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Translating the Sequence of Tenses From English Into Serbian: A Case Study

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Abstract

The sequence of tenses (SOT) is a phenomenon which exists in English and some other languages, but not Serbian. Therefore, translating texts which contain SOT into Serbian frequently creates problems, and in the English Department of Belgrade University's Faculty of Philology special attention is paid to teaching students to master that set of rules. This study was carried out with third-year students, by using the contrastive analysis method, which consisted of comparing the source and target texts, in order to draw conclusions as to why errors are occasionally made. First of all, when a novel written in English and its translation into Serbian were compared, it was noticed that many sentences in which SOT was used were wrongly translated because the same rules were applied to the target text. In some cases failure to adapt the tenses even led to misunderstanding of the entire sentence, mostly because past tense was used instead of the present. The sentences that were pinpointed as the most problematic were given to students to translate, and then their translations were contrasted with the original. It was concluded that detailed and comprehensive teaching of SOT within grammar classes proved worth the effort, since the students made far fewer mistakes than was the case with the published translation, so the sense of the text was much clearer. Those few errors that the respondents made were then analysed in order to discover deeper causes for their occurrence and suggest guidelines for future work with students.

Keywords: Sequence of Tenses, English, Serbian, Contrastive Analysis, Translation

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Introduction

Among the characteristics of grammar in many languages worldwide is the so-called sequence of tenses (SOT), which regards complex sentences and includes a set of rules about using the respective tenses in the main and the subordinate clauses. To briefly clarify the essence of the SOT, it can be simply said that its rules generally encompass the use of tenses in reported speech – more precisely, in indirect discourse – to express simultaneity, posteriority or anteriority. The SOT rules apply to reported speech if the words or thoughts of a person are not conveyed exactly – in direct speech, but their content is reported in the form of indirect speech, that is, without quotation marks. Moreover, the SOT rules are in force over a much larger domain than that of indirect speech, because "it is important to remember that the forms of reported speech are used in many circumstances besides the reporting of words spoken" (Allen 1978: 265). In other words, "'Reported speech' is not only used to report what people say. We use the same structure to report people's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge etc." (Swan 1984: 220). For ease of reference, it should be noted that in reported speech the main or superordinate clause is usually called the reporting clause, while the subordinate one is the reported clause, whereas when we talk about indirect speech the corresponding terms may also be independent and dependent clause, respectively. In this paper, examples from reported speech containing the instances of SOT will be analysed, and these terms will be used interchangeably, without further explanation.

Though the specific rules of the SOT may vary from language to language, due to the differences in their temporal systems, the essence is the same: if the verb in the main clause is in the past tense, this will affect all other verbs in the sentence. The sequence of tenses is not only the feature of English (sometimes also called *the agreement of tenses*, *the concord of tenses*, *the succession of tenses* or even *tense harmony*), but also of Latin (known as *consecutio temporum*), as well as the Romance languages, including: Spanish (*la concordancia temporal*), Italian (*la concordanza dei tempi*) and French (*la concordance des temps* or *la correspondance des temps*). Furthermore, it is particularly interesting how different grammarians provide extremely different definitions of this phenomenon, so while some of them consider that this combination of tenses is only natural and stems from the meaning of the sentence, others think that the tense used in the main clause preconditions that of the subordinate one. For instance, in French grammars we can find a wide array of opinions regarding this issue: starting from Ferdinand Brunot's opinion that the SOT does not exist at all since the tenses used in the subordinate clauses are chosen according to the same principles as those in the main clause and the decisive factors are the sense and the context; to the opinion of authors – such as Jean Dubois and René Lagane – who consider that there are two kinds of the SOT: the one required by the sense, and the other which is mandatory and has nothing to do with the meaning of the sentence; and finishing with those who believe that there exists 'the grammatical constraint' to the use of tenses in such cases (see more about this in: Bibic 2017, pp. 3-4), including, among others, Slobodan Jovanovic who finds that "the tense in the subordinate clause is adjusted according to the tense in the main clause" (1993: 591).

