's capabilities in supporting language learning tasks. To be more precise, it could identify the meaning of words in context, correct language mistakes, and create texts in various genres. Nonetheless, they reported some drawbacks related to ChatGPT in three aspects encompassing assessment, its responses' accuracy, and non-neutral cultural tones.

The article of Bin-Hady et al. (2023) explored the use of ChatGPT in English language learning. In their study, they collected and analyzed data from 20 researchers through a two-week discussion on the ResearchGate platform. The preliminary findings showed that ChatGPT could be used to develop learners' language skills and scaffold their learning process by providing feedback and recommendations and could act as partners in language practice. In addition, their research highlighted the potential benefits of using ChatGPT in language learning, such as improving conversation practice, reading and writing skills, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Farrokhnia et al. (2023) conducted a SWOT analysis to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of ChatGPT in higher education. The strengths of ChatGPT included

its sophisticated natural language model, personalized and real-time responses, and increased access to information. The threats to education included a lack of understanding of the context, threatening academic integrity, creating discrimination, democratizing plagiarism, and declining higher-order cognitive skills.

Thai (2023) conducted a study using a convergent mixed-methods design to assess English-major students' attitudes toward ChatGPT and its potential to support future learning and teaching, which data was collected through surveys and interviews. According to the findings, most students were aware of ChatGPT, and some had used it for educational purposes. The participants showed positive attitudes towards its potential to support learning and praised its instant and precise responses and the potential to improve language abilities. However, they voiced doubts regarding the dependability and quality of the data supplied by ChatGPT. They also supported the idea that this tool could have a detrimental effect on users' critical thinking. The author encouraged more research to explore its effectiveness and ethical implications when integrating ChatGPT and other A.I. tools into English language teaching in the future.

Ho (2024) conducted a mixed-method case study to learn more about I.T. students' attitudes and usage patterns when exposed to ChatGPT. To gather quantitative data, a structured questionnaire was distributed to 120 I.T. students at the Korea University of Information and Technology. Moreover, ten students participated in a group interview to gain deeper insights that complemented the questionnaire data, improving the comprehension of their perspectives. The results emphasized these students' need for instructor guidance and a traditional classroom despite acknowledging ChatGPT's effectiveness for English for Specific Purposes vocabulary learning, translation, grammar checking, and paraphrasing. Students mostly used this chatbot to get immediate help for their English language learning problems. The study also highlighted the need to assist students in using it responsibly and highlighted the necessity for more research into plagiarism-detecting software to reduce the possibility of technological misuse.

Two research gaps, including population and methodological gaps, were noted after examining pertinent literature. For the population gap, although many studies determined ChatGPT use in higher education, a few explored how secondary school students used VoiceGPT to support their English vocabulary learning and how they felt about this assistance. For the methodological gap, most previous researchers used surveys and interviews for their research, but a few employed tests to explore their lexical performance on writing productions after receiving the intervention. As a result, this case study was an attempt to address the two research gaps aiming to determine the VoiceGPT use of sixth-grade students and their attitudes toward this support.

Research Questions

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

1. How do sixth-grade students use VoiceGPT to learn new words in English?
2. How do they perceive using VoiceGPT to support their English vocabulary learning?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

This study was conducted in the second semester (between February and April 2023) in two English-intensive classes at Lam Son Secondary School, a Vietnamese state school in District Six in Ho Chi Minh City. In terms of the educational setting, this school was focusing on investing and developing English-related activities to create a favorable environment for students to practice listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills. The school authorities also encouraged the appropriate use of technology for students' learning purposes. The number of students in each class was usually around 45, and the textbook surveyed was English 6 i-Learn Smart World (Vo et al., 2021).

After having careful evaluations of students' academic performance in the first semester, the researchers randomly selected ten sixth-grade students with the same English proficiency from the two classes to participate in this research. The main author of the current study was the main teacher of these classes, so the variables such as VoiceGPT literacy, time, participants' language proficiency, learning styles, and so forth were tightly controlled.

Design of the Study

This case study employed a quasi-experimental design, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. This study took place during extended school hours. In addition to the commentary and scoring assessments of participants' academic performance in the first semester, the teacher asked those in both groups to write a 50-60-word paragraph on an unfamiliar topic individually before joining the survey, and then their works were sent to two examiners to assess so that the researchers could ensure the homogeneity of the sample.

The research instruments in the current study from which the researchers collected data for analysis involved semi-structured interviews, small tests, and a scoring rubric.

- The semi-structured interviews: They investigated how sixth-grade students use VoiceGPT to search for new words, study those words in context, and provide them with practice exercises and their perceptions of this use.
- The small tests: A small test whose designers were the researchers included two sections. The first part was a matching exercise in which the participants had to match the words with their definitions. To design this task, the researchers collected all new words that the participants found out; therefore, this part aimed to assess the memorization of new words that they learned from VoiceGPT. Another part was writing a 50-60-word paragraph in which the use of vocabulary in sentences with specific contexts would be assessed.

In this survey, the interviews were conducted after the lessons to collect feedback from sixth-grade students on how they used VoiceGPT to learn English vocabulary and how they felt about this use. Then, their small tests were collected and delivered to two examiners to assess their overall lexical performance in their writing productions.

The student-VoiceGPT interactions in the current study have three main principles. Firstly, VoiceGPT is integrated as a supplementary tool for teaching English new words. In other words, it does not replace the teacher's role in the surveyed lessons. Secondly, the students have to

interact regularly with this chatbot to maintain continuous language learning engagement and reinforce English vocabulary acquisition after the lessons. Lastly, the teacher gains their awareness of the ethical and effective use of A.I. chatbots, including VoiceGPT, in advance. This means they need to use it wisely in English language learning and other subjects such as Vietnamese literature, science, history, etc.

Data Collection and Analysis

There were two groups of random participants in this survey, including Group 1 and Group 2, with five members for each group. Both groups did similar tests during the research, and their mutual communication was strictly controlled. Regarding the differences, although the teacher did not introduce VoiceGPT to students in Group 1 and provide them with opportunities to practice using this chatbot, these instructions took place in the other group.

To be more precise, the teacher employed the Presentation-Practice-Production teaching method in this current investigation. She asked Group 2 to use VoiceGPT to find and report vocabulary that was relevant to five assigned topics by using VoiceGPT in advance, and then she taught them these new words while those in Group 1 had to learn topic-related words in their textbook at the presentation stage. In the following phase, the teacher instructed them how to use this chatbot to generate exercises for them to practice and memorize those words and encouraged them to explore other ways to employ it for vocabulary learning. Besides, those in Group 1 only learned topic-related words in the textbook. At that moment, she also encouraged them to introduce English words that they remembered beyond their current lesson. In this group, the teacher supplied them with exercises so that they could practice and recall the new words they had learned. In the production step, the students in both groups were asked to write a passage, in which they wrote their paragraphs individually in thirty minutes and under the supervision of their teacher. They were not allowed to use VoiceGPT while they were writing the passage.

The vocabulary learning of participants in Group 2 was assessed through two-part tests. Their memorization of new words' meanings was tested by the task that asked them to match the words with their definitions. This task was designed based on their reports on noted new words while searching VoiceGPT. After the vocabulary acquisition process, their lexical performance was evaluated by writing 50-60-word paragraphs in English. Five topics were delivered to the students in both groups, and they were allowed to choose a topic according to their preferences. The topics were:

- (1) writing a short paragraph about Seoul,
- (2) writing a short movie review,
- (3) writing a paragraph about the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF),
- (4) writing a short paragraph about ways to save the environment, and
- (5) Write a short paragraph about a party.

In terms of data collection, each member of Groups 1 and Group 2 composed a paragraph on their own in thirty minutes under the supervision of their teacher. They were not permitted to utilize VoiceGPT while they were writing the passage. Once they had finished, their writing

productions were delivered to two examiners to assess, score, and deliver feedback. The examiners were working in other secondary schools using the same textbook, were experienced in teaching students in grade six and assessing young learners' writing skills, and needed to learn each other. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were carried out at the end of the survey with five students in Group 2 to gather qualitative data on how they use VoiceGPT to learn new English words and how they perceive this A.I. support in their vocabulary learning.

To ensure the test's validity, the researchers picked up the topics from English 6 i-Learn Smart World, the official textbook that the participants had to learn at school. In addition, the expertise of the examiners was guaranteed. Furthermore, the scoring rubrics were adapted from the Aptis rating scales for Speaking and Writing (O'Sullivan et al., 2020), in which their writings were specifically assessed in six aspects, including task fulfillment, register, vocabulary range, vocabulary accuracy, cohesion, and coherence.

The qualitative data selected from semi-structured interviews were codified from S1 to S5 for each group and transcribed for analysis. To be more particular, the codes of S1-CG to S5-CG were for the participants in Group 1 (without VoiceGPT's assistance), and those from S1-EG to S5-EG indicated those in Group 2 (with VoiceGPT's assistance).

Table 1. Codes of the participants in Group 1 and Group 2

Participants	Group 1 (C.G.)	Group 2 (E.G.)
Participant 1	S1-CG	S1-EG
Participant 2	S2-CG	S2-EG
Participant 3	S3-CG	S3-EG
Participant 4	S4-CG	S4-EG
Participant 5	S5-CG	S5-EG

Findings

Research question 1: How do sixth-grade students use VoiceGPT to learn new words in English?

Most sixth-grade students in Group 2 employ VoiceGPT to learn new words, like the ways that they learn from their teacher, and a few utilize this tool in another way. To be more particular, S1-EG and S5-EG use it to provide many texts for their topic, thereby enabling them to be exposed to new words on that topic. As a result, it can assist them in studying the words' context and part of speech so that they can use them more appropriately. Besides, S2-EG employs it to translate his ideas and expressions from Vietnamese to English so that he can write paragraphs based on his writing style and learn new words tailored to his preferences. In addition, S3-EG utilizes it to provide her with vocabulary for unfamiliar topics and their contexts, resulting in her ability to deal with such topics more easily. Moreover, S4-EG creatively uses it to identify the words he uses inaccurately and recommend synonyms or replace them; therefore, he can learn English words beyond those in his textbook.

Concerning exercise generation, the majority of Group 2 members used the prompts suggested by their teacher to ask VoiceGPT to generate exercises so that they could practice the words

provided by VoiceGPT in the presentation stage. They need to use the teacher-recommended prompts because they need more vocabulary to create effective prompts for this A.I. tool. One student in that group additionally uses Google Translate to help him translate his requests from Vietnamese to English and then gives them to VoiceGPT. As a result, he can use VoiceGPT to create many types of exercises, such as matching definitions, filling in the blanks, and circling the correct answers by himself. Furthermore, he uses VoiceGPT to produce a word list that summarizes the new words he notes so that he can easily learn and remember them. His list has six columns encompassing (1) words, (2) their parts of speech, (3) their U.K. phonetic transcriptions, (4) their Vietnamese meanings, (5) their English meanings, and (6) their example sentences (in English).

Table 2. The student's word list generated by VoiceGPT

Words	Parts of Speech	U.K. Phonetic Transcriptions	Meanings (Vietnamese)	Meanings (English)	Example Sentences (English)
collect	verb	/kə'lekt/	thu thập	to gather or bring things together	I like to collect stamps.
collection	noun	/kə'lek.ʃən/	bộ sưu tập	a group of things gathered or accumulated	My book collection is very diverse.
collector	noun	/kə'lek.tər/	người sưu tầm	a person who collects things	He is a collector of ancient coins.
collective	adjective	/kə'lek.tɪv/	tập thể	done by people acting as a group or team	We need to have a collective working spirit.
differ	verb	/'dɪf.ər/	khác biệt	to be unlike or distinct from something	This one differs from the other in size.
different	adjective	/'dɪf.ər.ənt/	khác nhau	not the same as something or someone else	We have different opinions on this issue.
differently	adverb	/'dɪf.ər.ənt.li/	khác nhau	in a way that is not the same as something else	They solve this problem differently.

According to their test results, most of them do well in the matching tasks despite a few incorrect answers. In addition, five participants in Group 2 used approximately three-quarters of the new words that they learned from VoiceGPT to write their paragraphs. The assessment for writing productions' lexical performance of ten participants in two groups is reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' lexical performance with VoiceGPT assistance (unit: marks)

No.	Assessment criteria	Topic 1		Topic 2		Topic 3		Topic 4		Topic 5	
		S1-CG	S1-EG	S2-CG	S2-EG	S3-CG	S3-EG	S4-CG	S4-EG	S5-CG	S5-EG
1.	Task Fulfillment	8,5	8,5	7,0	6,5	8,0	7,0	7,0	6,5	8,0	8,0
2.	Register	8,0	8,5	7,5	9,0	7,5	9,0	7,5	9,0	8,0	8,5
3.	Vocabulary Range	7,5	7,5	7,0	8,5	7,0	9,5	7,5	9,0	7,0	8,5
4.	Vocabulary Accuracy	8,5	8,0	8,0	8,5	8,0	9,0	6,5	9,0	8,5	9,0
5.	Cohesion	7,5	8,0	7,0	8,5	7,0	8,0	7,0	8,0	8,0	8,5
6.	Coherence	7,5	8,0	7,0	8,0	8,0	8,0	7,0	8,0	8,0	8,5

Table 3 illustrates how many marks for each assessment criterion the participants in both groups receive from two examiners based on the scoring rubric. Overall, the performance of those in Group 2 on five topics is better than that of Group 1.

As can be seen from this table, students' vocabulary range and accuracy constitute the biggest difference between the scores of two group members, achieving 2,5 points. To be more precise, most students' scores in Group 1 are approximately 7,0 points for vocabulary range and 8,0 points for vocabulary accuracy in topics two to five, whereas those in Group 2 are marked around 9,0 points for both criteria. In other words, the students can use English words at a broader and more precise level in their passages when they learn new words with VoiceGPT. Furthermore, the marks for register, cohesion, and coherence are not considerably different between the two groups (from 1,0 to 1,5 points). The numbers for cohesion range from 7,0 to 8,5 points, and a similar pattern is evident for coherence.

By contrast, in the task fulfillment criterion, the scores of the sixth graders who participated in the survey in the experimental group are not as good as those of the control participants, which are about 0,5 points lower. Additionally, their marks are the same in topics one and five for this criterion. Another remarkable feature occurring in the first topic is that S1-EG gets a lower score for vocabulary accuracy when compared to S1-CG (8,0 and 8,5 points, respectively), but their scores are equal in the third criterion (7,5 points).

Research question 2: How do the secondary school students perceive using VoiceGPT to support their English vocabulary learning?

The majority of sixth-grade students in Group 2 think that VoiceGPT is an extremely useful application, and they point out many positive impacts of using this chatbot on learning vocabulary, such as exposure to a wider range of vocabulary, translation, and error checking. Additionally, they have both positive and negative feelings when using this tool. In terms of good emotions, S1-EG is excited about this tool because it can help her provide words in context. S2-EG is also interested in it since it helps him to translate his expressions from his mother tongue to English, which enables him to self-regulate his vocabulary learning. Besides, S3-EG perceives that it is supportive when she encounters strange writing topics by providing her with vocabulary related to them. Moreover, S4-EG thinks that VoiceGPT can support EFL

learners' study more than vocabulary learning, so he is extremely curious to seek out other ways to employ it. However, S5-EG expresses her anxiety about using this tool. For her, registering a VoiceGPT account with her Gmail address is challenging and time-consuming. In addition, she realizes that most of the vocabulary provided by this chatbot only occurs in the textbook and beyond her English proficiency.

Discussion

The main research findings provide valuable insights into how secondary school students use VoiceGPT to support their English vocabulary learning and how they feel about this assistance when they learn new English words. Firstly, the diverse ways in which they leverage VoiceGPT for L2 vocabulary learning, such as generating texts, translating, accessing vocabulary for unfamiliar topics, and error identification, illustrate the adaptability of this technology. This suggests that VoiceGPT can cater to a wide range of learning preferences and needs, promoting engagement and flexibility in the learning process. Secondly, the substantial improvement observed in the six aspects of lexical performance, including task fulfillment, register, vocabulary range, vocabulary accuracy, cohesion, and coherence, when they use this tool to support them underscores its potential to enhance overall language proficiency. This finding carries profound importance as it indicates that it can contribute comprehensively to students' linguistic competence, equipping them with a broader vocabulary and better language use skills. Finally, it is crucial to recognize that one of the findings reveals their mixed perceptions of this intervention. Although they acknowledge the benefits it offers, such as a great source of vocabulary, real-time assistance, and an enjoyable learning experience, they encounter many difficulties, including creating an account with their Gmail address, resulting in the need for a well-prepared approach to this technology integration in EFL classrooms at Vietnamese secondary schools.

When compared to the findings in previous investigations, those in the current study collaborate with Kohnke, Moorhouse, and Zou (2023) and Farrokhnia et al. (2023) by revealing that this type of A.I. chatbot can help to provide larger linguistic input, identify the meaning of words in context, and increase access to information. Additionally, the research results that reveal this interactive online chatbot can help secondary school students scaffold their learning process, including English vocabulary learning, are similar to those of Bin-Hady et al. (2023) and Ho (2024). Besides, their favorable perceptions and concerns about the potential difficulties in promoting learning new English words support the findings of Thái (2023). Furthermore, the results of this study are compatible with those of Ho (2024), which highlighted the importance of learners' instructor supervision.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study set out to achieve two primary research objectives: first, to investigate the VoiceGPT usage patterns among sixth-grade students for learning English words, and second, to understand their attitudes toward this intervention. The findings of this research have not only fulfilled these objectives but have also shed light on more general implications of incorporating it into secondary school curricula.