The point of view that the tense in the subordinate clause should be selected according to the sense has been named *the natural sequence of tenses*, whereas the belief that there are rules, or even laws, about the tense in the subordinate clause being influenced or governed by the one in the main clause has been called *the attracted sequence of tenses*. Similarly, such contrasting ideas have also been voiced in English grammars. The grammarians of the English language have also expressed many different opinions, from that of Audrey Jean

Thomson and Agnes V. Martinet who do not limit this phenomenon only to indirect/reported speech but classify as the sequence of tenses any and every agreement of tenses between the main and the subordinate clauses including temporal adverbial clauses (1988: 195); then Martin Hewings who explains how "The tense we choose for a *that*-clause is one that is *appropriate at the time that we are reporting* what was said or thought. This means that we sometimes use a different tense in the *that*-clause from the one that was used in the original statement" (1999: 90, italics in the original text); to Michael Swan who thinks that it is 'natural' to use past tenses for situations which happened in the past and that students should not learn or practice the use of complicated rules but simply use the 'normal' tenses which describe the situation they are talking about (for this opinion, which is similar to Brunot's, if not even more extreme, see more in Swan 1984, Chapter 534); and all the way to Professor Radmila Djordjevic who discusses the notions of hypotaxis, subordination and dependency (1997: 707) which dictate the sequence of tenses in the dependent clause as "the form of grammatical agreement with the introductory verb" (1997: 342).

To Shift Back or Forth, the Question Is Now

However, it is undisputable that in the languages in which the attracted SOT exists there is a certain sort of correlation between the tenses used for the verbs in the main and subordinate clauses. Contrary to that, in the grammar of many other languages there is no such relation between the verbs of the main and the subordinate clauses, for instance, in Slavic languages, like Russian or Serbian. Therefore, it can be said that these languages are characterised by the natural sequence of tenses.

This is confirmed by all the renowned grammarians of the Serbian language (previously known as Serbocroatian, until the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in 1991, when it branched into Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian). For instance, Professor Ivan Klajn explicitly maintains that "there is no agreement of tenses in Serbian" (2005: 121), while Professor and Academician Mihailo Stevanovic clarifies that in the Serbian language "indirect speech, either by its essence or its form, is nothing else but a dependent clause used to express the object of the reporting verb" (1989: 838) and concludes that in Serbian "there is no difference in form between indirect and direct speech" (1989: 839).

That being so, the use of the attracted SOT in French or English may come as 'natural' or 'normal' to the native speaker, like it was mentioned above as the opinion of some grammarians. However, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students whose mother tongue does not include this phenomenon cannot find it either 'natural' or 'normal' since they have a completely different worldview and their perspective is not focused on the context and the temporal relationship of the subordinate verb itself (the meaning of which is, indeed, related to a reference point in the past), but on the subject of the sentence whose words or thoughts are not influenced by the tense of the verb in the main clause. Therefore, the tenses in subordinate clauses in these languages remain those used in direct speech, since their reference point is not the predicate but the subject. In consequence, the students whose maternal language is Serbian automatically select the required tense according to the relevance of the verbal process for the speaker's mental state at the moment of speaking. Simply put, if the speaker said something in the present tense, that clause should remain the same in reported speech regardless of the tense of the verb in the main clause, and the same goes for the past and the future.

Quite the opposite, the main characteristic of the attracted SOT is the so-called rule on *backshifting*, which "refers to the changes we make to the original verbs in indirect speech because time has passed between the moment of speaking and the time of the report" (*Cambridge Dictionary*). The famous grammarian of the English language Randolph Quirk, whose team probably coined this term back in 1972, explains that a shift of the main verb into the past must be followed by "a corresponding shift into the past (or if necessary, further into the past) in the reported clause" (1973: 786). So, when the verb of the main clause is in a past tense, this overtly positions the entire sentence in the past, and due to that fact we must introduce "the changing of a tense when reporting what somebody said" (*Oxford Dictionaries*), or in other words, all the tenses in the subordinate clauses have to be further shifted into the past as compared to the original sentence. According to these rules, which are compulsory with a few exceptions, a present (Simple or Continuous) tense in the dependent clause becomes a corresponding past tense, a past or perfect (Simple or Continuous) tense is turned into a respective past perfect tense, and a future tense into future-in-the-past.

On the other hand, that is not the case in Serbian (and other languages that have the natural SOT), in which there is no backshifting – regardless of the tense of the verb used in the main clause. Thus, for instance, a present tense in the dependent clause must not become a past tense because that would create confusion as to when the action denoted by the verb in the dependent clause took place: at the same time as the action denoted by the verb in the main clause (which would have been the case in English), or before that (which is the case in Serbian). Professor Ivan Klajn thus explains this specific use of the Present Tense in the subordinate clause, in order to make a distinction compared to its regular use, which is to denote the action that actually happens in the present: "In the dependent clause, since there is no agreement of tenses in Serbian, the Present Tense can denote a past action simultaneous to the past action in the main clause (relative present)" (2005: 121).

While the rules of the attracted SOT demand the use of a past tense for expressing simultaneity, when it comes to expressing anteriority a past perfect tense has to be used. Though in the Serbian language the use of the Past Perfect – rather called Pluperfect (*pluskvamperfekat*) in Serbian – is not ungrammatical, not only is there absolutely no need to use it in order to denote anteriority, but it also sounds awkward and artificial, since pluperfect has been less and less in use in the Serbian language, therefore such backshifting should always be avoided and the Perfect Tense (called *perfekat* in Serbian) should be used, as the equivalent of the English Past Simple Tense. All Serbian grammarians mention this characteristic of pluperfect in our contemporary language: for instance, Professor Klajn ascertains that "In dependent clauses it is usually replaced by the Perfect Tense" (2005: 123). Zivojin Stanojic and Ljubomir Popovic explain that "According to its syntactic character, the Pluperfect is always a relative tense (the action which was performed or being performed in the past is determined indirectly from the point of view of the time when it is spoken about). It has been in use less and less frequently, and when it is still used, it gives the text an archaic tone, and especially emphasises that the action which it denotes had already been carried out at the time when an action indicated by another past tense began or was being performed" (2000: 386). In his grammar, Milos Milosevic emphasises that "The Pluperfect Tense is nowadays rarely used in the [Serbian] literary language, where it is usually replaced by the Perfect Tense" (2001: 116).

The most comprehensive explanation is provided by Professor Stevanovic: "Pluperfect is generally getting more and more rarely used; in recent times, it is utilised only when it is particularly necessary to emphasise that what is expressed by it had already been carried out

at the moment when another action indicated by another perfect tense, related to which the action indicated by the pluperfect is denoted as already finished, had started being performed or was being performed. Besides, to this purpose using a relative perfect tense is both possible and very common, especially when some other linguistic sign marks the supplementary function, which makes the disappearance of pluperfect from use all the more understandable" (1989: 670). Thus, for instance, if *already* is used in the sentence, it denotes anteriority by itself.

In order to emphasise that backshifting in indirect speech in the Serbian language is not only unnecessary but even wrong in most of the cases, and inspired by the phrase *back-and-forth*, I made up the term *forthshifting* to denote that in translating a text from English into Serbian the tenses in the sentences which are in indirect speech should be moved forward instead of backward – which happens in reported speech when a text is translated into English. Briefly and more generally, if tenses were moved back due to the attracted SOT rules of a specific language, in the process of translation that move has to be reversed for languages without such SOT rules – that is, languages with the natural SOT.

To summarise, let us see what the consequences of this comparative analysis of temporal patterns in English and Serbian reported speech are. In the translation of English texts (ST) into Serbian (TT), there are basically two types of mistakes regarding verbs in reported speech:

- If a past tense in the subordinate clause in the ST is translated by using a past tense in the TT, this can be misleading since in Serbian that past tense denotes that the action was already finished before it was reported, so instead of simultaneity its meaning is anteriority and this error can lead to misunderstanding of the entire sentence;
- If a past perfect tense in the subordinate clause in the ST is translated by using pluperfect in the TT, although this is not a grammatical error, such a sentence can – and usually does – sound unnatural and clumsy, since pluperfect is rarely used in the Serbian language nowadays and it seems rather archaic.