The two research objectives of this study are well achieved by clearly answering the two research questions. The first objective is addressed through the exploration of diverse ways in which sixth-grade students maximize the potential of using VoiceGPT to assist them in learning English words. This study reveals that students utilized this tool for various purposes, including generating texts, translating, accessing unfamiliar topic-related vocabulary, and identifying errors within texts. These results highlight its flexibility as a support tool that can be customized to meet teenage learners' various requirements and preferences, encouraging a more flexible and enjoyable vocabulary learning experience. The second aim, which focused on their perceptions of this help, is accomplished by concluding both positive and negative views of the interviewed students regarding the use of this chatbot to support their vocabulary learning in English. These attitudes are shaped by the benefits and difficulties they encounter in their interactions with this tool. This finding underscores the importance of considering the complex interplay between technology and student experiences in high school educational settings.

In terms of implications for learning English vocabulary at Lam Son secondary school, these findings advocate for the integration of VoiceGPT with English lessons at school as an assistant tool to foster student engagement, improve vocabulary acquisition, and enhance overall writing proficiency. The study also emphasizes these teenage students' diverse experiences and perceptions and addresses the challenges that they may face when interacting with this chatbot.

This investigation has two limitations related to the participants' age, the study's scope, and the small number of participants. First, sixth-grade students do not have a wide range of vocabulary to give VoiceGPT detailed inquiries, so they cannot resolve the difficulties they face when using this tool to learn new words effectively. Secondly, this research explores how middle school students employ this tool to support vocabulary learning, including using it to create exercises for practice. Other general education aspects, and L2 learning in particular, have yet to be investigated. Finally, there needs to be more than the number of ten participants to lead to the generalization of the research.

To further advance this research area, future studies can explore strategies to maximize the benefits of secondary school students' VoiceGPT use to learn English vocabulary while mitigating its limitations. Furthermore, investigating the long-term effects of VoiceGPT on English language learning and tailoring its use to different student profiles and learning contexts will provide valuable insights for educators and researchers alike.

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Appendix

The Scoring Rubrics for Participants' Writing Productions: adapted from the Aptis rating scales for Speaking and Writing (O'Sullivan et al., 2020)

	Scoring criteria	Insufficient (1-4, 9 pts)	Average (5-7, 4 pts)	Good (7, 5-8, 9 pts)	Excellent (9, 0-10, 0 pts)
1.	Task Fulfilment	The student needs to meet the task requirements, and the writing needs to be revised or revised.	The student partially meets the task with some clarity and coherence, but there may be notable lapses in fulfilling the task.	The student mostly meets the task with good clarity and coherence but minor lapses.	The student fully meets all the requirements of the task with exceptional clarity, coherence, and sophistication.
2.	Register	The student rarely uses appropriate language for the audience and purpose, and language use may interfere with comprehension.	The student sometimes uses language that is somewhat appropriate for the audience and purpose, but there are occasional slips in the register.	The student usually uses appropriate language for the audience and purpose, with some inconsistency.	The student consistently uses appropriate and consistent language for the audience and purpose.
3.	Vocabulary Range	The student demonstrates a very limited range of vocabulary, mostly simple and repetitive.	The student demonstrates a limited range of vocabulary, with limited variety and simplicity.	The student demonstrates a good range of vocabulary.	The student demonstrates a wide range of vocabulary to convey ideas effectively.
4.	Vocabulary Accuracy	The student's language could be more accurate, and errors significantly hinder comprehension.	The student's language is mostly accurate, but errors may hinder comprehension.	The student makes some accurate language, but noticeable errors may affect comprehension.	The student consistently demonstrates accurate language with very few errors.
5.	Cohesion	The student uses inconsistent, and we could be more consistent, and stronger to a disjointed and hard-to-follow passage.	The student attempts to use linking devices to connect ideas, but they may only sometimes connect ideas logically.	The student uses linking devices to connect ideas, although some may need to be more varied or clear.	The student consistently uses appropriate linking devices to connect ideas effectively, creating smooth transitions

					between ideas.
6.	Coherence	The writing lacks coherence. It is difficult to follow the ideas, and there needs to be more logical progression.	The writing needs coherence, and it is easier to follow the ideas. Numerous errors in language and structure.	The student's writing maintains coherence, but some parts may need stronger connections.	The student's writing maintains a clear and logical progression of ideas throughout the passage.

Teaching and Learning Collocations in the Vietnamese Context: Teachers' Voices

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Abstract

This primary research focuses on teachers' perceptions of the teaching and learning of collocations in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in the context of Vietnam. The study involves four teachers currently teaching in different educational settings in Ho Chi Minh City. A purposeful sampling technique is adopted to select the participants. The findings from semi-interviews can shed light on how teachers teach collocations to EFL learners, whether they apply technological applications or web-based platforms in teaching collocations and assisting learners to acquire collocations, as well as possible causes for some of the learners' collocation errors. Teachers' sharing about the procedure of teaching collocations in different classroom settings, including public schools and private classes in either secondary level or universities, is provided. Moreover, challenges during the process of conducting such practices based on the teachers' perspectives are discussed. As a result, suggestions for teachers and learners can be made to facilitate Vietnamese EFL learners' acquisition of collocations, in many cases, with the assistance of technology.

Keywords: teaching collocations, Vietnamese learners, technological tools, collocation errors

Introduction

Collocations are believed to be essentially important to the development of English proficiency. The body of research into the knowledge of collocations has proven that there is a positive correlational relationship between the acquisition of collocational knowledge and language proficiency (Cantos & Sánchez, 2001; Nesselhauf, 2005). More interestingly, lexical collocations are found to play a crucial role in learners' English proficiency (Al-Zahrani, 1998; Sung, 2003). This indicates that the more collocational knowledge the learners acquire, the more competent the learners' communicative skills become. Thus, an investigation into how teachers teach collocations to Vietnamese EFL learners is necessary. This study investigates the procedures teachers follow to teach collocations to learners in different settings, their perceptions of the difficulties and learners' performance, and common collocation errors during the teaching and learning process.

Literature Review

Definitions of collocations and classification

Collocation is generally defined as the grouping together of words; however, how words are grouped together is not the same by different researchers. While Sinclair (1991) believes that in the typical investigation of Collocation, the maximum range is 4-span, including the node

word, Kjellmer (1994) is more interested in strictly adjacent word co-occurrence. More interestingly, the span proposed by Sinclair (1991) was later viewed as unnecessary because the lexical hierarchy formed by collocates within linguistic units such as sentences and phrases truly matters (Cantos & Sánchez, 2001). Regarding the number of words in a collocation, there have been different views on how many words and what types of words are included that can form a collocation. Whereas Partington (1998) claims that traditionally, collocations are two-word combinations, there are combinations of more than two words that are still deemed collocations. In a broader sense, a collocation is considered a co-occurrence of a word with another word or other words, and the frequency of such combination is higher than expected to be a chance co-occurrence (Clear, 1993), while the span of those combinations can range from ± 2 (Clear, 1993) to ± 5 (Stuart & Trellis, 2006).

With regard to the classification of collocations, the most commonly adopted model divides the collocational items into two major categories, namely, grammatical collocations and lexical collocations (Benson et al., 1997). Regarding lexical collocations, they contain two or more content words and do not consist of prepositions or infinitives. According to the BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations, there are six sub-types of lexical collocations (Benson et al., 1997); however, the seventh sub-type, “noun 1 of noun 2” was then added (Hausmann, 1999; Kimmes, 2004, as cited in Hsu, 2007). Hence, there are seven sub-types of lexical collocations: (L1) *adjective + noun* (e.g., *strong tea*), (L2) *verb + noun* (e.g., *conduct an experiment*), (L3) *noun + noun* (e.g., *city transport*), (L4) *adverb + adjective* (e.g., *physically demanding*), (L5) *verb + adverb* (e.g., *jump happily*), (L6) *noun + verb (action)* (e.g., *wolves growl*), and (L7) *noun 1 of noun 2* (e.g., *a school of fish*).

Several empirical studies on collocations, especially on lexical collocations, have been conducted, and the correlation between lexical collocation knowledge and overall proficiency in English has been proven. Particularly in a study conducted by Al-Zahrani (1998), the knowledge of English lexical collocations of 81 Saudi EFL learners and the relationship between these learners’ knowledge of lexical collocations and general language proficiency were investigated. One of the most major findings is the strong correlation between the learners’ knowledge of collocations and their language proficiency measured using the TOEFL test, which means that the language mastery of EFL learners can be influenced greatly by the acquisition of collocations. Thus, it is evident that lexical collocations play an important role in a learner’s English proficiency.

Teaching and learning lexical collocations

Many studies in second language acquisition of collocations have discovered that learners’ mother tongue is vital to their L2 collocation learning (Bahns, 1993; Bahns & Eldaws, 1993; Bisk-up, 1992; Hama, 2010; Koya, 2004; Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2003, 2005). One major problem that learners have when acquiring collocations is language transfer, which takes place when learners find something in the L1 similar to the target language, which is considered negative transfer. A study conducted by Bahns (1993) concluded that inappropriate collocational usage may result from L1 transfer, especially when learners’ L1 is closely related to English. Similarly, in a study carried out by Biskup (1992) to investigate L1 transfer observed in German and Polish learners of English, most of the collocation errors are the use of inappropriate synonyms and L2 learners show too much reliance on a small number of some particular collocations when they are able to produce those correctly.

The degree of congruence of the collocations between their L1 and L2 is associated with the likelihood of learners producing incorrect collocations, which also means that congruent collocations, which sound natural in both their L1 and L2, cause less difficulty to learners than

non-congruent collocations. These findings are consolidated in Ying's (2009) study as it is concluded that collocations congruent and translatable collocations from L1 to L2 are easier for learners to acquire. This study also discovers that overgeneralization is a major cause, as learners tend to look for the equivalent collocation in L1 without realizing that incongruity exists between their L1 and L2. Besides, specifically in the context of Vietnam, Nguyen (2020) also identified interlingual interference as a primary source of the majority of Vietnamese EFL learners' erroneous collocations.

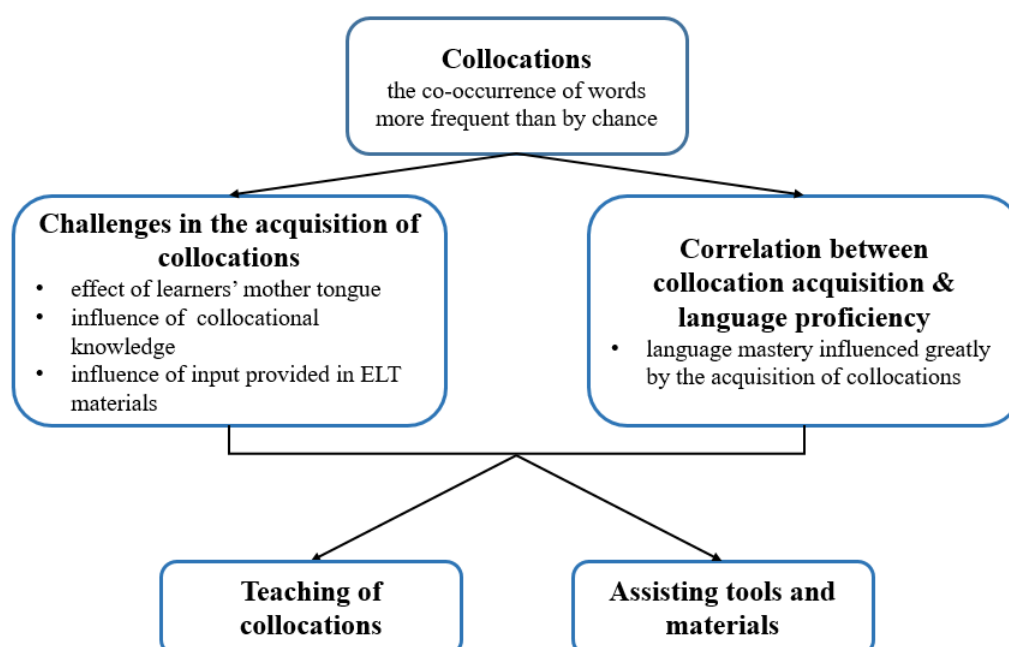
It is also pointed out that the insufficiency of collocational knowledge or lexical items may hinder the acquisition and production of certain collocations. In other words, the insufficient, ineffective instruction of collocations to learners can negatively influence the acquisition of those (Shitu, 2015). Liu (1999) finds out that the lack of collocational concept leads to learners' inability to know which word collocates with the node word, although they know the basic meaning of the node word. The inability to produce collocations correctly or use appropriate collocations can make non-native speakers sound unnatural and even unintelligible to target language speakers. Moreover, too much reliance on a small number of collocations can become an obstacle to language users in academic contexts, as collocations are ubiquitous. Thus, a high level of collocational competence is crucial if learners aim for advanced proficiency.

Regarding the input factor, textbooks are believed to play a part in providing useful input for learners. The usefulness of lexical phrases, including collocations, idioms, and phrasal verbs, provided in ELT coursebooks was investigated in a study by Koprowski (2005). Koprowski (2005) concluded that not very useful collocations were included in the coursebooks and that the usefulness of lexical phrases was compromised, which was also found in a study by Koya (2004) to investigate ELT materials. Furthermore, Cao, Pho, and Dangnguyen (2021) also discovered that the repetition of the same collocations or less-frequently used collocations (compared with reliable collocation lists) is unnecessary, as the deliberate teaching time should be allocated for teaching new target collocations. This implies that the recycling of target collocations should be systematic and effective. It is evident that collocations deserve attention, and the collocation input presented in textbooks is even more necessary for learners to acquire and consolidate their collocational knowledge for production. ELT materials must manage to highlight the collocations of the target words in the lexical syllabus. Moreover, in many foreign language teaching and learning contexts, a textbook is the primary source of target language exposure, which means that the collocational knowledge contained in the textbook can be crucial to non-native learners.

Learners' learning styles and habits, as well as assisting tools and materials, can greatly contribute to their acquisition of vocabulary in general and collocations, more specifically. The use of dictionaries or exposure to concordances and examples is reported to bring about significant benefits to learners' retention of lexical items (Cao, 2018; Hadley, 2002; Kolln, 1992; Lew & Doroszewska, 2003; Rahimi & Mohemi, 2012). Because the context in which a lexical item is used, along with the accuracy of a collocation, is provided, the process of acquiring such items is more enhanced and facilitated. Simultaneously, a variety of exercises and activities for learning and practicing collocations, as Lewis (1997) suggested, can play an important role in teaching and learning collocations. Considering our contemporary world, with the rapid development of technologies and the Internet, virtual platforms where learning can take place in an interactive way can be of great importance. According to Trinh et al. (2022), EFL learners think digital games can provide vital assistance when learning vocabulary. They believe that the games are fun and interesting, providing them with a means to easily memorize the words and understand them better. The process of making sense of and learning word families becomes more exciting and simpler, and this corroborates the findings in the study by

Rasti-Behbahani (2021), in which learners can effectively recall the form and the meaning of the target words thanks to the visual aids and audio files from the games. Simultaneously, the teachers in this study all think that digital games provided on platforms such as Quizizz, Kahoot and Quizlet can motivate learners when learning new vocabulary. For EFL learners at the tertiary level, a study conducted by Pham et al. (2024) revealed that university learners enjoyed using an AI-based chatbot called POE, or Platform of Open Exploration, created by OpenAI in 2020. This chatbot is believed to help learners with their vocabulary learning process as this tool provides them with ideas and necessary vocabulary for assignments. Lastly, it has been found that electronic dictionaries contribute greatly to the vocabulary learning process of EFL learners thanks to their interactivity and flexibility (Le, 2023; Trinh et al., 2021). The majority of Vietnamese EFL learners in a number of previous studies think that electronic dictionaries provide useful assistance when they learn vocabulary because they can quickly and conveniently look up the meaning of a word and understand the context in which the word is used. By and large, the use of technological tools in teaching vocabulary, or more specifically, collocations, is promising.

Figure 1. Summary of theoretical notions investigated in the study



Although the topic of identifying learners' collocation errors in their production has been investigated worldwide (Shin, 2015), very little research on exploring Vietnamese EFL learners' difficulties and teachers' teaching collocations in the Vietnamese context is seen. In other words, collocations have not received sufficient attention in the process of teaching and learning English in Vietnamese contexts, especially in different settings from lower secondary to higher education levels. Insights into how Vietnamese teachers teach collocations and the difficulties or challenges they face during this process can be shaped through this study, which then results in appropriate implications and suggestions for improvement and enhancement in the teaching of lexical collocations to EFL learners of different education levels in Vietnam.

Research questions

This study aims to shed some light on (1) how teachers teach lexical collocations to their Vietnamese EFL learners in different settings and (2) teachers' perceptions of the challenges

and assisting tools during the process of teaching lexical collocations. The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. How do teachers teach lexical collocations to Vietnamese EFL learners?
2. What are the realities and challenges of the teaching and learning of collocations in the Vietnamese context?

Methods

Participants

With a view to investigating the procedures of teaching lexical collocations to Vietnamese EFL learners in different teaching contexts, four English teachers were invited to four separate semi-interviews. The first teacher (Teacher #1) has more than 25 years of teaching experience at a public secondary school in Ho Chi Minh City, and this teacher works mostly with the ninth-graders. Participating in the semi-interview, the second teacher (Teacher #2) teaches IELTS classes at a private English center in Ho Chi Minh City. The students enrolling in these classes are tenth, eleventh, and twelfth-graders coming from a variety of public high schools in the same city. The third participant (Teacher #3) is an English teacher for non-major university students at a Ho Chi Minh City college. This teacher has provided IELTS classes for non-majored students for more than two years. The fourth teacher (Teacher #4) is a young in-service teacher who started teaching at a public high school in Ho Chi Minh City two years ago, and this teacher's students are in grades ten and eleven. Purposeful sampling and convenience sampling techniques were adopted to select the participants for the interviews, as teaching collocations in the classroom, either formally and separately, or opportunistically and incidentally, is not compulsory in the curriculum, and therefore, the researchers had to initially ask different teachers whether they teach collocations in their classrooms to choose the appropriate participants for this study. The table below summarizes the information of the participants and the context in which they teach collocations to EFL learners.