It is obvious that in translating reported speech from English texts into Serbian forth shifting is obligatory in both cases: in order to preserve the temporal pattern of simultaneity, a past tense has to be translated with a present tense; and a past perfect tense used to express anteriority should be translated with a past tense in Serbian due to stylistic reasons. Nevertheless, as it has been demonstrated in this chapter of the paper, the use of Pluperfect tense in Serbian is not by itself wrong or ungrammatical, so the examples regarding anteriority will not be discussed in the following chapter, which will focus on the errors made in expressing simultaneity by translating a past tense from the English ST as a past tense in the Serbian TT, since this is something that must not be done.

The Contrastive Analysis of the English ST and the Serbian TT on Two Levels

The previous chapter has demonstrated that translating source texts which contain the sequence of tenses in English into Serbian may frequently create problems, since English grammar includes the rules of the attracted SOT, while Serbian is among languages with the natural SOT, which means that a past tense used for the reporting verb in the main clause does not influence at all the tenses of the verbs in the subordinate clauses, unlike those in English.

However, while I was reading the Serbian translation of a novel originally written in English, I noticed many sentences in which the past tenses used in indirect speech were translated with Serbian past tenses, and at times I even felt confused as to the right meaning of the TT. When I consulted the ST and compared it to the TT, I discovered that it was indeed the translator's mistake, and concluded that failure to adapt the tenses that should be used in Serbian at times even led to misunderstanding of the entire sentence, mostly because a past tense was used rather than a present tense. Instead of sticking to the tenses used in the ST, the translator should have forthshifted, that is, used the tenses that would have been used in direct speech – since this is in line with the rules of Serbian grammar.

Then I contrasted selected sentences taken from the ST, all of them comprising the use of the SOT, and their translations found in the TT, in order to pinpoint the most problematic examples, which will be analysed in this chapter. The next part of my research, and the second level of contrastive analysis, was to give these sentences from the ST to my students to translate them into Serbian. This study was carried out with 26 third-year students at the English Department of Belgrade University's Faculty of Philology, all of them native speakers of Serbian, with English levels between C1 and C2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The students were explained the wider background for each sentence by supplying whole paragraphs where it was necessary for understanding the meaning of the sentence. However, they were asked to translate only those sentences that are in the focus of this research as they comprise the use of the SOT, but it was not specified that their real task was to render correctly the tenses affected by the SOT rules into the target language.

Prior to that, grammar classes for third-year students incorporated detailed teaching of the SOT rules, including exercises in both directions. More specifically, besides the usual "Put the following sentences into reported speech" exercises, the students were also asked to reverse their process of thinking and either convert the reported speech sentences supplied in English into direct speech or translate them into Serbian. Both of these cases demanded forth shifting in order to obtain correct sentences in Serbian.

Due to the page length limit of this paper, I have chosen the following five sentences for more detailed analysis, since their published translation completely changed the sense of the TT:

1. She knew *she was beautiful* and now, dropping the thin silk veil, she unleashed the beauty she had kept hidden and he was lost. (Rushdie 2009: 51)

Znala je *da je bila prelepa*, a sada, spustivši svileni veo, oslobodila je lepotu koju je krila i on je bio izgubljen. (Ruzdi 2009: 58)

The use of the Perfect Tense in the Serbian translation signifies that she had been beautiful at some time in the past, but was no longer beautiful, which would be in contrast with the rest of the sentence.

2. The ambassador of Queen Elizabeth understood that this was the first test *he had to pass*. (Rushdie 2009: 66)

Ambasador kraljice Elizabete znao je da je to prvi test *koji je morao da polozi*. (Ruzdi 2009: 74)

In the ST, the underlined phrase refers to a necessity related to future and the action expressed by the verb in the dependent clause has not yet been implemented, whereas the use of the Perfect Tense in the TT suggests that the action has already taken place.

3. [...] behind those memories [was] the knowledge that those who loved you were dead, *that there was no escape*. (Rushdie 2009: 189)

[...] a u pozadini tih secanja saznanje da su oni koji su te voleli mrtvi, *da nije bilo izlaza*. (Ruzdi 2009: 197)

Instead of using a present tense in Serbian to mark the current impossibility of escaping, the translator used the Perfect Tense, which is rather confusing in this context.

4. Marietta started thinking that her life was not as hard as she had erroneously believed it to be, *that her husband loved her, her children were good children, and these visitors were after all the most distinguished guests* it had ever been her privilege to receive. (Rushdie 2009: 254)

Marijeta je pocela da misli da joj zivot i nije tako tezak kao sto je, pogresno, verovala, *da ju je muz voleo, da su joj deca bila dobra, a da su ovi posetioeci ipak bili najotmeniji gosti* koje je ikada imala privilegiju da primi. (Ruzdi 2009: 262)

Although the Past Simple Tense in the first dependent clause is correctly rendered by using the Present Tense in Serbian, and the Past Perfect Tense in the second clause is correctly translated by using the Perfect Tense in Serbian, which denotes a previous action, the verbs in the remaining three dependent clauses are erroneously translated by using the Perfect Tense instead of the Present Tense, thus placing the entire situation back into the past.

5. Argalia understood at once that the new ruler of Florence *was a weakling*, and so was that young nephew of his, riding by his side. (Rushdie 2009: 264)

Argalija je odmah shvatio da je novi vladar Firence *bio slabic*, kao i onaj njegov mladajhni necak koji je jahao uz njega. (Ruzdi 2009: 272)

In this sentence, the incorrect translation of the Past Simple Tense by using the Perfect Tense denotes that the action had already been completed in the past, when in fact the sense is quite the opposite because the Past Simple Tense is used in the ST only due to the SOT rules, while its meaning is in the present.

The last step was to implement contrastive analysis to the corpus consisting of sentences taken from the ST and their translations provided by students. In the translations done by students, the problems mainly occur in two cases: the first one is when the reporting verb did not refer to somebody's words – as these clauses are usually introduced by *say* or *tell*, and the students easily recognise the need to forthshift – but to their thoughts or beliefs or inner speech (in the above analysed sentences those include: know, understand, think); and the second one is when a sentence consisted of the main clause and not one but several dependent clauses, in which case some students translated correctly the tense in the first of these, and then seemed to forget the SOT rules for the rest of the sentence (the example for this is sentence no. 4).

Nonetheless, the results show that in most of the examples the students either forthshifted the tenses used in the ST due to the reported speech rules of English and opted for the appropriate tense in the Serbian language, or found some creative ways to express the tense demanded by the context, by paraphrasing the sentence with an equivalent that is the most suited to the nature of the target language.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to analyse the translation of texts affected by the SOT in English into Serbian, which is a language with the natural SOT. Since the verbs in the dependent clauses in the ST are subject to backshifting, Serbian grammar rules demand forthshifting, because the mapping of same tenses from English would be incorrect.

The contrastive analysis was carried out on two levels: by comparing sentences with the SOT from the ST written in English and their counterparts from the published translation in Serbian; and then by contrasting those same sentences with their translations into Serbian done by students at the English Department of Belgrade University's Faculty of Philology. It was ascertained that, although in the published translation certain sentences were wrongly translated because the English SOT rules were applied to the TT and this sometimes even led to misunderstanding of the entire sentence, the translations provided by students contained far fewer mistakes than was the case with the published translation, so the sense of the TT was much clearer.

Therefore, it was concluded that detailed and comprehensive teaching of the SOT rules within grammar classes proved worth the effort. When educating students for their future work as translators, teachers should pay special attention to exercises that include forthshifting and make students understand that while they translate a text, they should be guided by the grammar of the target language. It is suggested that forthshifting exercises be practised with the students whose first language has the natural SOT, and for those languages that have the attracted SOT but with rules that are different in the source and the target languages, the tenses in such sentences should be forth shifted and then translated according to the rules of the target language.

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“Gotta Blend ‘Em All” Morphological Blending in Pokémon Names

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Abstract

Games are one of the most enjoyable entertainments because they can amuse people’s eyes, ears, and minds. All these entertainments always keep the novelty by providing intriguing stories, design, and ‘namings’. Pokémon is one game that always provides its fans with new names of new Pokémon. In this research, the writer would like to investigate word-formation theory limited to Blending theory. The study investigates Blending theory morphotactically, morphonologically, and morphosemantically by Mattiello (2013). The object of this research is Pokémon names. This is chosen because many word formations are used to create Pokémon names. This research aims to find the kinds of Blending used in Pokémon names and how significant blending is used for naming the Pokémon. The data are collected from a webpage called Pokémon database. The data collected are the 3 latest generations of Pokémon games based on ‘Complete Pokémon Pokédex’ on said webpage. The analysis uses qualitative methods to answer the research questions. Pokemon names were collected, identified, classified, and then described. The findings found that there are many variants of Morphological Blending used in naming the Pokémon. This research is expected to contribute to language research development and encourage other researchers to have a greater sense of literacy even when enjoying entertainment.