Table 1. Demographics of the participants

	Experience & Setting	Work with	Teach collocations
Teacher #1	> 25 years of teaching experience public secondary school	students of grade 9	from EFL textbooks issued by the Ministry of Education
Teacher #2	> 2 years of teaching experience private English center	students of grades 10, 11 and 12	from IELTS materials and coursebooks
Teacher #3	> 2 years of teaching experience College	non-majored university students	from IELTS materials and coursebooks
Teacher #4	> 2 years of teaching experience public high school	students of grades 10 and 11	from EFL textbooks issued by the Ministry of Education

Design of the study

This study adopted the qualitative approach by setting up semi-interviews in order to gain deeper insights into the participants' perspectives and perceptions. According to Creswell (2001), the qualitative design of a study can help build a holistic picture of the detailed views and experiences of the participants, providing the understanding of a problem, reality or

challenges. Additionally, as the researcher aimed to explore the way teachers teach and facilitate learners' acquisition of collocations, a qualitative approach with the application of semi-interviews is the most appropriate way to thoroughly comprehend the phenomenon.

Data collection and analysis

In order to interview the participants, the researcher prepared a number of questions related to teaching collocations in their specific context, their perceptions of the importance of collocations, learners' common collocation errors, and causes, as well as the difficulties they have while teaching collocations, along with some technological tools or platforms they use to help learners. Probing questions were also asked to obtain more information or to prompt clarification for a point. Each interview took place within 30 minutes. A consent form was provided before the interview started and anonymity was maintained during and after the interviews.

The interviews were held virtually via Google Meet due to geographical constraints. Despite this, the interviews were conducted smoothly with recorded audio for transcript after the interviews. Vietnamese was used during one interview because this teacher felt more comfortable expressing thoughts and opinions. The permission to record audio of the interviews was given through the approved consent form. After four semi-interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio and typed it into a Microsoft Excel file to store the data. The researcher attempted to translate the qualitative data obtained in Vietnamese into English with the help of another English teacher who was not one of the participants. This assistant teacher checked the English translation and gave suggestions for revisions.

A thematic analysis was carried out through three main stages. Firstly, the researcher reads the transcripts and gives specific pieces of information a specific code. Then, the researcher goes through all the codes to identify the common themes. Last but not least, the themes were reviewed and reported. Four main themes are emerging from the data collected from the interviews. They are (1) *the procedures of teaching collocations*, (2) *challenges in the process of teaching and learning collocations*, (3) *supporting materials and technological tools to facilitate collocation acquisition*, and (4) *suggestions and hopes for improvements in the process of teaching and learning collocations*. Interestingly, in the second theme regarding the challenges during the process of teaching collocations and learners acquiring collocations, there are two sub-themes, which are (a) *learners' common errors and causes* and (b) *teachers' difficulties*. Regarding the common collocation errors and causes, there are four causes identified in this study.

Findings and discussion

Four main themes emerged from the process of analyzing the interview transcripts and their codes. The themes help visualize the reality of the process of teaching and learning collocations in the context of Vietnam in general and specifically in three distinct settings: classes in public schools, IELTS classes at a private center, and IELTS classes in a university. The subthemes of the challenges in this process also demonstrate both learners' and teachers' difficulties, which can result in a number of interesting suggestions for improvement. In addition, teachers' sharing related to supporting materials and web-based applications in the process of teaching and learning collocations can greatly assist other teachers with the same teaching context.

The procedures of teaching collocations

When asked about whether the importance of collocations in language proficiency is introduced in the classroom, all interviewed teachers assured that collocations are taught and explained carefully in their settings. Regarding teachers currently teaching at public schools, despite the rare appearance of collocations in the textbook used in the classroom, these teachers insisted that when a collocation emerges, it is explained and taught with great emphasis, as the teacher is concerned that the students may easily forget it, which they may encounter in exams. Similarly, the teachers that teach IELTS classes either in a university or at a private language center claimed that at the beginning of any new courses, the definition of collocations and examples of those are always provided and illustrated with great emphasis, as collocations play a crucial role in making IELTS learners' speech and writing natural and native-like.

"I introduce how collocations are formed; for example, a verb goes with a noun, an adjective goes with a noun, and so on. I emphasize that collocations have fixed meanings and are like blocks of language. For instance, "terribly sorry" cannot be understood as the words are separated, like "xin lỗi kính khùng". I teach the collocations and how to understand their meanings." (Teacher #1)

"Collocations are often mentioned in most of my classes. I explain what collocation means at the beginning of any course so that my students are aware of collocations and their importance in language production. I give them examples of lexical collocations and their use in writing and speaking." (Teacher #2)

"I explained collocations to them in our first lesson. I think letting the students know about them is crucial since they need to have a range of collocations used in speaking or writing for better band scores in IELTS. I often teach collocations together with vocabulary lessons when the textbook provides some information on it. I also tell them about collocations when correcting their writing essays." (Teacher #3)

"I usually teach collocations in skills lessons rather than spend a whole separate lesson just for them. I'll show students the node word first. Then, I give them the meaning and ask them to guess the verbs, nouns, and adjectives that go with the word. Finally, I'll ask students to make some sentences using the Collocation." (Teacher #4)

Regardless of the teaching contexts, all four teachers prefer to take advantage of the reading texts in the textbooks or materials to pick out some interesting collocations to teach learners. With regards to the teachers teaching IELTS courses, it is believed that the use of authentic texts from IELTS reading practice tests is of great importance, and the authenticity of the language is guaranteed. Moreover, by emphasizing brainstorming activities during writing classes, the teachers can create opportunities to provide learners with new collocations that they wish to use in their essays. This way of introducing collocations is not seen in teachers' procedures at public schools because of time constraints and the shortage of communicative activities related to writing and speaking skills.

"While correcting the reading tasks, there would usually be a number of collocations embedded in the reading text. I always point out those collocations and explain to them carefully what those mean. I do not pick out or select the lexical collocations that are going to be taught in my classes on my own because all of the collocations come from the reading texts in the textbooks or the materials I use. In both Vietnamese and English, the students are required to brainstorm ideas for a writing task as a group. Then, I would always check whether their ideas are sufficient for the essay and whether they are coherently connected and supported. When students have difficulty coming

up with a suitable collocation, they would write the idea in Vietnamese, and I would provide them the best Collocation in English to use.” (Teacher #2)

Another interesting point extracted from the interviews of three out of four teachers is the use of various exercises and tasks for learners to consolidate their collocation knowledge. Except for the IELTS teacher who claimed to be able to hold separate sessions dedicated to teaching collocations, other teachers teaching at public schools do not have similar experiences. Instead, teaching collocations at schools is not far from incidental teaching, as that is not the main goal in their classrooms. However, three teachers agreed that they had utilized a number of different exercise types to help learners remember some collocations. Those types of exercises are mostly multiple-choice questions, word formation exercises and guided-cloze tests.

“I always remind them the “spell” “danh động tính trạng” (i.e. noun, verb, adjective, adverb) whenever new words are introduced. I do the same when I teach collocations because in many word formation exercises, they are required to provide the correct part of speech of the given node word, and most of the time, the test item is a part of a collocation.” (Teacher #1)

“For vocabulary lessons, I let them read the collocations at home before coming to class. Then, in class, they have some time to practice with collocations (probably with exercises like matching and filling in the gaps...) for about 10-15 minutes. For the practice session (writing or speaking), I ask them to choose 3-4 collocations to use in their essay or speech. At first, they often found it difficult to meet the requirements, but later on, once they are used to it, they perform better at thinking of situations to apply the collocations when speaking/writing. Homework assignments include making sentences or producing writing/speaking work. When doing so, the students often show weaknesses in collocations. Though they have learned the correct collocations, some of them still have difficulties applying to the correct contexts.” (Teacher #3)

“In the speaking and writing lesson, I'll ask students to use those collocations again. I think this way of teaching is quite straightforward and, therefore, does not take much time. The students can remember most of the collocations and use some of them in their speaking and writing if they review the lesson [...] Written exercises are the ones I use the most frequently. These exercises can be done and checked easily.” (Teacher #4)

Although teachers at public schools may resort to incidental teaching when encountering collocations, according to Hill and Laufer (2003), this method is only suitable for reviewing words that learners have already met previously, which also means that incidental teaching may not positively support the learning of new words or collocations. Indeed, the teaching of collocations should stem from the notion that language production is putting pieces of chunks or blocks of language or ready-made units and lexical items together, appropriate for each specific situation (Rahimi & Momeni, 2012).

Table 2. Summary of participants' procedures of teaching collocations

	The procedure of teaching collocations	Materials/Activities utilized
Teacher #1 (public school)	rare appearance of collocations >< explain carefully	reading texts in the textbooks issued by the Ministry of Education exercises (multiple-choice questions, guided-cloze, word formation)
Teacher #2 (private center)	explain and give examples	authentic reading texts from IELTS materials and books brainstorm activities in writing/speaking sessions
Teacher #3 (college)	explain and give examples	authentic reading texts from IELTS materials and books exercises (matching, filling in the gaps, making sentences)
Teacher #4 (public school)	rare appearance of collocations >< explain carefully	reading texts in the textbooks issued by the Ministry of Education exercises (multiple-choice questions, guided-cloze, word formation)

Generally, teachers participating in the interviews are aware of the importance of collocations and the teaching of collocations to learners of different levels, and they take advantage of the available texts or materials to extract useful collocations for learners to acquire. In addition, the use of a variety of exercise types, though not data-driven and corpus-based yet, is believed to offer learners opportunities to review the collocations and ensure their retention.

Challenges in the process of teaching and learning collocations

Learners' collocation errors and causes

Negative transfer

One major problem that hinders learners' collocation acquisition is their mother tongue. All interviewed teachers believed that this is a challenge that is hard for the students to overcome instantly or within a short period of time, because when they lack vocabulary knowledge of the words or collocations they are looking for, they are not able to produce a correct collocation without trying to make sense with their mother tongue, as Teacher #3 shared, *"They sometimes use inappropriate words in the collocation because they attempt to translate from Vietnamese to English."* Combinations that are not correct are deemed "weird" by Teacher #4, *"I think this is normal because students cannot remember everything they are taught. Students usually make "weird" combinations of words due to the influence of their mother tongue."* This point can be found in the sharing of the other teachers.

"They may not know that collocation, so they may use their mother tongue to work out the meaning they need, like in a multiple choice question, they are required to choose an adjective to describe "heavy rain", which means "mưa to" in their mother tongue. They are likely to choose "big", because they translate from Vietnamese, and they have not heard of the chunk "heavy rain" before." (Teacher #1)

"There are multiple times my students use incorrect collocations, and I think it is mostly because of their mother tongue. They attempt to translate the phrase they want from Vietnamese to English. They would say, "This figure is impressive", without

knowing that this is not a collocation suitable for writing task 1 in IELTS.” (Teacher #2)

Vietnamese EFL learners in many settings have the tendency to translate from their mother tongue to get the phrases they are looking for. In a study conducted by Bahns (1993), it is said that when learners' mother tongue is closely related to English, L1 transfer may result in inappropriate collocational usage. This corroborates the findings in the study carried out by Nesselhauf (2003), which states that the degree of congruence of the collocations between learners' L1 and the second language is linked with the chances of learners producing inaccurate collocations. This notion is strengthened thanks to the findings of a study conducted by Hama (2010) to explore the sources of collocational errors produced by EFL learners in a university in Iraq. This study found that L1 interferences caused 56% of the erroneous collocations extracted from learners' essays. Regarding the context of Vietnam, a Vietnamese study conducted by Nguyen (2020) on university students revealed a causal effect of Vietnamese interlingual interference found from the collocational errors made in these EFL learners' essays. The implication is that Vietnamese learners tend to overgeneralize and translate to get the Collocation they want without realizing the incongruity between their L1 and L2.

Lack of vocabulary knowledge

One of the interviewed teachers insisted that in the classroom, when introducing a collocation, she always emphasizes the part of speech of each component in a collocation. The main reason for this is that students are required to do many types of exercises in which the part of speech of a word is tested, such as in a word-formation exercise or a guided-cloze. Hence, the teacher finds it vital to carefully explain the part of speech of the components of a collocation to the students. Without sufficient knowledge of the part of speech, the production of correct collocations of learners may be greatly hindered, and then, they may resort to translating from their mother tongue.

"When the students do not know the collocations, they cannot find out what that Collocation means, and they cannot choose the correct word to fill in the blank in a guided-cloze or a multiple choice item. That is what they find most daunting.” (Teacher #1)

The teacher teaching IELTS courses at a university pointed out that the learners tend to use single words to express their ideas because they do not know many collocations. Hence, it leads to some inappropriate language use, making their speech or writing unnatural. Teacher #3 stated, *“Some of them did quite well, but some habitually use "single words" rather than collocations. They sometimes use inappropriate words in the Collocation.”* It can be clearly seen that when learners have insufficient knowledge of vocabulary and part of speech of a lexical item, they may find it hard to memorize the collocations and produce the correct versions of those, leading to the use of strategies such as coinage and approximation. According to Liu (1999), even when learners may know the meaning of the node word in a collocation, but without the proper collocational concept, they may be unable to know the collocates. Meanwhile, Shitu's (2015) study investigating Nigerian university learners' production of collocations discovered that one of the major causes of students' erroneous use of collocations is ineffective instruction or teaching of collocations. This implies that EFL learners are more likely to fail to produce syntactically and semantically correct collocations without proper knowledge of collocations.

Insufficient provision in ELT textbooks and materials

The teacher who teaches at the secondary school stated that collocations are not emphasized in the teaching-learning English process at the lower secondary school level. Collocations are not separately introduced, which means that teachers are required to pick out the collocations and decide, on their own, whether this Collocation should be taught or not. This is said to put more burden on teachers' shoulders. Even in the new textbook, collocations are occasionally introduced, and mostly (L2) *verb + noun* collocations. Similarly, the teacher who teaches at the public high school in the study confirmed that the number of collocations provided in the ELT textbook used in the classroom is not sufficient for students to convey their messages and opinions with optimal effectiveness. Teacher #1 shared, *"In the old textbook, there are no collocations introduced. We must pick out the collocations necessary to teach the students. Even in the new textbook, there isn't a Learning Box to contain all the necessary collocations."* The reason for this may lie in what Koprowski (2005) claimed, which is that the usefulness of lexical phrases or collocations in coursebooks may be compromised, leading to insufficient provision of useful collocations for learners to equip themselves. Simultaneously, another interesting point regarding the provision of collocations in textbooks used in those educational settings is shared.

"I think the collocations in the books are only enough to complete the task in the books. Teachers must add a few more to help students communicate more effectively. Therefore, I usually add some more collocations besides those from textbooks."
(Teacher #4)

This implies that the number of collocations provided in the ELT textbooks is insufficient for learners to communicate more effectively in the target English. Because of that, Teacher #4 felt obliged to supply learners with additional collocations so that they could acquire and produce them in their writing or speaking.

Moreover, when Koya (2004) investigated whether ELT textbooks in Japan introduce common collocations extracted from collocation dictionaries, it was revealed that few collocations were introduced in the textbooks and were not recycled to an extent that can facilitate learners' acquisition. It can be understood that in order for learners to memorize and produce correct collocations, the provision of collocations in textbooks and materials is of great importance and should be made explicit and recycled frequently. Interestingly, the findings of a study conducted by Cao, Pho and Dangnguyen (2021) to investigate the collocational profiles of English textbooks for Vietnamese learners and whether the collocations are recycled to an extent that can assist learners in acquiring them provide another insight into the provision of targeted collocations in textbooks for EFL learners in Vietnam. It is found that one-third of the targeted collocations are either repeated multiple times in different places or they are not of great importance according to some reliable collocation lists. This may indicate that the more effective approach to recycling a target collocation is by embedding it in exercises or activities in the textbook, while the standard teaching time should be integrated into teaching frequently used collocations. This point corroborates the notion of incidental teaching by Hill and Laufer (2003) mentioned in the first theme covering the procedures of teaching collocations of the participants. Incidental teaching is not useful for introducing new target collocations; instead, it is more useful for revisiting taught collocations through the use of exercises and activities.

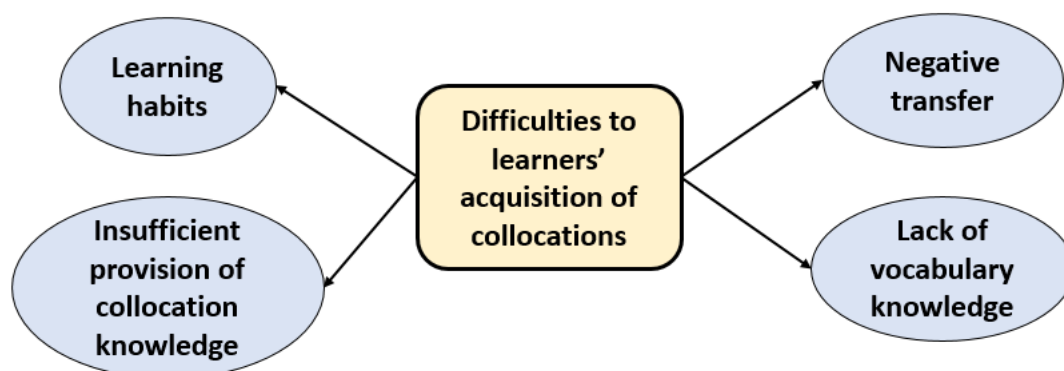
Learning habits

Besides the challenges related to knowledge of the collocational concept, interference of mother tongue and inadequate supply from ELT textbooks, learners' habits of learning collocations can

be a contributing factor. The most major difficulty is that learners may fail to remember the collocations that have been taught in the classroom due to the lack of review and suitable learning strategies. Teacher #4 shared, *“My students cannot remember everything I teach.”* This resonates with other teachers. Teacher #1 mentioned the findings observed from multiple choice questions and said, *“Some of my students fail to produce correct collocations or choose the correct collocate of a node word in multiple choice questions because they do not review their lessons regularly.”* Meanwhile, Teacher #3 mentioned the process of memorizing collocations and stated, *“I think it's the memorization process. When students learn new collocations, they don't have the habit of using them right away. Rather, they prefer to use single words because it's more approachable.”*

The frequency with which collocations occur to learners can become the driving force for learners' acquisition of those. Hence, it is important that learners pay more attention to the acquisition of collocations and adopt a suitable learning strategy to assist them in memorizing and producing the collocations accurately and effectively. Here, it should also be noted that a number of useful tools, such as online corpora, can be introduced to learners (Tran & Nguyen, 2022) so that they can check for the frequency and accuracy of a collocation. This is believed to enhance learners' autonomy to assist their acquisition of collocations.