Keywords: Blending, Linguistics, Morphology, Pokémon

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1. Introduction

Language is essential in human life. Language is not only used as means of communication, but it has become one of the major roles in entertainment. There are songs, novels, movies, and even games with their own distinctive language use. With the development of technology and the ease of having game consoles, more people know about the existence of games. Now people can play trending games even on their own mobile phones.

Pokémon is one of the most famous games that can be found since decades ago. It has become one of the biggest companies with its ever-changing development since the release of its first game. Until now, there have been countless franchises of this company that release more spin-offs (non-official Pokémon-related games, anime, movies, etc. such as Detective Pikachu movie). Even after decades, it is still growing and creating new features and characters.

Pokémon was initially released as a computer game (*Bulbapedia*, n.d.). However, nowadays there are many things related to Pokemon because the developer has created a full story and a whole world of Pokémon along with the rules in it (Bainbridge, 2014). Moreover, the developer of Pokémon games always comes with new names, new regions, and new features in each update. This game is only one example of how the development of technology has successfully brought so many new terms and names (Rini & Moehkardi, 2016). Pokémon names are somewhat similar to the reference to some creatures or things that we already recognize in real life. Some names are easy to understand whilst others need some research and are even arguable because of the ambiguous word used.

Many people or parents argue that games can cause gaming disorder (Lemmens & Weergang, 2023). It is true that many bad effects can be made because of addictions to games. However, there are even games that can help people for example for evacuation; i.e. Shelter Go Game (Mitsuhara & Shishibori, 2023). There was even research that shows the impact on health of one spinoff of Pokémon called Pokémon Go games (Khamzina et al., 2020).

One research analyzes the relevance of Pokémon naming to its physical characteristics (Cipta et al., n.d.); and even the sound and symbols have been analyzed (Shih et al., 2018). Other renowned games such as Dota (Dallmann et al., 2021); and Genshin Impact (Cai et al., 2023) have also been analyzed. This is because games are not solely an entertainment. It is factually even more delicate than movies, songs, and books. It is because recent games, moreover some genres like RPG (Role-Playing Game), MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game), or adventure games include not only a story but a whole new world in it. The story, language translations, game features, songs/ music, characterizations, and even the impact on players or the developer (economically, in terms of health, etc.) can be analyzed in research. Games are also challenging to players because, unlike books nor movies, a game needs to be ‘played’ and ‘understood’ to continue to the next chapter/ story. Some stories even need more effort such as defeating strong enemies that cannot be completed in a day or two. On the contrary, books can easily be continued by opening each page and movies can be finished in one sitting.

Similar research related to Blending using the theory of Mattiello (2013) had already been written with data taken from Children’s Programs on BBC News (Arifah & Moehkardi, 2021); and Indonesian advertisements that merge Indonesian and English words as Blends

(Moehkardi, 2019). There was also research comparing the frequency of Blendings used in English and French (Grlj, 2022).

This research refers to the original game released by Pokémon Company in Nintendo games. The newest games always come first in the form of a turn-based, RPG (Role Playing Game) game in a game console called the Nintendo series. Even though games have been seen as contradictory with academic studies, as academic students we need to be sensible to our surroundings that games have been an inevitable phenomenon in this era. This research is expected to find the variants of blends by Mattiello found in the generation 7th – 9th of Pokémon Nintendo games. The research can be used as a reference to future researches related to blending.

The theoretical approach applied in this research is a theory of Morphological process, especially Blending (Mattiello, 2013). According to her, Blending is a way of creating a new word by merging two or more words. The word part can be in the complete form or only in parts. In her book, there are some categories of Blending such as Total blends, Partial blends, Overlapping blends, Non-overlapping Blends, Attributive Blends, and Coordinate Blends.