Figure 2. Summary of learners' difficulties when acquiring collocations



Teachers' difficulties

The biggest challenge to teachers when it comes to teaching collocations is time constraints, especially for teachers at public schools. They cannot cover many collocations in their periods or attempt to provide more collocations for learners because they do not have sufficient time. Teacher #1 claimed, *“But we cannot be very ambitious, as we cannot have enough time to cover them all.”* Meanwhile, teacher #4 stated, *“There are too many collocations. I don't know which ones I should teach first.”* This implies that especially in the context of Vietnam, time constraints cause great difficulties for teachers, preventing effective teaching of collocations from taking place on a regular basis in the classrooms.

This aspect of a challenge has not yet been investigated or revealed in the previous bodies of research focusing on teaching and learning collocations in Vietnam. However, despite this issue, with appropriate sets of activities and proper explanations of the importance of collocations, teachers can still manage to draw learners' attention to useful collocations and the production of those in both spoken and written forms. Another important thing to note is the

allocation of time during a lesson to take advantage of the deliberate teaching time and incidental teaching. Important target collocations should be taught throughout the deliberate teaching time, while recycling taught collocations or introducing less-frequent collocations can be conducted incidentally.

Supporting materials and technological tools to facilitate collocation acquisition

Teachers who are in charge of IELTS classes either at the private center or at a university agreed that *ozdic.com* is an informative tool to help learners look up collocates of a node word. The part of speech of the collocates of the node word is noted in a straightforward manner, making it easy for learners to do quick research. Also, the interface is user-friendly and simple enough for even learners in at the secondary school level. Another significant piece of sharing is the use of dictionaries as a reliable reference when learning about collocations. Therefore, Online dictionaries are believed to bring about many benefits.

Generally, effective vocabulary retention of EFL learners after using dictionaries is reported to be significant in many previous studies (Bruton, 2007; Lew & Doroszewska, 2009). More specifically, Cao (2018) concluded that electronic dictionaries can bring about more benefits compared with physical dictionaries as learners are exposed to more language input, facilitating the acquisition of vocabulary more efficiently. The database of examples written in authentic language provides learners with the context in which the Collocation is used. Teacher #3 mentioned the utilization of *ozdic.com*, “For most of the classes, I often introduce them to *ozdic.com*, which is a website to search for suitable collocations. The students respond quite positively to the website, and after the introduction, they use it more often.” Agreeing with the sharing of this teacher, Teacher #2 also allows learners to resort to *ozdic.com* to assist with vocabulary learning.

“I usually introduce ozdic.com to my students because it is easy to use and it provides a very large source of collocations. Any students can visit the website to look up the collocates for a word and strong collocations. Actually, I do tell them that there is another, much easier way: to type the Collocation they have in mind in the search engine on Google and see if this Collocation appears in any reliable English sources.”
(Teacher #2)

More generally, Teacher #4 expressed deep appreciation for both paper and electronic dictionaries as learners are exposed to many examples with contexts in which the collocations are used. This is said to help learners to understand one lexical item more effectively.

“I think dictionaries are great tools to learn collocations effectively. We can not only check the meaning but also read the examples with the Collocation in a specific context to understand how these collocations are used, which helps us remember the collocations faster. Online dictionaries are of great assistance.” (Teacher #4)

The use of *ozdic.com* tool or dictionaries as the main reference for collocations is the fundamental idea of the data-driven learning approach, which advocates the consultants of concordances and collocation dictionaries in the classroom to learn about collocations from sources of authentic language (Kolln, 1992), and the use of digital software to create a database of linguistic resources or language examples (Hadley, 2002). This approach has proven its positive effects on learners’ overall language proficiency in an investigation carried out by Rahimi and Mohemi (2012), in which learners of the experimental group performed better after vocabulary was taught through collocations and concordancing techniques.

Suggestions for improving the collocation teaching-learning process

All interviewed believed that collocations should receive more attention from the teaching staff and textbook developers. The importance of collocations in making our speech more natural

and effective has been proven, and yet, collocations are still not perceived as a major aspect of English teaching and learning in the context of Vietnam, especially in the case of public schools and ELT textbooks for public schools. Another interesting point in these teachers' sharing is the techniques or approaches teachers can adopt to help facilitate learners' acquisition of collocations. Different activities can be organized and various exercises can be provided to encourage learners to review the collocations and practice producing the correct collocations.

"There are expressions introduced in the new textbook, but not many collocations. If yes, mostly they are verb + noun collocations, while there are very few adjective + noun collocations. More collocations should be introduced so that students can seriously learn these to use in communication." (Teacher #1)

"I hope that there is going to be a book focusing on collocations that are useful for IELTS learners. It would be more systematic and helpful to both teachers and students. Also, I think ELT textbooks used in school can also include a list consolidating all collocations that are presented throughout the book, so that students can use the list as reference." (Teacher #2)

The application of collocations is mentioned by Teacher #4, as it is stated as, *"I just hope that more teachers will make students aware of the importance of collocations."* The sharing of Teacher #3 further supports this, as this teacher claimed, *"Hopefully, the textbooks will provide more activities for learning collocations. Furthermore, teachers should require students to apply collocations more often."* With the rapid growth and prevalence of technology in every aspect of our modern society, it is undeniable that technological tools and digital software should be applied and utilized in schools and classrooms to adopt the data-driven learning approach, especially in the context of Vietnam.

Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

This study was carried out to investigate teachers' perceptions of the process of teaching and learning collocations in the context of Vietnam. Four teachers coming from four different educational settings in Vietnam were invited to share their thoughts and challenges. Interesting opinions and perspectives were expressed, painting a more vivid picture for a deeper understanding of the reality and difficulties encountered by both teachers and learners.

In order to improve the reality of teaching and learning collocations in the Vietnamese context, it is important to keep in mind that collocations play a crucial role in a person's language proficiency. Without the use of appropriate collocations, one's speech can become unnatural. According to Hill (2000), teachers are supposed to make learners aware of the importance of collocations when learning English, and noticing collocations is an essential stage in their learning process. A key note to remember is that teachers need to make sure that learners understand a lexical item's context of usage sufficiently, which means that they can produce the items or collocations appropriately. This can be done through a variety of in-class exercises or activities such as the ones proposed by Lewis (1997) (see Appendix A). The utilization of such exercises provides learners with opportunities to understand how a collocation is formed, the meaning of a collocation and be aware of the part of speech of each component in a combination. Another interesting suggestion is that teachers can introduce a number of electronic dictionaries for EFL learners to look up the meaning of a collocation or find the suitable collocates for a node word, since electronic dictionaries are interactive and time-saving (Le, 2023; Trinh et al., 2021). The use of electronic dictionaries should be encouraged both in the classroom and outside the classroom so that learners can have reliable tools to resort to when they need assistance.

Regarding learners' learning habits when it comes to storing lexical items and collocations, teachers can encourage learners to keep a journal of vocabulary and collocations by topic so that they can use them when writing essays or making speeches. The act of writing the taught collocations down and storing them by a means that matches their own learning style can help enhance the acquisition of any lexical item, including collocations. Also, it is worth noting that with the advent of technology and the prevalence of technological tools serving educational purposes, learners can be instructed to create digital journals on applications and virtual platforms, which may allow them to adopt various methods of recording vocabulary items of collocations such as mind maps and tables. Those applications and platforms can be *canva.com* (to create presentation slides with multi-media content), or *padlet.com* (to create an interactive platform for learners to record and share collocations with each other). Teachers can take advantage of reading texts or listening to audio files to extract useful collocations for learners to notice and learn. Furthermore, to successfully create a learning environment full of excitement and enthusiasm, teachers can create digital games and adopt a blended learning approach in order for learners to practice at home by playing those games. Digital games have been proven to assist EFL learners' vocabulary learning process (Trinh et al., 2022). Besides digital games created on platforms such as Quizizz and Kahoot, teachers can introduce AI-based chatbots to EFL learners of higher education levels, which can help them brainstorm ideas and equip them with the necessary vocabulary for writing or speaking assignments (Pham et al., 2024).

Last but not least, textbook developers and authors should pay more attention to the clear plan of regulating target collocations throughout the content of the book so that the number of target collocations is introduced evenly in a single unit or section and recycled effectively in exercises and activities throughout other parts of the book. This also suggests a more systematic recycling of collocations in ELT materials so that learners can easily notice and acquire those lexical items. Teachers can also benefit from a more convenient approach of introducing and consolidating textbook collocations, especially during exam periods or for testing purposes.

Suggestions for teachers, students, and even textbook developers are formed with the valuable sharing of teachers from four different settings. These are believed to make some improvements to the reality of teaching and learning collocations in Vietnamese context. It is important to ensure that the positive link between knowledge of collocations and language proficiency has been proven, so all stakeholders can consider this seriously and make possible changes to their own situations. Yet, changes on a larger scale and in a more systematic way are required to maximize all the potential. More empirical research on Vietnamese EFL learners' erroneous collocations in productive skills and causes of errors explored from their perceptions can become great contributions to the existing literature.

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Biodata

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Appendix A

Examples of exercises and activities to teach collocations proposed by Lewis (1997)

Table A.1. A matching exercise to teach collocations (p.88)

List 1	List 2
1. daily 2. short-term 3. regular 4. healthy 5. to follow 6. to control 7. to eat 8. to set	a. a balanced diet b. your weight c. an exercise program d. routine e. weight-loss f. targets g. food h. benefits

Table A.2. A deleting exercise to teach collocations (p.94)

One word in each group does not make a strong word partnership with the word in capitals. Which is the odd one?	
BRIGHT	idea green smell child day room
HIGH	season price opinion spirits house time
STRONG	possibility doubt smell influence views coffee

Measures Taken by Lecturers in Teaching Language Skills to Large EFL Classes Online at Some Universities in Vietnam

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Abstract

In EFL online teaching, large-sized classes are of major concern, and different teachers have taken various measures to facilitate and enable better learning outcomes. This study investigated the measures used by lecturers at some universities in Vietnam to teach language skills to large EFL classes online. The sample size was 60 respondents from different age groups, university settings, and IT competence levels. The research found that most teachers often preferred teaching receptive skills (i.e. reading and listening) as they were more graphic and more easily handled. Accordingly, more audio-visual measures were reported to be effective. Activities that allowed students to prepare and get ready were also more favorable. Presentations, role-plays, interviews and flipped classes were counted among the most frequently used activities. Besides, class short assignments on less academic tasks were more prevailing because they did not apply challenges and pressure on learners. Respondents revealed that they had to perform a lot of technical skills and combine several digital means of teaching, managing, monitoring and assessing their classes. It was recommended from this study that more training on handling blended classes and support efforts should be given to teachers of large classes as well as more innovative language activities and pedagogical measures should be designed to improve teaching and learning quality in such a circumstance.

Keywords: Large-sized class; online teaching; measures; English language skills; digital means.

Introduction

Teaching language skills usually requires various initiatives from teachers of large classes and it even urges them to utilize more measures in online settings. It is necessary to explore how teachers of language skills have been struggling to overcome obstacles from their online oversized classes. Different researchers have found that teachers often encounter multiple problems in class monitoring and feedback (Devi, 2016; communicative skill practice (LoCastro, 1989); maintaining teaching and learning quality (Ijaiya, 1999). In Vietnam's school settings, "large classes prevented the lecturers from varying teaching activities, interacting individually with students, and providing detailed feedback on students' performance". Besides, big sizes of classes were also challenging for lecturers in assessment activities (Le Thi Thuy Nhung, 2019, p.122-123). This study investigated real situations of how teachers cope with their large online

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EFL classes via opinions from 60 lecturers teaching English language skills in 15 different universities in Vietnam. Accordingly, the research suggested some implications for more effective teaching of English language skills in online teaching circumstances.

Literature review

There are two main ways of referring to “big classes”. The first way tends to be a quantitative reference that based on the number of students in a class to define it as a large one (LoCastro, 2001; Ur, 1996; Shehu et al., 2016). The second way is more qualitative because it refers to big classes as the ones where resources are insufficient for students (LoCastro, 2001; Ur, 1996), or class efficiency is low (Khan & Iqbal, 2012) or the class number of participants exceeds the teacher’s expectation (Küçükler & Kodal, 2019).

Research articles on pedagogical issues often mention various ways of dealing with large classes. In recent years, they include both instructional and technological measures. Carpenter (2006) suggested that “faculty teaching large classes should attempt to include constructive, active teaching methods in their courses whenever possible” (p.19). As Mulryan-Kyne (2010) reported, these include ways to get students more engaged in the teaching-learning process: “brainstorming, short writing activities followed by class discussion, quick surveys, think-pair-share, formative quizzes, debate, role-playing and student presentations” (p.181). Suggestions also cover such initiatives as short demonstrations, sessional class activities, small-group work,...”. Other techniques can be “drama, simulation, and peer teaching” (p.181). For online settings, teaching large classes can be supported by uploading course materials, providing opportunities for discussion and feedback, and providing objective assessments for online learners. (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010, p.182). To foster active learning in a large-sized class, pairing and group work are often highly recommended. Among those instructional measures of active and cooperative learning, “Round Robin”, “Roundtable”, “Writearound”, “Numbered Heads Together”, “Team Jigsaw”, and “Tea Party” are mentioned (Küçükler & Kodal, 2019, p.172). All of them seem to be more suitable for physical classroom settings of large-sized classes. Closely related to our research concern, Abu-ghararah (2021) explored 307 EFL teachers’ measures in teaching four language skills to students of large classes and concluded that they made more use of language techniques in teaching graphic skills than aural ones, in which gender and level of teaching were dominant factors that determined their instructional choices (p.333). Regarding the teaching aids, Ly T. N. L. et al. (2021) explored how online platforms were utilized by instructors in several Vietnamese universities. They observed the adoption of diverse information communication technology tools for disseminating information, conducting classes, engaging with students, and fostering collaboration. Notably, Gmail and Google Classroom emerged as preferred platforms for e-learning (p. 34). Similarly, within higher education contexts, Pham T. T. (2021) investigated the perspectives of both teachers and non-English majors at a university in Vietnam. Her study revealed a wide array of IT tools employed to enhance students’ autonomy in learning English, with Padlet and Quizizz being identified as the most favored choices (p.42).

There is a notable gap in research about teaching large EFL classes online regarding teachers’ measures to meet the challenges that they face in virtual educational circumstances. However, there have recently been certain interests in teaching measures for large-sized online classes in

other fields. In investigating two case studies of large-sized online economic classes, Zhong (2017) found that effective online learning necessitated a cohesive and user-friendly structure as well as the implementation of learner-centered instructional strategies, especially “versatile and prompt communication with the students” (p.152). Besides, through their discussion to present some general guidelines, Elison-Bowers et al. (2011) found it important to manage large to very large online courses within four areas: “effective communication, teaching assistants and multiple sections, implementing teaching techniques successful in large online sections, and professional practice in the online classroom” (p.58). These researchers focused on how to create an online teaching environment characterized by “open communication”, with “a sense of community” and “assurance of civility” (p.64). While such studies offer valuable insights into online teaching measures for large-sized classes, there remains a dearth of literature specifically addressing the unique challenges faced by EFL teachers in similar contexts. Therefore, it is imperative for researchers and practitioners in EFL education to delve deeper into the measures adopted by EFL instructors to navigate the complexities of online teaching effectively, thereby contributing to the advancement of pedagogical practices tailored to the needs of EFL learners in virtual educational settings.

Research methods

Research questions

A survey was designed to find answers to the following research questions:

- a. What instructional measures do lecturers often use to facilitate their teaching in their online large-sized classes?
- b. What technical solutions do lecturers often deploy to facilitate their teaching in their online large-sized classes?

Participants

This is a cross-sectional study. The survey applied a random sampling method. 60 lecturers from 15 different universities and institutions of higher education participated in the survey. Most of them are young, 28.3% are in their 40s, 25% are of 30-35 age range, 21.7% are in 25-30 age range, 20% are of 35-40 age range, and 5% are of 20-25 age range. The great majority of them hold a master's degree (80%), some with a doctorate (13,3%) and a bachelor's degree (6,7%). 56,7% of them have a local teaching certificate, 31,7% have a TESOL certificate. Two of them have the CELTA certificate or TEFL certificate. Their self-report of IT capacity revealed that 36,7% gave themselves a score of 7/10 (fairly good), 31,7% with a score of 8 (excellent), 19,7% gave themselves a score of 6 (average). 8,3% are of outstanding level of 9 a, 3,3% self-reported that their IT competence level should be given a score of 10. Two lecturers gave themselves a score of 4 or 5. Most participants are experienced in using the Zoom app (89,8%) and MS Teams (76,3%). About 46% know how to use Google Meet, 15,3% can use Skype.

Research methods

The data collection tool includes a questionnaire in the form of a Google Form sent to lecturers teaching English language skills at a number of universities in Vietnam (Vietnam National

University in Hanoi, Thai Nguyen University, Hanoi University of Industry, Vinh University, Dai Nam University, Phenikaa University, Thang Long University, University of Business and Technology, ...) during the first term of academic years 2022-2023. The survey questions focused on the lectures' reflections on instructional techniques for teaching language skills online in large classes and technical solutions in teaching such classes.