The idea of this research comes from the following research questions:

1. How is Blending used in Pokémon naming from the data used?
2. How frequent is the kinds of blending used according to the data investigated?

2. Theoretical Framework

In creating novel things such as a character in literary works, creating a new word is essential. It is what people call a ‘word-formation’. A word can be formed by using a theory called the Morphological process. In this study, the researcher investigates one of the Morphological processes called ‘Blending’. Blending according to Meyer (2009) means two shortened words that are merged into one. Blending is useful since it can be used to create a word using more than one existing or known word which in the end will create one word with multiple ideas.

The world of Pokémon is widely known for its abundance of Pokémon names and terms. They are all new words coined by the developer in order to show their novelty and distinction with other works. In this study, the writer investigates the names of Pokémon and excludes the other technical terms found in the data source.

This study uses the Blending theory by Mattiello (2013). In her book, she explains that there are three kinds of Blending. Blending can be done Morphotactically, Morphonologically, and Morphosemantically. Morphotactically, a Blend can consist of all splinters combined which is called a Total Blend, or only part of the splinter found from the words used that is called a Partial Blend. In addition, there are Blends that can be formed Morphonologically. Phonologically, a Blend can be made of two or more words that overlap in terms of their sound or even alphabetically. This is called an Overlapping Blend. The other kinds of Blending made up of random words are not considered an Overlapping Blend which in the end is called a Non-Overlapping Blend. The last kind of Blending according to Mattiello (2013) is a kind of Blending made up of words that may explain or give attributes to the other words. Blendings made this way is called a Morphosemantic Blend. It can be defined that the head word is described or given an attribute by the other words/ splinters. This kind of Blending is called an Attributive Blend. The other kind of Morphosemantic Blending is

called a Coordinate Blend since they are not attributing the other word because they are in equal positions.

3. Methods

This research took all the data from a webpage (Pokemondb, n.d.). the data collected were only taken from the latest 3 generations of Pokémon primary Nintendo games. This should be differentiated because there are many spin-offs of Pokémon caused by the number of franchises it owns. This 3 last generations of Pokémon games taken as data were also only the generation that provides a whole new region and whole new starters as well as new legendary Pokémon.

The names provided are all available to be analyzed from said webpage. The names taken were Pokémon from number #722 (Rowlet) to number #1000 (Gholdengo). The maximum number for new Pokémon released has reached up to number #1010 (Iron Leaves). Even so, the next names after number #1000 do not show some sign of names that can be analyzed using English nor its form not even in a ‘word’, yet in the form of a ‘phrase’. The researcher excluded them from the data collection. The data chosen are from generations 7 – 9 to avoid similarities in analysis from another unknown researcher.

The method of research is started by documenting all the names said in the data collection provided by the pokemondatabase.com webpage. The analysis will be done using a mixed method (Qual-Quan) by (Dörnyei 2007). In his book, he argues that instead of using solely Qualitative or Quantitative methodology, one can use both because they may be in contrast, yet they can complete each other. The names are then unblended if they are categorized as blends. The type of blending used is then categorized. Pokémon names here are the variables. Based on (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991) variables are the units used in the analysis. The variables are then categorized into levels of Blending types. Levels here according to (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991) means the further division of the variable to categorize them into more specific groups.

After all the data had been categorized, the researcher took the ‘critical case sampling’. (Dörnyei, 2007) suggested that critical case sampling is a type of sampling that intentionally chooses the most significant and the most special from all similar samples. From each of the Blending categories, the researcher took sufficient data to be analyzed.

The analysis was different for each of the level. In the Morphotactical analysis, the data are only categorized whether they were included into Total or Partial Blends. In this study, the Total Blends are symbolized using (A1), and Partial Blends were symbolized using (A2). Morphologically, the data were categorized into Overlapping Blends with symbol (B1) and Non-overlapping Blends using (B2). Finally, Morphosemantically the attributive Blends were symbolized with (C1) and coordinative Blends were symbolized with (C2).