There were two parts in the questionnaire comprising a total of 15 multiple-choice questions supplemented by some open-ended ones for respondents to express their opinions further. Part one focuses on teachers' perceptions of large-sized classes, including their views on class size, the language skills taught within them, experiences with measures adopted in crowded online classes for each language skill, and assessments of the effectiveness of technical solutions in teaching such classes. Part two collected some data of the respondents' self-reflection on their teaching proficiency alongside the pedagogical certificates, IT capacity, present workplace, workplace environment, usage of teaching apps or learning management systems (LMS), suggestions for effective technical measures and any other opinions regarding measures for teaching online crowded EFL classes. The data was exported from Google Forms and analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2019, with percentages presented in tables and figures.

Results

Which skills are easy to teach in online crowded classes?

Table 1. Lecturers' opinions on skills easy to teach in online crowded classes (%)

Skills easy to teach	Number	Percentage
Listening	35	58.3
Speaking	14	23.3
Reading	41	68.3
Writing	15	25.0
Other opinions	1	1.7

Overall, a majority of respondents revealed that receptive skills (listening and reading) are easier to be taught in crowded online classes. Specifically, 68.3% of the teachers find reading easy to teach. This number is followed by listening, at 58.3%. Conversely, speaking and writing can inherently present greater difficulties for educators. The figures for writing and speaking are similar, at around 25%, and only one teacher (1.7%) believes that these skills are of equal difficulty in teaching.

Measures adopted in teaching Listening in crowded online classes

In the context of teaching listening skills, instructors employ various activities. Predominantly, listening to conversations and monologues emerges as the most commonly adopted method, utilized by up to 60% of teachers. Following closely, video-based activities rank second, with a frequency of 41.7%. Conversely, a notable portion of teachers, approximately 31%, seldom or never incorporate storytelling or dictation exercises into their listening practices within crowded online classes.

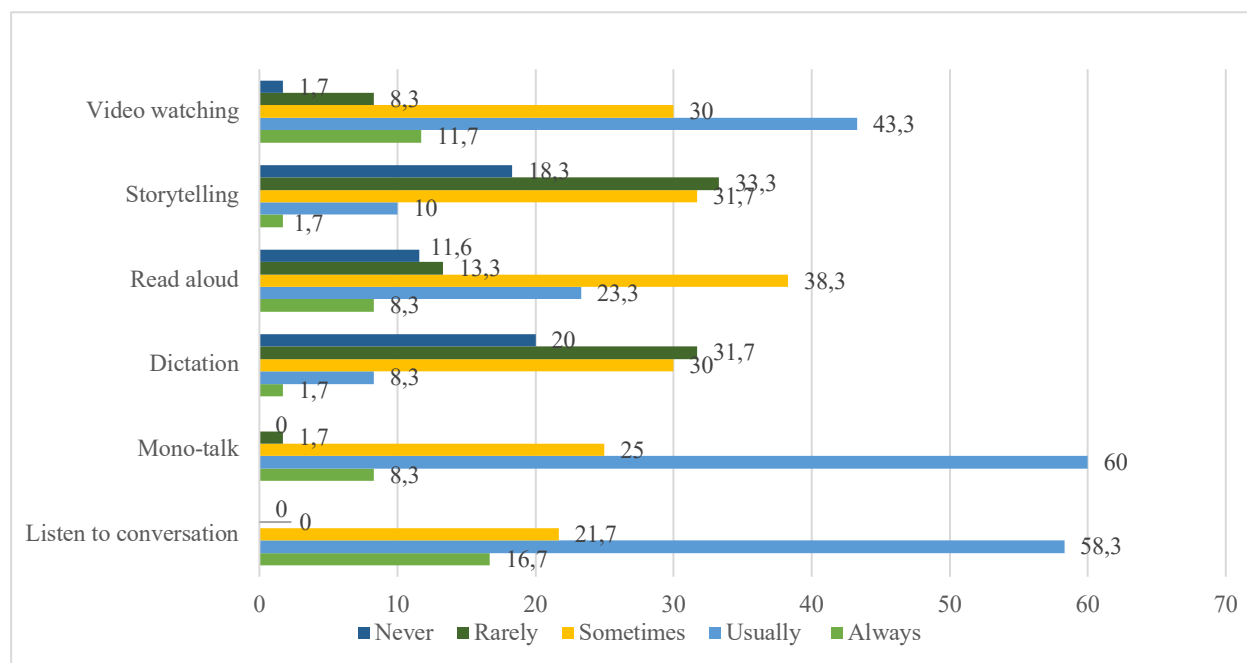


Figure 1. Instructional measures in teaching listening skills in online large-sized classes (%)

Apart from the aforementioned activities, 31.7% of respondents suggest more listening activities in teaching crowded online classes. These activities vary, including showing transcripts, self-study, listening and repeating, filling in the blanks with missing words, MCQ and note taking, working in a group, gamification, summary, podcasts, listening to a song and filling in the gaps.

Measures adopted in teaching Speaking in crowded online classes

In online crowded settings, engaging in conversation emerges as the foremost activity, embraced by an overwhelming majority of instructors. A striking 96.3% of teachers regularly incorporate this method into their classes. Following closely are activities such as presentation-making, role-playing, and interviews, with an impressive 83.3% of teachers integrating presentations into their teaching repertoire.

Conversely, a notable portion of participants (43.3%) abstain from utilizing pantomime as a method in online speaking classes. Moreover, activities with intricate instructions and procedures, such as "chain story" or "flipped classes," are infrequently employed in online settings. The former sees a combined rate of "rarely and never" usage at 40%, while the latter stands at 29.9%.

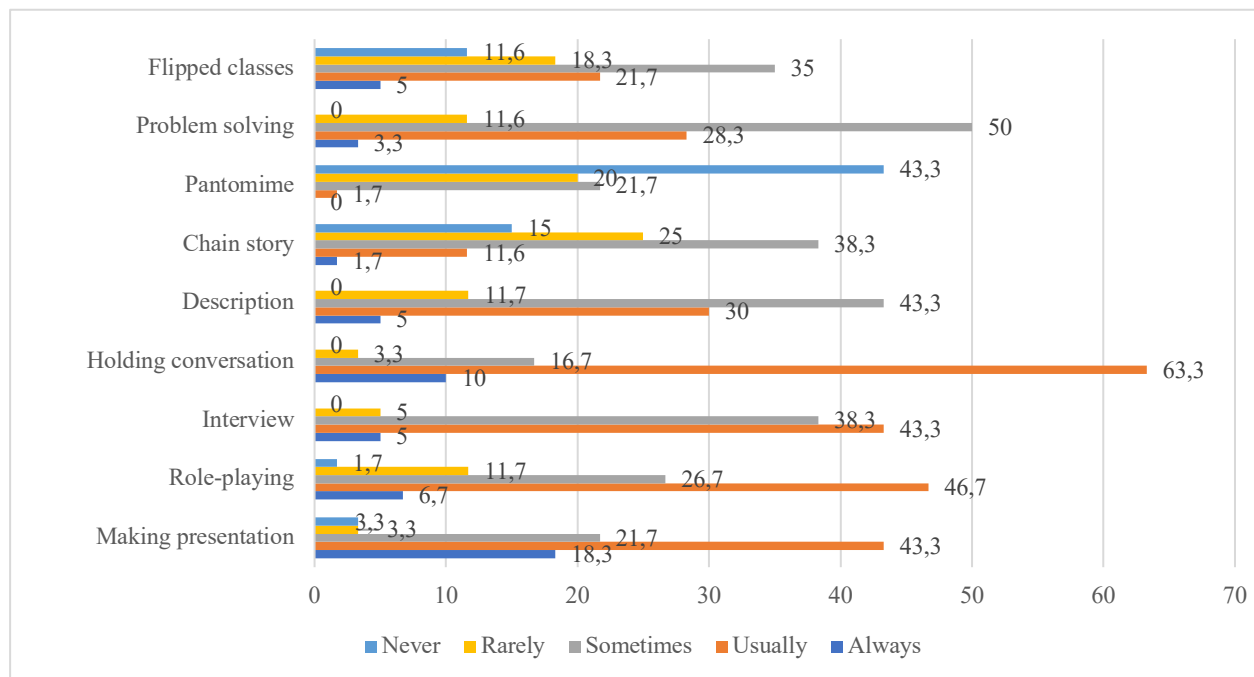


Figure 2. Instructional measures in teaching speaking skills in online large-sized classes (%)

Among 60 participants, 16 teachers (26.7%) also suggest other activities, consisting of learning by heart, discussing in pairs/groups, making a video, and video dubbing.

Measures adopted in teaching Reading in crowded online classes.

An examination of the data underscores the prevalence of skimming, scanning, and in-depth reading as the primary methods employed in educational virtual settings. Impressively, the rates of "always, usually, and sometimes" for these methods reach up to 90% for skimming, 83.3% for scanning, and 76.6% for reading in-depth.

In contrast, summarizing or reviewing a book and extensive reading are less favored measures among educators in virtual environments, with only 5% of teachers consistently utilizing these approaches.

In addition to these activities, 14 teachers (23.3%) propose alternative methods. One suggestion involves students assuming the role of the teacher, guiding their peers' learning under the teacher's supervision. Another participant recommended translating difficult sections of the text after all questions had been addressed. Encouraging reading for pleasure is advocated by one educator, mirroring another's suggestion that students actively seek news articles to share in class. Furthermore, the strategy of employing the jigsaw technique is highlighted as an effective activity in crowded online classes.

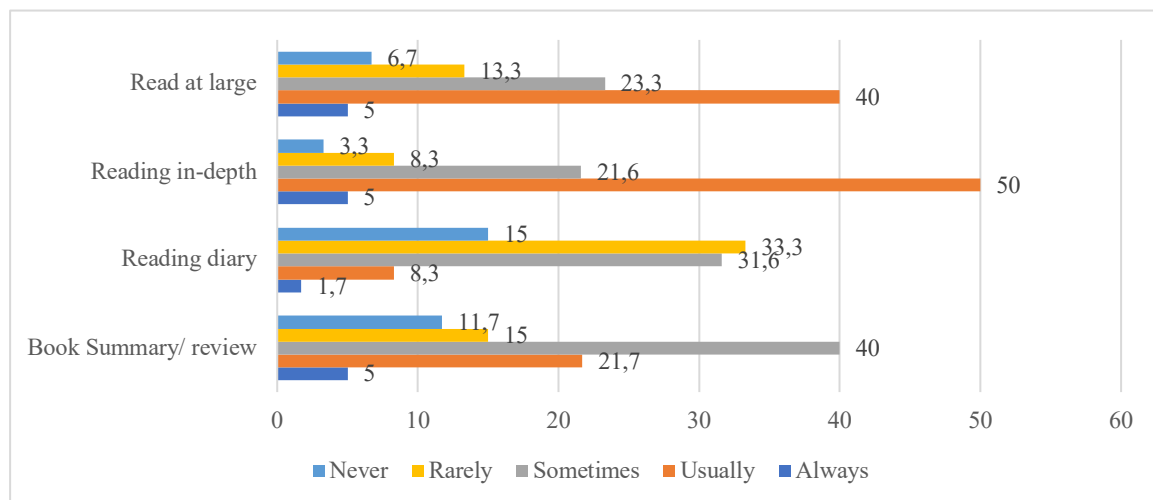


Figure 3. Instructional measures in teaching reading skills in online large-sized classes (%)

Measures adopted in teaching Writing in crowded online classes.

It is evident that conventional measures found in coursebooks, such as letter writing, email writing, essay writing, and description writing, enjoy widespread popularity. Approximately 83% of teachers frequently incorporate these methods into their teaching practices. Conversely, dictation and composition exercises are less favored, with only 38.3% and 48.3% of teachers, respectively, utilizing them regularly.

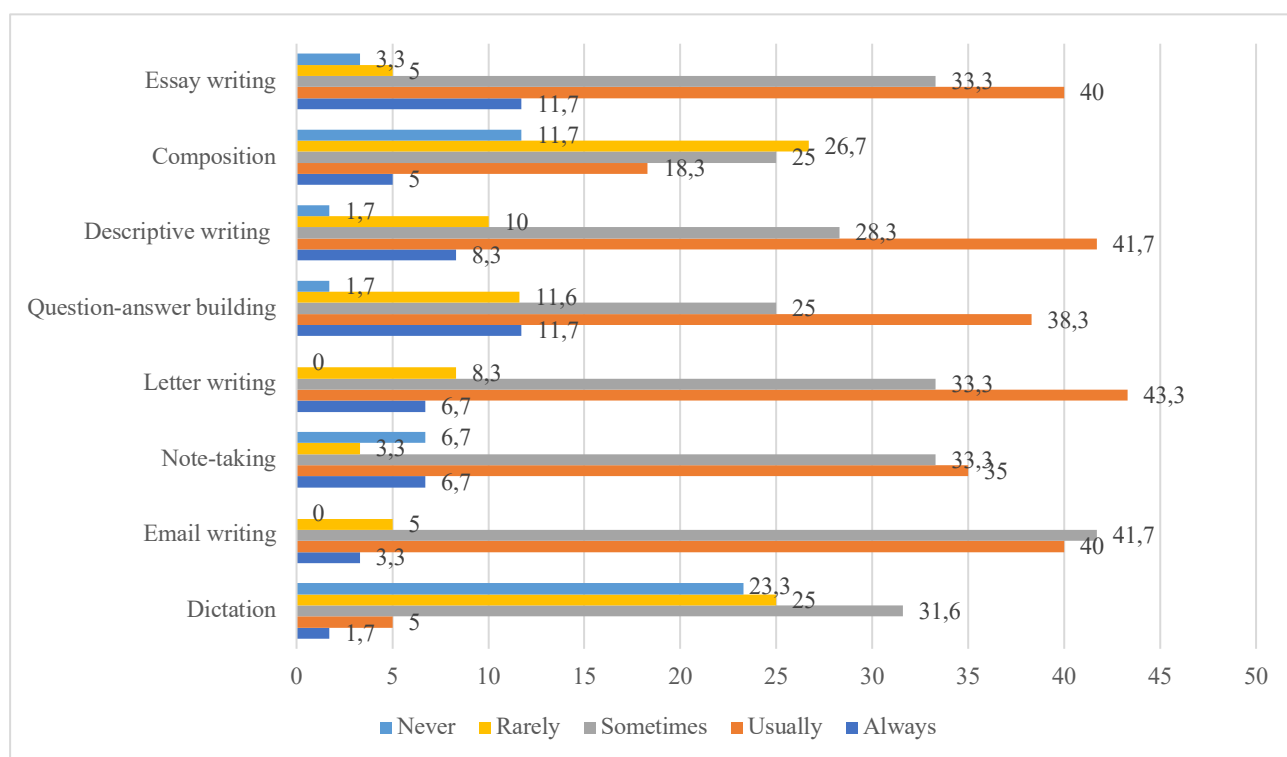


Figure 4. Instructional measures in teaching writing skills in online large-sized classes (%)

The participants also suggest other measures. One recommends “re-order sentences into a logical paragraph.” Another suggests describing a chart. Writing using a template is also recommended. Free writing and peer review are proposed by two other different teachers.

Technical measures suggested by the participants

Table 2. Technical solutions in teaching English language skills in online large-sized classes (%)

On a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), please indicate your assessment of the effectiveness of the following technical solutions when teaching online classes.	1.0	2.0	3.0	4.0	5.0
Teachers use good-looking, easy-to-read slides during class	5.0	20.0	13.3	33.3	25.0
students use visual aids (slides) to present, give speeches, and practice production skills (speaking, writing)	3.3	18.3	13.3	41.7	20.0
Set up social networking groups between teachers and classes (zalo, messenger, ...) to exchange ideas between students and lecturers during and outside of class	5.0	11.7	26.7	28.3	25.0
Allow students to use the internet and supporting tools (recorder, automatic translation app, ...) to serve language practice	8.3	10.0	30.0	31.7	16.7
using movies, video songs, authentic audio files	5.0	3.3	18.3	38.3	30.0
using software to design, manage a bank of questions, and diversify forms of assessment	5.0	8.3	13.3	40.0	28.3
Leverage LMS to manage time, organize classes, communicate, manage, and support students during and after school hours	8.3	8.3	25.0	40.0	15.0
Using apps to design and practice language through games (Quizlet, Kahoot, ...)	10.0	8.3	13.3	40.0	25.0
Regularly use the breakout rooms tool on MS Team or Zoom	3.3	13.3	25.0	35.0	20.0
Block student microphones to block out noise, only allow microphones to be used when students raise their hands	13.3	13.3	23.3	35.0	10.0
Require/Restrict/Encourage students to turn off cameras to reduce internet connection load	8.3	15.0	38.3	25.0	6.7

The participants were invited to evaluate the effectiveness of various technical solutions for online teaching, rating them on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The findings indicate that a

significant majority of teachers awarded scores of 4 and 5 to the suggested technical solutions, indicating their overall effectiveness. Notably, 68.3% of respondents strongly endorsed "the use of movies, video songs, authentic audio files" with high scores of 4 and 5, signifying strong agreement with this approach. Similar levels of endorsement were observed for "using software to design, manage a bank of questions, and diversify forms of assessment", as well as "students using visual aids (slides) to present, give speeches, and practice production skills (speaking, writing)", among other solutions.

However, one measure found to be less preferred was "Requiring/Restricting/Encouraging students to turn off cameras to reduce internet connection load." Only 6.7% of teachers assigned a score of 5 to this measure, while 38.3% offered an average score of 3.

In addition to these measures, teachers provided various suggestions. For instance, in case Microsoft Teams is not supportive, alternative channels such as email or Zalo could be utilized to disseminate materials. Turning off cameras to mitigate internet lagging was also mentioned as a potential technique. Some educators recommended using online assessment software to conduct exams and curb examination fraud. Recording lessons for students who miss information was suggested as a helpful practice unique to online classes. Additionally, utilizing the chat box and breakout rooms to organize students into groups were among the recommended solutions, features already integrated into many online platforms.

Other opinions regarding problems and measures for teaching online crowded classes

Concerning this matter, 17 participants responded. Suggestions are proposed, and teachers' experiences are shared.

Good internet connection and technical device

This is critically important in online teaching and learning. One respondent explains that teachers often waste a great deal of time due to internet connection, which affects the teaching and learning quality. Another participant said that schools and governments should provide financial support so that teachers can be well-equipped with good-enough computers and laptops.

Improving teachers' quality in an online educational environment

It is obvious that the IT ability of teachers must be enhanced. Currently, when rating IT competence, most of the teachers believe that their competence is well beyond average. Particularly, 22 out of 60 respondents (which accounts for 36.7%) claimed that their level is 7 out of 10; 19 teachers rated their IT level at 8/10, and less than 9 teachers scored at 9 and 10.

Improving teaching techniques

It is suggested by the respondents that teachers should divide students into small groups and assign weekly tasks. There should be peer reviews and giving comments among groups. In addition, students are obliged to write a reflective journal regarding the knowledge and skills they have acquired and share them with other members. Also, "formative assessments should be given more, compared to summative assessments" – a teacher suggests.

As far as teaching writing is concerned, with crowded classes, teachers can review and mark some papers as samples; other students can comment on those papers and draw lessons themselves.

Discussion

Skills are easy to teach in online crowded classes.

The findings reveal that it is simpler to teach receptive skills (reading and listening) in packed online courses. The possible explanation is that these days, students are familiar with reading on computer screens, and listening to electronic devices like laptops or computers is also a common practice. Online platforms like MS Teams or Zoom provide an audio-sharing function, which helps students listen to good-quality sounds. Hence, teaching reading and listening is not regarded as real trouble for most teachers.

In comparison, speaking and writing can naturally pose more challenges to teachers in their jobs since they have to check and review students' products. Teachers hardly can be totally proactive because what they do in the class such as reviewing, giving feedback, and providing further guidance depends on what students produce. The larger the class is in size, the more difficult and tiring for them to complete their tasks. Especially in the online environment, the focus and engagement of the students may be reduced significantly.

When it comes to speaking activities, students often have to use the mute and unmute function on online educational platforms whenever they speak. When students are assigned to small rooms for discussing activities, for instance, they also often turn off the camera, which may hinder their interactions. These can cause difficulties for teachers in handling their online classes, especially when the classes are large. Regarding writing, many students do not have any computers or laptops to type on keyboards. Some of them write on a piece of paper, snap a shot of the paper, and submit it online, which of course, is rather inconvenient and poses more challenges to the teachers.

Measures adopted in teaching Listening in crowded online classes.

The results show that the most common listening activities used by the teachers are listening to conversations and mono-talks. This is totally expected since conversations and mono-talks reflect communication situations in real life.

However, in crowded online classes, teachers hardly ever utilize dictation or narration as a listening exercise. Admittedly, storytelling can help to cultivate imagination and meditation among students, furnish the time for creative expression, stimulate interest and learning and provide close contact with the students Dima & Tsiaras (2021). Nevertheless, this practice is rather difficult to conduct online, and the outcomes might be undesirable. Some problems are mentioned by Dima & Tsiaras (2021) such as lack of discipline, difficulty in managing if the room is crowded and sometimes teachers find it hard to use lexical items that all students are able to comprehend. Furthermore, adult learners (university students) seem less interested in storytelling compared to kids.

Regarding dictation, although this method indeed can have significant positive effects on listening comprehension ability (Kiany & Shiramiry, 2002), this method may be exceptionally

time-consuming, especially if the dictation is corrected word by word afterward (Kuo, 2010). In online classes, where teachers often have trouble with technical issues, this practice becomes even more unrealistic.

While the first group of techniques (listening to a conversation, listening to a mono-talk and video types) does not require students to speak, the second group (storytelling, dictation and reading aloud) does. These results indicate that the first group of techniques is preferable, implying that teachers tend to use listening techniques that students seldom have a chance to verbally exchange in crowded online classes of listening skills. Perhaps in a large-in-size class, teachers prefer activities which all students can do at once. Additionally, the activities added by the teachers suggest that different activities should be introduced in the listening class which is large in size.

Measures adopted in teaching Speaking in crowded online classes

The study shows that lecturers prefer activities that require a large number of students to be involved. In crowded online settings, having a discussion is the most popular activity perhaps because this is the most popular activity in the textbooks. The popularity of presentations is similar to that of Abu-Ghararah (2021), which indicates that 88.9% of teachers often use presentations in their large speaking classes. The possible explanation is that these activities are rather easy to be conducted online and students normally have time to prepare beforehand. Presenters can work in a group, even on online platforms, thanks to the “breakroom” function and presentations can excite students’ creativity, bringing more fun to the class.

In contrast, teachers are reluctant to use pantomime as a method in online teaching speaking classes, perhaps because this method does not require students to speak, which deprives students of opportunities to practice this skill. “Chain story” or “flipped classes” are also not preferred because of their difficulties in conduction, even in offline settings. According to Abu-Ghararah (2021), as much as 41.7% of teachers rarely or never use chain stories in offline large classes, while the figure for flipped classes is 32.6%. Apart from being not very feasible to conduct, these activities are normally unfamiliar to Vietnamese teachers and require a large amount of time for preparation and direct interactions between students at a higher level that online conditions hardly can allow.

Other activities suggested by the participants include making a video, and video dubbing. In all fairness, presenting a video in an online class is rather convenient, and perhaps this is the reason why teachers often take this measure. These results indicate that visual-aided tools are efficient in teaching speaking skills in online crowded classes.

Measures adopted in teaching Reading in crowded online classes.

From the collected data, traditional methods like skimming and scanning are still favored in large online settings. These results are in line with the study of Abu-Ghararah (2021), which indicated that 82 to 84% of teachers often employ intensive reading and skimming in their traditional large classes. This is probably because these activities are popular in the coursebooks, and given that they are in the Vietnamese educational context, teachers often rely on books and attempt to complete all the in-class activities within the given time.

Reading at large, writing book reviews, and summarizing texts are less common methods. Considering these activities are not really popular in textbooks, these findings mean that although the condition has shifted from offline to online, teachers still often resort to traditional approaches. Also, many other activities suggested by the teachers show that they often adopt various reading teaching techniques in their crowded online settings.

Measures adopted in teaching Writing in crowded online classes.

Common assignments included in textbooks, like drafting emails, letters, essays, and descriptions, appear to be the most well-liked, indicating that similar to reading, teachers often rely on tasks in coursebooks in their online writing classes.

It is interesting to note that essay writing is exceptionally common in online contexts, compared to their offline counterparts. Up to 85% of teachers often employ this activity in their online classes, compared to a mere 45.6% in traditional classes (Abu-Ghararah, 2021). This huge distinction is perhaps attributed to examination and course output standards in Vietnam where higher education students often have to deal with essay writing tasks in their exams at college.

Composition and dictation are probably less common because the two activities are difficult to apply online. Dictation requires listening to audio, which is often hard to conduct owing to technical issues in an online environment. Plus, dictation is time-consuming and rather boring while composition may excite creativity among students, but it could be difficult for teachers to monitor students' performance on online platforms and check for plagiarism. Note-taking, Question-answer building, and Descriptive writing are often regarded as supportive activities. Hence, they also receive less attention from teachers in comparison with directly related exam tasks. In addition, the results also indicate that teachers often apply a wide range of techniques when it comes to teaching writing online.

Technical measures suggested by the participants

Overall, the results imply that almost all the above measures are highly recommended. It also should be noted that activities that can make lessons more lively and involve a large number of students are favored by teachers.

The solution "Require/Restrict/Encourage students to turn off cameras to reduce internet connection load" is less preferable perhaps because turning off cameras may destroy both students' and teacher's interest in the lessons. Likewise, blocking student microphones to block out noise seems "hostile" to students and therefore, this measure seems less favored among teachers compared to the remaining measures.

Other opinions regarding problems and measures for teaching online crowded classes

In general, since the educational environment is online, it is predicted that having good internet connections and equipment is the prerequisite for learning to occur smoothly. Also, improving teachers' quality in an online educational environment is imperative. Because the situation these days seems much better compared to the initial stage of the Covid era, when almost all the educational institutes suddenly switched to online settings, the quality of lessons significantly depends on the teachers' competence in operating educational tools in the online context. Hence, improving IT capability among teachers remains critical. It is suggested that teachers

should take part in online teaching and learning conferences so as to be trained not only about teaching methodology but also about tools, apps, software, etc. In addition to that, teachers should constantly improve their teaching techniques, especially in online settings.

Conclusion

The paper examines university teachers' techniques to cope with the difficulties of teaching in large online classes. Overall, while teaching reading and listening are easier to be conducted in online classes that are large in size, the opposite is true for instructing speaking and writing.

It is evident that crowded classes may cause a great deal of challenges, especially when a large class is taught online. Nevertheless, teachers from different universities in Vietnam have used a wide range of remedies to combat the issue.

Specifically, in teaching listening, activities like listening to a conversation, mono-talk and video watching have often been used. For speaking, it is suggested that teachers can instruct students to hold a conversation, make a presentation, do role-playing, and interview. When it comes to teaching reading, skimming, scanning and reading in-depth are the most popular activities teachers can use. As far as teaching writing is concerned, letter writing, email writing, essay writing, and description are suggested for use in large online classes.

In addition, building teachers' competence in both technical capacity and methodology is highly recommended in this educational context. Some class management techniques are also efficient in helping teachers overcome online large classes' difficulties.

Although being carefully conducted with thoughtful questions when collecting data, this study might still have some limitations. Firstly, this research explored the most popular techniques for teaching four language skills in crowded online settings, but it did not reveal comparisons with the outcomes of offline classes. Secondly, the study has not investigated the effectiveness of each technique, and why they can be useful in the online context. These issues urge further qualitative investigations.

Some other future studies also can be recommended to conduct. For instance: will the same findings be obtained by repeating this study at other grade levels, such as high schools? To what extent governments and schools can support teachers to improve their capacities in terms of technological abilities and methodologies? What are the orientations of training pre-service teachers in this digital era? These could be topics of interest for scholars to find the answers.

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Biodata

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Identifying Sources of English-Speaking Self-Efficacy among Vietnamese EFL University Learners

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Abstract

Current research shows that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in academic success. Therefore, understanding how learners perceive their self-efficacy can lead to more positive and realistic views on learning foreign languages, especially in improving English-speaking skills. This study focuses on identifying the sources of self-efficacy in English speaking among 203 Vietnamese university students and examining its connection with their speaking performance. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire for quantitative analysis and a speaking test to assess speaking skills. The results reveal that the students generally had strong self-efficacy in English speaking, with emotional and physical experiences being the main contributors to their self-efficacy. Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between their self-efficacy in speaking English and their actual speaking performance. These findings significantly illuminate how self-efficacy influences speaking performance in the context of language learning.

Keywords: self-efficacy, English-speaking, speaking achievement, Vietnamese EFL learners

Introduction

Self-efficacy beliefs, which are an individual's evaluation of their abilities to learn or perform tasks, are key factors that affect human functioning (Schunk & Pajares, 2010). These beliefs are fundamental to human motivation, well-being, and personal achievement (Waddington, 2023). Empirical research has demonstrated that self-efficacy strongly predicts academic performance (Peterson & Arnn, 2004). Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on learners' self-efficacy in all facets of learning and growth within academic settings. Notably, identifying self-efficacy beliefs is a crucial initial step in cultivating more optimistic and realistic attitudes towards foreign language learning, particularly English-speaking abilities. Mastering the ability to produce fluent speech in English is essential for effective communication. However, L2 learners have to deal with a wide array of variables, from linguistic components to psychological barriers. Speaking English often causes apprehension and anxiety among L2 speakers due to performance-based features (Zheng & Cheng, 2018). In this context, English-speaking self-efficacy plays a vital role in motivating speakers and giving them confidence to accomplish oral tasks.

A considerable amount of research has been dedicated to exploring the level of self-efficacy in English-speaking across diverse settings (Alimunddin et al., 2020; Millatasari, 2021; Truong & Wang, 2019; Zhang & Ardasheva, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). These investigations consistently demonstrate a moderate level of English-speaking self-efficacy among L2 learners. However, within this body of literature, there exists a notable inconsistency in pinpointing the predominant source of self-efficacy, suggesting a need for further research-based evidence in this domain. What is more, while existing studies have established a positive correlation between English self-efficacy and speaking achievement (Arlinda, 2022; Desmaliza & Septiani, 2018; Gedamu & Gezahegn, 2023; Kitikanan & Sasimonton, 2017; Ramassari, 2017), this relationship warrants validation within the specific context of Vietnam.

Consequently, the present study endeavors to address these gaps in the literature. It seeks to elucidate the primary sources of English-speaking self-efficacy beliefs among Vietnamese university students enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs. Additionally, it aims to examine the extent to which these students' self-efficacy beliefs correlate with their English-speaking achievement. By doing so, this research aims to contribute a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping English-speaking self-efficacy among Vietnamese EFL learners, thereby enriching the existing scholarly discourse on language learning and pedagogy.

In pursuit of these objectives, the current study is guided by two overarching research questions:

1. What are the predominant sources underpinning English-speaking self-efficacy beliefs among Vietnamese EFL university students?
2. To what degree do these students' self-efficacy beliefs influence their English-speaking proficiency and achievement?

Literature review

Self-Efficacy Beliefs

From the social cognitive theory perspective (Bandura, 1999), “self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). According to this view, such belief is important because it can affect people’s decision-making, their effort made in given endeavors, their perseverance in the face of difficulties, their resilience to adverse situations, the level of stress they experience, and the level of accomplishments they achieve. Specifically, in academic contexts, students with a high sense of efficacy may undertake challenging assigned tasks more readily than less efficacious students. The reason is that high perceived self-efficacy involves a remarkable investment of cognitive effort and superior learning. Moreover, this belief also plays a significant role in predicting various forms of motivation in learning (Schunk, 1991; Zimmerman, 2000). In other words, self-efficacy is a key construct that affects motivation and achievement.

Self-efficacy beliefs are formed based on the four primary sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1999; Gallagher, 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2010). Mastery experience or the interpreted outcome of one's prior performances is the indicator of his/her capability of completing a specific activity. Simply put, results perceived as triumphant enhance self-efficacy; those interpreted as fiascos

diminish it. In addition to reflecting upon their own actions, students also shape their self-efficacy by observing models who are their counterparts or associates. By witnessing their peers achieve success, students are inspired to follow suit with a belief that if others can do it, they can, too. These positive vicarious experiences guide and motivate students' development, especially for those who lack familiarity with the specified tasks. Moreover, students can also increase their self-efficacy when receiving encouragement and appraisals, which are forms of verbal persuasion. The exposure to these positive verbal judgments empowers students' beliefs in their capabilities in task accomplishments. The last source of self-efficacy beliefs stems from physiological and affective states. These somatic and emotional cues, which arouse stress and anxiety, can negatively affect students' thoughts and actions, namely, gauging their confidence and triggering their apprehension.

English-Speaking Self-Efficacy

Speaking, as a fundamental aspect of social interaction, transcends linguistic boundaries and holds significance irrespective of one's proficiency in the first or second language (Luoma, 2009). Bygate (1987) delineates speaking skills as a combination of motor-perceptive and interactional skills. The former encompasses “perceiving, recalling, and articulating in the correct order sound and structures of the language”, while the latter involves “making decisions about communication, such as what to say, how to say it, and whether to develop it, in accordance with one’s intentions” (Bygate, 1987, p.6). Notably, one characteristic of speaking is the temporal constraint under which it often occurs, which can significantly impact speakers' fluency and coherence under pressure.

Speaking performance is potentially affected by a myriad of factors, including linguistic factors such as lexical knowledge (Koizumi, 2013), pronunciation accuracy (Levis, 2018), and grammatical competence (Hinkel, 2018). Moreover, psychological factors such as motivation levels (Wu, 2022), anxiety (Zheng & Cheng, 2018), and situational variables like time pressure exert a notable influence (De Jong & Perfetti, 2011).

In this regard, English-speaking self-efficacy is about how students judge their capabilities to produce speech to attain a designated speaking objective. Specifically, High levels of self-efficacy empower students to engage confidently in challenging oral tasks, invest greater effort in task completion, exhibit resilience in the face of obstacles, and effectively manage emotional barriers such as stress and anxiety when communicating in English (Zimmerman, 2000).

Previous Studies about English-Speaking Self-Efficacy

Research into self-efficacy beliefs has been conducted from different perspectives. While some researchers examined the impacts of instructional practices on English self-efficacy, such as intensive English training programs (Xu et al., 2022), collaborative authentic tasks (Karnchanachari, 2020), task-based language teaching (Quang et al., 2022), some attempted to validate the psychometric properties of a scale measuring English language self-efficacy in various settings including Thailand (Polrak et al., 2023), Vietnam (Kim et al., 2021), and China (Wang et al., 2014). In the English-speaking domain, several studies have been conducted to explore learners' self-efficacy beliefs. Alimunddin et al. (2020) investigated how self-efficacious Indonesian EFL students feel when speaking in the classroom context. Their

findings show that students are moderately self-efficacious in speaking English. Moreover, the fact that most of the students had low levels of self-efficacy when performing oral tasks was ascribed to their somatic and emotional states, including feelings of apprehension, unease, and diminished self-assurance. In the same vein, Millatasari's research (2021) results discovered a moderate level of self-efficacy in speaking English among 36 university students. However, the dominant source of self-efficacy was found to be vicarious experience, not mastery experience or verbal persuasion.

Meanwhile, Zhang and Ardasheva (2019) explored the degree to which four sources of self-efficacy predict English Public speaking self-efficacy among 263 EFL Chinese college students. An English public speaking self-efficacy scale and sources of English public speaking self-efficacy scale were administered to collect the data. Enactive mastery experience was found to play a significant role in how EFL learners perceive English public speaking self-efficacy, followed by verbal persuasion and vicarious experience. The physiological and affective state was identified as a non-significant contributor to English public speaking self-efficacy, which was explained by the fact that these students were willing and motivated to join the speaking course and had developed a repertoire of learning strategies thanks to their prior experiences in English public speaking. In another research, Zhang et al. (2020) employed a mixed-method approach to investigate the development of self-efficacy related to English public speaking performance among 82 EFL students in China. This time, the outcome was different. They discovered that the most influential factor in forming English public speaking self-efficacy was feedback from the teachers or verbal persuasion sources. However, students' performance success was still decided mainly by their speaking performance experiences. In Vietnam, Truong and Wang (2019) investigated the self-efficacy perspectives of 767 Vietnamese first-year college students concerning their English language ability and prior learning experience. Learners reported a medium level of self-efficacy. The findings indicated that master experience is a dominant source of self-efficacy beliefs. The inconsistency among these findings in identifying the main source of self-efficacy beliefs indicates the need for more research-based evidence, especially in the Vietnamese context, where research into English-speaking self-efficacy has received little attention.

The correlation between self-efficacy and success in English-speaking

Previous research has consistently shown a favorable connection between English self-efficacy and speaking achievement. For instance, Ramasari (2017) conducted a study focusing on students' self-efficacy in professional speaking contexts, revealing a positive link between self-efficacy levels and speaking achievements. Similarly, investigations by Desmaliza and Septiani (2018) and Arlinda (2022) among seventh-grade students also underscored the connection between the two variables. Notably, the former study reported a particularly robust correlation between self-efficacy and speaking achievement.

In the same vein, Kitikanan and Sasimonton, (2017) investigated the levels of English self-efficacy of the L2 Thai learners and its relationship with various language skills. Thirty-two fourth-year English major students joined the study. Self-efficacy in each aspect of language skills was found to be relatively high and positively correlated with overall English learning achievement. Yet, no correlation was identified between self-efficacy and English learning

achievement. Conversely, recent research by Gedamu and Gezahegn (2023) confirmed a positive and significant moderate correlation between learners' attitudes to and self-efficacy beliefs of oral presentation.

While existing studies have emphasized the positive relationship between English-speaking achievement and self-efficacy, uncertainties persist regarding the applicability of these findings to Vietnamese learners. Therefore, the current study was undertaken to address this gap in the literature and provide valuable insights into the dynamics of self-efficacy and speaking achievement among Vietnamese learners.

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The target population for this study comprised second-year non-English major students attending a private university in Vietnam as a result of convenience sampling. Specifically, they were enrolled in a general English course at level 4. As per the university's curriculum, this indicates that they had already completed levels 1, 2, and 3 of the English courses, with three more levels (5, 6, and 7) remaining for them to undertake. These courses provide students with comprehensive linguistic knowledge covering all four language skills.

Speaking skills are taught and evaluated by predominantly English native-speaking foreign language teachers. Despite being exposed to conducive learning environments and opportunities to enhance their speaking abilities, the researchers noted a prevalent lack of confidence among the majority of students, coupled with difficulties in articulating their thoughts effectively. This observation prompted the researchers to delve into the students' speaking self-efficacy beliefs, recognizing them as pivotal factors influencing speaking performance.

Regarding the sample size, a total of 203 participants were included, comprising 62% females and 38% males, distributed across six randomly selected classes out of a pool of 200. The average age of the participants was 19 years old, and they represented various disciplines, including Management, Economy, Marketing, Banking, and Information Technology.

Design of the Study

The nature of this study is descriptive. The primary instrument utilized in this study was a questionnaire, chosen for its efficacy in gathering data on a large scale, a necessity for comprehensive research endeavors. The questionnaire employed in this study was adapted from the framework established by Zhang et al. (2020), who investigated self-efficacy concerning English public speaking performance. However, this study focused on a broader scope of speaking self-efficacy. Hence, certain questionnaire items were tailored to align with the specific objectives of the current research.

Comprising two principal sections, the questionnaire aimed to assess participants' speaking abilities across specific linguistic domains and to identify various sources contributing to their self-efficacy beliefs. These sources encompass mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Respondents rated each item on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, reflecting degrees of agreement or disagreement, thereby

facilitating nuanced data collection. To mitigate potential language barriers, the questionnaire underwent translation into participants' native language.

To ascertain the questionnaire's validity and reliability, a pilot study was conducted among a subset of students before administering it to the designated sample, ensuring its appropriateness and effectiveness in assessing the intended constructs.

Additionally, a speaking test served as another crucial instrument, administered at the end of the course. This test, evaluated by native English teachers, assessed learners' speaking proficiency through two distinct components. Initially, pairs of students engaged in interactive dialogue based on prescribed scenarios, followed by individual questioning pertaining to the discussed content. Each speaking interaction spanned approximately 7 to 10 minutes. Evaluation criteria for this test were adapted from established standards, such as those found in the IELTS test, covering aspects including fluency, lexical range, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation proficiency.

Data collection & analysis

Upon obtaining authorization from the university administration to access the target population, the researcher adopted a randomized selection process, choosing six classes from the pool of eligible participants. Subsequently, communication was initiated with the respective instructors in charge of these classes. Following this, the survey instrument was disseminated to the identified students utilizing the Google Forms platform, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research objectives among the participants.

Upon completion of the course, the speaking test scores of the enrolled students were systematically compiled. Subsequently, all acquired data underwent analysis utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics were computed for each category and item to provide a comprehensive dataset overview. Concurrently, the Pearson correlation test was conducted to ascertain the nature and strength of the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and English-speaking achievement. This rigorous analytical approach aimed to elucidate the underlying dynamics governing the observed phenomena within the context of English-speaking proficiency.

Results/Findings

The major source of English-speaking self-efficacy beliefs among Vietnamese EFL students

The descriptive statistics, displayed in Table 1, show that the dominant source of English-speaking self-efficacy among the participants was decided by the physiological and affective states of the speakers ($M=3.5$, $SD=1.01$), followed by their vicarious experience ($M= 3.4$, $SD=.78$). The other sources, verbal persuasion, and mastery experience were reported to be less influential with $M=3.1$, $SD=.88$ and $M=3.0$, $SD=.88$, respectively. Besides, only a relatively medium level of self-efficacy in speaking English was specified among these Vietnamese learners.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of items regarding speaking self-efficacy (N=203)

Categories	Mean	Std. Deviation
Speaking self-efficacy	2.8	.79
Mastery experience source	3.0	.88
Vicarious experience source	3.4	.78
Verbal persuasion source	3.1	.88
Affective state source	3.5	1.01

Table 2

The Correlation Matrix of Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Speaking scores	1					
2. Speaking Self-efficacy beliefs	.131	1				
3. Master experience source	.143*	.774**	1			
4. Vicarious experience source	.096	.409**	.488**	1		
5. Verbal persuasion source	.083	.745**	.720**	.610**	1	
6. Affective state source	.033	.095	.021	.385**	.071	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs and their English-speaking achievement

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to ascertain the association between students' self-perceived efficacy in English speaking and their performance in speaking tasks. Table 2 illustrates the correlation matrix of related variables. Data demonstrates that only a positive association was detected between the two components ($r=.131$). Speaking achievement was identified to be connected to all sources of self-efficacy but was only significant in the case of speakers' experience in accomplishing the speaking tasks. Furthermore, a strong link was established between speaking self-efficacy and all sources of self-efficacy ($r=.774$, $r=.409$, $r=.745$) except the physiological and affective states, which only had a positive correlation ($r=.095$).

Discussion

The results of this investigation indicated that the students exhibit a moderate level of self-efficacy in English oral communication. This finding aligns with previous studies (e.g., Almunddin et al., 2020; Millatasari, 2021), demonstrating that learners also reported their perceived self-efficacy at a medium level. In the case of Vietnamese learners, Truong and Wang (2019) also discovered that the level of self-efficacy in learning English is moderate. It can be seen that most Vietnamese students have low confidence not only in learning English but also in speaking English. Truong and Wang (2019) explained that it was the embedded culture in daily lives and in teaching practices to which these learners were exposed to. Another possibility is that the opportunities for English-speaking interactions are scarce. Lack of practice in communication may raise the level of anxiety in producing speech even in the native language, not to mention in a foreign language.

Notably, the current study also uncovers that the students' self-efficacy is influenced primarily by the source of physiological and affective states, followed by vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and mastery experience. This outcome is contrary to those of prior studies that pinpointed the prevailing factor contributing significantly to self-efficacy: mastery experience (Zhang & Ardashaeva, 2019), teacher feedback (Zhang et al., 2020), and vicarious experience (Millatasari, 2021). A possible interpretation of the differences is that the cradle for nurturing self-efficacy may stem from the same sources that were established by earlier researchers (Bandura, 1999; Gallagher, 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2010). However, the decisive factors may vary depending on the learners. This means that their differences with a focus on experience have a part to play in how the students perceive their sense of self-efficacy. These differences may include their educational background, their individual upbringing, environmental conditions, linguistic knowledge, etc. All these elements are fundamental and contribute to the formation of self-efficacy in learners who speak English.

Another finding is that English-speaking self-efficacy is positively connected to speaking achievement and all sources of self-efficacy. The result supports evidence from earlier investigations (e.g., Arlinda, 2022; Ramasari, 2017). Despite the differences in terms of context, a positive association between self-efficacy levels and speaking achievements was also identified. However, the level of correlation in this research is not significant, as was observed by Desmaliza and Septiani (2018). The discrepancy in the observed correlation between the two components might be explained in two ways. First, speaking English fluently tends to be performance-based because sometimes it is affected by many factors uncontrolled by the speakers. Therefore, an accurate measurement of the level of self-efficacy that can apply to a large population is relatively unattainable. The second problem may have something to do with the instrument utilized in each research for evaluating speaking abilities. The diversity of speaking tests may have some influence on the trustworthiness and credibility of the outcomes.

In sum, the outcome of this study still contributes significantly to the related literature in the context of Vietnamese self-efficacy beliefs. However, the generalisability of these findings is restricted by specific limitations. First, the relatively modest sample size of the current study precludes an exhaustive exploration of this relationship. Second, the study only focuses on examining the students' perceptions of speaking self-efficacy and its relationship with speaking performance. Empirical research from experimental design may provide more robust evidence for the impacts of self-efficacy on the oral tasks of the students.

Conclusions

Overall, the study attempts to delve into the primary determinants fostering self-efficacy among Vietnamese students in their English-speaking endeavors. Additionally, it seeks to establish a coherent understanding of the relationship between English-speaking self-efficacy and actual speaking achievement within the context of EFL university learners. The outcomes of this investigation hold significance across various dimensions.

First and foremost, the revelation of a moderate level of English-speaking self-efficacy among Vietnamese learners underscores the imperative for an augmented emphasis on speaking

activities within English courses. In the contemporary landscape, the proliferation of internet technologies has democratized access to global interactions, presenting learners with ample opportunities for linguistic practice. Nevertheless, the onus ultimately falls upon learners to actively engage in these opportunities. Hence, educators are encouraged to catalyze student motivation by fostering an environment that nurtures speaking proficiency through encouraging participation in diverse speaking contexts.

Secondly, the identification of physical and emotional conditions as the predominant sources of self-efficacy among Vietnamese learners underscores the necessity for tailored pedagogical approaches. Specifically, language teaching practices, particularly in speaking proficiency, should pivot towards addressing these intrinsic challenges. Implementing remedial activities targeting these specific areas can ameliorate students' confidence barriers. Furthermore, diversification of self-efficacy sources beyond physiological and affective domains should be emphasized, with deliberate efforts directed towards enhancing students' belief in their ability to succeed. This can be achieved through the provision of tasks that actively engage students in practicing speaking skills alongside recognition and celebration of exemplary performances, thereby fostering a culture of inspiration and emulation among learners.

Lastly, the discernment of a favorable connection between English-speaking self-efficacy and speaking achievement underscores the multifaceted nature of proficiency attainment. While linguistic knowledge undoubtedly forms the bedrock of competence, the significance of self-efficacy as a complementary factor cannot be overstated. Future research endeavors are encouraged to replicate these results by expanding the sample sizes to provide enhanced validation and elucidation of the intricate interplay between self-efficacy and speaking success in English language acquisition contexts.

Given the significant contributions mentioned above, some teaching strategies in speaking can be employed to enhance English-speaking confidence among Vietnamese learners, particularly in the context of Vietnam.

Regular speaking exercises should be woven into the curriculum, incorporating role-plays, debates, and group discussions that align with students' interests, thereby making the learning process more engaging. It's essential to create a classroom atmosphere that's both safe and inviting to alleviate the anxiety that typically accompanies speaking activities. This may involve rearranging the classroom to facilitate open discussion and actively acknowledging students' efforts and progress to foster confidence and reduce the affective barriers to language learning.

Instruction must be tailored to meet the diverse needs of the learners. This could involve adjusting the difficulty of speaking tasks or employing scaffolding techniques to incrementally increase task complexity. Incorporating technology—like language learning applications or recording devices—provides students the opportunity to practice speaking and conduct self-assessments in a more relaxed environment outside the classroom, thus supporting continuous learning and self-evaluation.

Moreover, students should be encouraged to engage in self-reflection regarding their successes in speaking tasks, helping them recognize and reinforce effective strategies. This reflective practice can be supported through a variety of authentic speaking assessments that not only

gauge proficiency but also embrace diverse learning styles and strengths. From presentations and interviews to storytelling exercises, these assessments can provide a richer picture of each student's abilities, thereby promoting a more individualized and effective path to language proficiency.

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What Types of Vocabulary Do Students Learn? A Computer-assisted Study of EFL Textbooks


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Abstract

There has been an increase in research based on corpus analysis, especially in the field of teaching English to foreign language students. Such research covers aspects like grammar, syntax, morphology, semantics, and pragmatics in a broader sense. However, corpus studies on vocabulary are limited, and the need to work on them has increased in the last decade. Vocabulary is essential in learning and teaching any second language to English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. This study aims to thoroughly analyze vocabulary in three textbooks through a corpus analysis tool that is used to teach English as a foreign language to level 1, level 2, and diploma-taking students at a college in Saudi Arabia. Vocabulary is scrutinized through AntConC (1.4.0), a freeware program that uses statistical algorithms to provide visualizations of word frequencies, lexical clusters, and keywords. The results can be seen in the form of lists, tables, or charts to help you understand and draw conclusions. This selected corpus contains 163,716 word tokens. After statistical analysis of these words, English language teachers (ELTs) will understand what type of vocabulary is important for students for a particular level. It will also tell whether the vocabulary used in these textbooks is the correct representation of academic words when compared to baby BNC. Moreover, the study will provide insight to academicians, language teachers, and curriculum designers on what type of vocabulary is suitable for developing reading, writing, listening, or speaking skills according to the needs and levels of students.

Keywords: Corpus Studies, ESL, Lexical Clusters, BNC

Introduction

Every textbook provides a basis for the foundation of learning in institutions. In the same way, second language textbooks also provide a basis for learning languages. The vocabulary used in those textbooks is crucial for the development of language skills in students, so it is important that the vocabulary is selected carefully while keeping in mind the needs of the learners. Unfortunately, the amount of research on textbooks is few that may assess their efficiency in second language learning (Chan, 2000), and there also seems to be a lack of standardized vocabulary in textbooks that, in turn, may affect student's learning (Yang, 2006). Therefore, the aim of this research is to look at the issue of vocabulary used in the selected textbooks.

Till now, the linguistic research on the construction of L2 textbooks and the content of

vocabulary provided in them is limited, keeping in mind the pedagogical point of view. Some researchers have employed corpus-based approaches, but their main focus is on teaching material with regard to written academic materials (Hoey, 2000; Thompson, 2000). In the same way, studies regarding the needs of college learners have been ignored (Foster & Mackie, 2013; Keck, 2004). Keeping in view the importance of second language learning for college learners, it seems shocking that significant research is lacking (Konstantakis & Alexiou, 2012; Skolverket, 2006).

The current paper aims to examine the vocabulary of three textbooks used for level 1, level 2, and diploma-taking students at the college level in Saudi Arabia. The researcher intends to describe the type and frequency of the vocabulary used in the textbooks with a view to making comparisons with Baby BNC (British National Corpus).

The role that vocabulary plays in language learning is crucial. The choice of words affects the way students write sentences and produce utterances in spoken language. Language shapes the students' discourses, making their communication more or less effective. Words are containers of meaning, and the need to use the right words in the right context is important for communicative competence. Hence, the given study is conducted to evaluate the vocabulary in terms of its representativeness when compared to Baby BNC.

Baby BNC Edition

Baby BNC is a sub-part of BNC (British National Corpus). It contains four million word samples representing four genres: fiction, newspapers, academic writings, and spoken conversations. The texts in these corpora are annotated similarly to the original full corpora. Its first edition was released in March 2007.

The four genres included in baby BNC contain four million words, and each genre represents one million words, hence creating a pool of equality in terms of representativeness. Texts are copied directly from BNC XML, 2008 edition, without adding or subtracting. The selection of texts is made based on the information provided in the original corpus and in accordance with the text classification given by David Lee (Lee, 2021).

Vocabulary

Building sufficient vocabulary is crucial for learning any second language. Without learning a substantial amount of second language words, learners may be unable to produce correct sentences according to the context. So, vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in the development of reading skills (Cameron, 2001) and is also closely related to the overall success of the learners in learning a second language. Memorizing and studying words are not enough, but understanding them requires knowledge of meaning, form, collocation, register, and association (Nation, 2013). To grasp the knowledge of any word, it must recur many times in multiple contexts, which may, in turn, automatize word knowledge (Tyler, 2012). Words are not stored in our brains as isolated units but rather in the form of semantic networks. These semantic networks are built when the same words appear before learners in multiple contexts, forming connections among them. These connections are internalized and remembered afterward (Cameron, 2001).

Researchers are not sure how many times a word should occur before learners completely comprehend it. Some say the number of occurrences is between 5-6 (Cameron, 2001; Nation, 1990) and twenty (Waring & Takaki, 2003). As such, repetition is more important for beginner learners than for advanced learners (Zahar, Cobb & Spada, 2001). Another important aspect is to understand the size of vocabulary that may be included in textbooks necessary for learning a second language. Moreover, the number of words that a learner may know during the course

of second language learning is also crucial. Such data is found in curricula of Greece, Spain, and South Korea (Jiménez Catalán & Mancebo Francisco, 2008) but not in Saudi Arabia.

As said, it is difficult to know the number of words a learner may know to understand a passage of an average difficulty level. Some researchers show that high-frequency words are closely related to successfully learning a second language (Nation, 2006). In the same way, 250 words occurring most frequently in children's speech account for 75 to 80 percent of language production (Roessingh & Cobb, n.d.). These works suggest that a small number of words may help considerably in comprehending a second language. Learning 1000 to 2000 most frequent words in any discourse may help learners develop, comprehend, and produce the vocabulary of a second language.

Research Objectives

This research has the following objectives: first, to understand the extent to which the selected books may represent the required vocabulary suitable for the students; second, to describe the frequencies of functional and content words and their importance in the corpora of English as a foreign language learning textbooks.

Literature Review

Research focusing on structuring textbooks, especially vocabulary, by considering learners' needs is scarce. However, Shin and Chon (2011) are some examples of such research. They worked on vocabulary profiles of Elementary and Secondary textbooks taught in South Korea. By comparing the vocabulary of these textbooks with West's (1953) 2,000 General Service List (GSL), they conclude that 68% of the vocabulary is not found in the GSL list. This suggests that most words used in these textbooks are used infrequently in language production.

Thompson and Sealey (2007) also carried out a similar study for the vocabulary used in children's literature. When they compared children's literature corpus (CLLIP corpus) to that of adults' literary vocabulary profiles, they found that much of their vocabulary is common and shares most of the linguistic properties. Rixon (1999) also examined vocabulary in teaching materials. She examined seven textbooks taught to first-year English learners and concluded that most of the vocabulary in these seven textbooks was unsuitable for first-year English learners. Moreover, half of the vocabulary used in those seven books was different and unique, which may create problems for first-year learners. The present study also aims to understand the type of vocabulary used in the selected textbooks and their differences when compared to baby BNC.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs quantitative research methodology to investigate numerical data and qualitative research methodology to interpret the results. According to Creswell (2012), the quantitative method is the process of collecting numerical data from people using an instrument such as questions or interviews. After collecting the data, numeric results are interpreted, and the researcher gets the optical values for the frequencies of the vocabulary.

The given study explores the vocabulary of English textbooks used for level 1, level 2, and diploma-taking colleges in Saudi Arabia. The text is analyzed at word, phrase, and sentence levels. One of the basic procedures adopted for corpus analysis is to find the frequencies of

different words or word units (morphemes). Using the frequency tool, the researchers may assess the importance of high-frequency words in a text. Such words may also be compared to other compiled corpora (e.g., baby BNC) to assess their usefulness in a certain textbook. It is a high frequency and may be high in significance, making it a characteristic feature of the text. Therefore, a mixed methodological research design is adopted for this particular study.

Subject of the Study

The following study investigates three English textbooks used for teaching English as a foreign language. These books are used to teach level 1 and level 2 and diploma-taking students at the higher secondary school level in Saudi Arabia.

These textbooks are analyzed for their vocabulary only. The corpus prepared for analysis does not contain figures, charts, tables, footnotes, endnotes, references, or pictures. Only plain text is to be considered in order to develop a suitable and representative corpus.

Collection of Data

The data collected for this study is taken from English textbooks specially designed to cater to the language needs of second-language learners in Saudi Arabia.

Foreign English authors write all these textbooks. The corpus that will be used for analysis is prepared from these textbooks, and it contains 163,716 word tokens. The researcher's purpose is to look at the number and types of vocabulary used in these textbooks and compare them with baby BNC to see whether the vocabulary represents a fair number of suitable words.

Research Instrument

A research instrument is a tool used to process data for scientific analysis. A corpus is a large amount of data extracted from various digital sources. In the case of this study, AntConC (1.4.0) is used to analyze corpora extracted from selected academic textbooks. AntConC (1.4.0) is multi-task software that is primarily developed to perform vocabulary profiling in corpus linguistics. Now, it is being used in many fields of knowledge to perform language-related tasks. It is developed by Anthony Laurence (2014) from Waseda University to perform various automated analyses on digital language. This software performs two functions: vocabulary profiling and file viewing and editing. Through the profiling tool, lists of the vocabulary are generated based on statistics and frequencies. The statistics and frequencies are then compared to other standardized lists, such as BNC. The file viewing and editing option allows one to color-code and highlight different levels of vocabulary, while the editing option allows making changes in the file and then seeing the results.

Rationale

The study uses a computer-based freeware program known as AntConC (1.4.0), which was developed by Anthony Laurence in 2014. This tool provides various types of language processes, but the researcher intends to use it to analyze vocabulary in EFL textbooks. Many other researchers have used this program previously, so it caters to everyone's needs. In this regard, the process being taken in this research is not new, but the research objectives are unique, so there still needs to be a lot of work to be done in this field

Analysis

Target and Reference Corpus

Target corpora in the given research are collected and prepared from three textbooks taught in Saudi Arabia to English as a second language learners. On the other hand, baby BNC is used

as a reference corpus to find differences in both corpora and understand the use of vocabulary. Representativeness of the target corpus is maintained by selecting textbooks that may balance the use of academic vocabulary in various contexts. Textbooks selected provide contextual usage of words in multiple contexts ranging from fictional stories to non-fictional texts.

Word lists

Following are the word lists of target and reference corpora generated through computer-assisted software. The word list is a list of all the words that occur in a particular text and are arranged in order of its frequency. To explore the type of words (content/functional) used in these corpora, lists are generated to find out their type and frequencies. For convenience, only excerpts from the original source are provided here.

Table 1

Type, rank & frequency in the reference corpus

Type	Rank	Freq	Range	NormFreq	NormRange
the	1	70362	30	69913.366	1
of	2	44256	30	43973.82	1
and	3	26841	30	26669.86	1
to	4	26348	30	26180.003	1
in	5	25265	30	25103.908	1
a	6	23252	30	23103.743	1
is	7	17432	30	17320.852	1
that	8	12476	30	12396.452	1
for	9	9438	30	9377.823	1
be	10	9401	30	9341.058	1
as	11	9252	30	9193.008	1
it	12	8268	30	8215.283	1
are	13	7551	30	7502.854	1
by	14	7340	30	7293.2	1
this	15	7084	30	7038.832	1
with	16	6991	30	6946.425	1
which	17	6026	30	5987.578	1
on	18	5843	30	5805.745	1
or	19	5547	30	5511.632	1
not	20	5229	30	5195.659	1
was	21	5078	30	5045.622	1
have	22	4712	30	4681.956	1
from	23	4634	30	4604.453	1

Table 2*Type, rank & frequency in the target corpus*

Type	Rank	Freq	Range	NormFreq	NormRange
the	1	9918	1	60580.517	1
a	2	5070	1	30968.262	1
in	3	3867	1	23620.172	1
to	4	3743	1	22862.762	1
and	5	3401	1	20773.779	1
you	6	2878	1	17579.223	1
i	7	2739	1	16730.191	1
of	8	2700	1	16491.974	1
is	9	1806	1	11031.298	1
s	10	1439	1	8789.611	1
it	11	1395	1	8520.853	1
with	11	1395	1	8520.853	1
t	13	1383	1	8447.556	1
for	14	1337	1	8166.581	1
are	15	1286	1	7855.066	1
we	16	1278	1	7806.201	1
your	17	1274	1	7781.768	1
do	18	1122	1	6853.331	1
at	19	1083	1	6615.114	1
have	20	1025	1	6260.842	1
about	21	984	1	6010.408	1
what	22	942	1	5753.866	1
b	23	918	1	5607.271	1

As can be seen, the highest frequencies are found to be of functional words with 'the' word at the top. 'The' shows a frequency of 70362 (69913.366 norm frequency) in the reference corpus and 9918 (60580.517 norm frequency) in the target corpus. Similarly, 'of' comes second with a frequency of 44256 (43973.82 norm frequency) and 'a' with 5070 (30968.262 norm frequency), and the list goes on. The differences in the use of lexical items suggest that students are given opportunities to use words in a variety of contexts that may enhance their understanding of the second language. The target corpus provides a balanced source of content to functional words ratio, implying that the selected textbooks are written with great care, keeping in mind the linguistic needs of second language learners. To further understand the phenomenon stated above, cluster charts of both the reference and target corpus are generated and presented below.

Lexical Clusters

Clusters are the repeated sequences of words that occur in texts. It may help in understanding the importance of sequences of words (lexical clusters) that repeatedly occur for a significant number of times. The following are the two-word clusters found in target and reference corpora, and they enable the researcher to hypothesize about the word sequences that are more useful for the learning of a second language for students.

Table 3*Cluster, rank, and frequency in reference corpus*

Cluster	Rank	Freq	Range	NormFreq	NormRange
the same	1	875	30	0.012	1
the first	2	624	29	0.009	0.967
the other	3	526	29	0.007	0.967
the most	4	499	29	0.007	0.967
the two	5	356	28	0.005	0.933
the case	6	331	27	0.005	0.9
the second	7	300	29	0.004	0.967
the time	8	269	27	0.004	0.9
the number	9	262	23	0.004	0.767
the party	10	259	8	0.004	0.267
the problem	11	256	28	0.004	0.933
the use	12	241	27	0.003	0.9
the end	13	239	27	0.003	0.9
the last	13	239	29	0.003	0.967
the new	15	231	26	0.003	0.867
the way	16	227	27	0.003	0.9
the fact	17	224	28	0.003	0.933
the law	17	224	14	0.003	0.467
the following	19	220	28	0.003	0.933
the form	20	217	26	0.003	0.867
the whole	21	213	27	0.003	0.9
the more	22	212	29	0.003	0.967

The first five frequent words that occur with the article 'the' are 'same', 'first', 'other', 'most' and 'two' in the target corpus, while 'sentences', 'questions', 'article', 'correct' and 'past' in the reference corpus. This suggests that the target corpus uses more adjectives, highlighting nouns' qualities. Adjectives create importance for nouns and, provide attraction for the readers and develop their interests. For second language learners, creating interest is important as it keeps them engaged in reading. On the other hand, nouns are used more frequently with the article 'the' suggesting that nouns present less interesting information for the readers. The readers have to put more effort into understanding the phenomenon given in the text due to the lack of descriptions. As such, the target corpus is more engaging and interesting than the reference corpus for second language learners. Moreover, the target corpus provides more variety of words, especially nouns and their descriptors (adjectives).

Table 4*Cluster, rank, frequency in target corpus*

Cluster	Rank	Freq	Range	NormFreq	NormRange
the sentences	1	354	1	0.036	1
the questions	2	240	1	0.024	1
the article	3	215	1	0.022	1
the correct	3	215	1	0.022	1
the past	5	169	1	0.017	1
the words	5	169	1	0.017	1
the same	7	148	1	0.015	1
the present	8	135	1	0.014	1
the video	8	135	1	0.014	1
the world	10	126	1	0.013	1
the photo	11	113	1	0.011	1
the first	12	105	1	0.011	1
the city	13	96	1	0.01	1
the grammar	14	78	1	0.008	1
the verbs	15	76	1	0.008	1
the future	16	75	1	0.008	1
the text	17	73	1	0.007	1
the verb	18	66	1	0.007	1
the expressions	19	65	1	0.007	1
the other	20	64	1	0.006	1
the people	21	61	1	0.006	1
the information	22	58	1	0.006	1

Keywords (Keyness)

Keyness refers to the frequency of words that occur in the target corpus in comparison to the reference corpus. The idea of keyness points out the relative importance of words compared to a reference corpus, providing insight into their usage in context. The comparison chart is given below.

The above table presents relative frequencies and keyness in both target and reference corpora. As is evident from the data, tokens show that, by and large, their frequencies in the target corpus are greater in number than in the reference corpus. This suggests that the target corpus uses the given words relatively more than the reference corpus, and so they have more keyness effect.

Table 5*Type, keyness & keyness effect in both corpora*

Type	Rank	Freq_Tar	Freq_Ref	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
you	1	2878	1660	5896.906	0.034
your	4	1274	579	2891.477	0.015
my	5	775	294	1882.3	0.009
sentences	6	659	151	1860.595	0.008
do	7	1122	1036	1742.254	0.014
listen	8	435	6	1650.377	0.005
pairs	9	425	21	1509.655	0.005
questions	10	600	277	1351.235	0.007
complete	12	494	163	1257.274	0.006
verbs	14	292	7	1084.732	0.004
go	15	475	214	1080.155	0.006
exercise	16	363	79	1037.303	0.004
work	17	855	1084	1031.397	0.01
watch	18	268	7	991.444	0.003
words	19	493	316	953.015	0.006
look	20	435	230	923.577	0.005
people	21	719	868	905.541	0.009
about	22	984	1629	902.801	0.012
read	23	378	174	851.923	0.005
what	24	942	1714	769.992	0.011
think	25	387	240	760.82	0.005
yes	26	245	42	737.699	0.003
past	27	373	229	737.043	0.005
video	28	194	4	725.363	0.002
grammar	29	234	35	723.268	0.003

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study looks at the words used both in target and reference corpora. The target corpus is prepared from three textbooks taught at the higher secondary school level containing 163,716 tokens. The main intent of the research is to look at the type of vocabulary used in the target corpus and its effectiveness in learning a second language. This is done by analyzing the corpus with the help of computer-assisted software AntConc (1.4.0), which generates results. Word lists and clusters are generated to draw results and make generalizations. The reference corpus used is baby BNC, which comprises four million words related to fiction, newspapers, academic writing, and spoken conversations. Baby BNC is used as a standard against which the target corpus is compared. The lists of the results given in this research are taken from original reports and contain limited tokens to avoid length. Following would be the final results that may be concluded from the analysis:

- i. The textbooks used at the higher secondary school level for teaching English as a foreign language contain a balanced number of content to functional word ratios in a

- variety of contexts when compared to a reference corpus. This may enhance students' understanding of the use of words and enable them to see words in various contexts.
- ii. The frequency of functional words is the highest in the target corpus, which also seems to be the case when the reference corpus is examined individually.
 - iii. The high-frequency content words in target corpus are the adjectives that provide opportunities for students to learn them along with nouns, enriching their vocabulary.
 - iv. The third most high-frequency content words are found to be verbs, and again, verbs are important to learn and present a rich repertoire of words.
 - v. The examination also reveals the recurrences of prepositions like 'the' with certain nouns, hence forming lexical clusters. The list of these lexical clusters may help students to learn along with individual vocabulary words.
 - vi. Keyness and its effect is major indicator in highlighting the importance of high frequency words that appear at the top of table 5. For example, the keyness (likelihood) of the token 'you' is 5896.906 with an effect of 0.034 in the given data. This indicates that 'you' is significantly important either in isolation or in relation to other words and the list goes on with decreasing keyness effect.

Apart from the results, it is well understood that students need more than just a few hundred recurring high-frequency words to fully comprehend the language. It is not about memorizing and understanding 1000 to 2000 most frequent words to communicate in the English language, but it requires both high and low-frequency words to cover situation-based contexts. There is no way that a text should contain only specific words because it will render the text boring and unrealistic. There must be a balance between the uses of different word classes to produce reasonable native-like texts. Learners should be provided maximum types of words in varying contexts to enhance their comprehension level.

The books that are analyzed in this regard contain a good balance of high and low-frequency words. Compared to a reference corpus, almost the same types of words are found with a 2:1 ratio. The researcher approves that these books are written with great care and caution and in accordance with the lexical needs of the second language learners. This research may help academicians select and sort ELT books for better teaching practice for foreign language practical teaching.

This study limits itself to specific aspects of English as a foreign language, potentially overlooking other broader issues of context, and so the findings may not be generalized to students of other cultures. Moreover, English language trends and usage can change rapidly, making it challenging for research to keep pace with evolving language dynamics. The use of modern technologies like interactive online chatbots may also pose a threat to students' learning of English vocabulary (Bin-Hady et al., 2023 & Ho, 2024). At the same time, online chatbots help students get linguistic inputs and provide real-time assistance (Kohnke et al., 2023), but since these chatbots are automated machines, they have drawbacks as well.

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Biodata

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The AsiaCALL Online Journal [ACOJ] (ISSN 1936-9859) is a fully peer-reviewed international publication of AsiaCALL, the Asia Association of Computer-Assisted Language Learning. It is an Open Access journal because it makes its contents available to all with no restriction. The authors are the owners of their published articles.

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The purpose of this international peer-reviewed online Open Access journal is to advance international scholarship and pedagogic practice in the area of Computer-Assisted Language-Learning (CALL) or Technology-Enhanced Language-Learning (TELL). The journal is multidisciplinary, international, multi-paradigmatic, and multicultural in scope and welcomes original contributions from all theoretical perspectives.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) or Technology-Enhanced Language-Learning (TELL) is defined as any scholarship and pedagogical practice from researchers and practitioners, which values and prioritizes modern technology use in language/culture learning and teaching across all learning settings. While the primary focus of the journal is the enhancement of language-learning (in all its forms, including culture) and teaching, the journal may accept contributions where the focus may not be language in the strict sense, provided the submitted material could, arguably, contribute to language learning and teaching in due course.

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