After categorizing all of the data in the data source, they were quantitatively analyzed and provided into narration qualitatively. By finding all the Morphotactical Blendings, it was also a sign of finding all the Blending contained in the data source. It means that all the Morphotactical Blendings data not included in Overlapping or Attributive Blendings are all Non-overlapping and Coordinating Blendings. However, to determine whether a datum is overlapping or not, the researcher applied rule such as: ‘must be overlapping phonemically, graphically or conceptually. Because some words use different languages that have different

concepts of phonetic and alphabetic rules. The analysis of Morphosemantic Blending is more delicate because in order to determine whether a datum is a morphosemantic Blending or not, the datum need to have the word as the head and the modifier. The head and modifier here are using these formulations:

- A) The head is Noun + (that is) Adjective
This can be seen in a word for example: Watermelon (that is) red.
- B) The head is Noun + (that) Verb + (s)
This can be seen in a word for example: Cat (that) run(s)
- C) The head is Noun + Noun (Compound word)
This can be seen in a word for example: Waterbird

All the data found were then counted in terms of amount and frequency.

4. Results and Discussion

From the analysis, it is found that out of 278 Pokémon names (#722 - #1000), 195 Pokémon names are made with Blending. The analyses start from the first category of Blending which is Morphotactical Blends. The analysis can be seen from the explanations below:

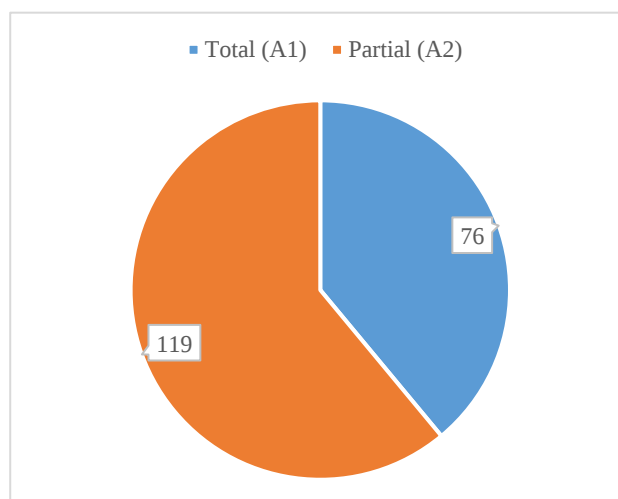


Figure 1: Morphotactical Blends

From the chart, it can be seen that there are 76 Total Blends found in the data source. The Partial Blends are found to be more frequently appearing in the making of Pokémon names which are 119 times from the total 195 Blending. The number of Partial Blends found in the data source might be caused by the rule of creating the Blends. As long as one of the words used is a splinter, the word can already be considered a Blending. Examples of names using this kind of Blending can be found in the tables below:

Table 1: Examples of Total Blends (A1)

No	Pokemon Name	Source Words
#834	Drednaw	Dreadnought + Gnaw
#866	Mr. Rime	Mr. Mime + Rime + Rhyme
#968	Orthworm	Ore +Earthworm
#885	Dreepy	Dragon + Creepy
#891	Kubfu	Cub + Kungfu
#919	Nymble	Nymph + Nimble
#969	Glimmet	Glimmer + Comet

From the above examples of it can be seen that each word is reduced into splinters in order to make a Blend. The arrangement is random because there is no rule of how a Total Blend should be made. The next table shows the Partial Blends that contain Blends created from a splinter + a full word.

Table 2: Examples of Partial Blends (A2)

No	Pokemon Name	Source Words
#724	Decidueye	Deciduous + Eye
#727	Incineroar	Incenerate + Roar
#733	Toucannon	Toucan + Cannon
#803	Poipole	Poison + Pole
#816	Sobble	Sob + Bubble
#822	Corvisquire	Corvine + Squire
#854	Sinistea	Sinister + Tea

These are the examples of Partial Blends found in the data source. One intriguing example is in the name ‘Toucannon’. This word looks very similar to a non-blending word because the two words used are already complete words and there seem to be no splinter from the two words used. However, there is actually a splinter seen from these words because the word Toucan and Cannon has similar syllable ‘can’ that needs one more ‘n’ in order not to be a Blend. Because there are only found 2 ‘n(s)’ in the word, thus this word is considered to be a Blend because one of the words lacks one ‘n’.

The next result will show the number of Morphonological Blends found in the data source. Morphonological Blends need to have similar sounds or letters. The result can be seen in the figure below:

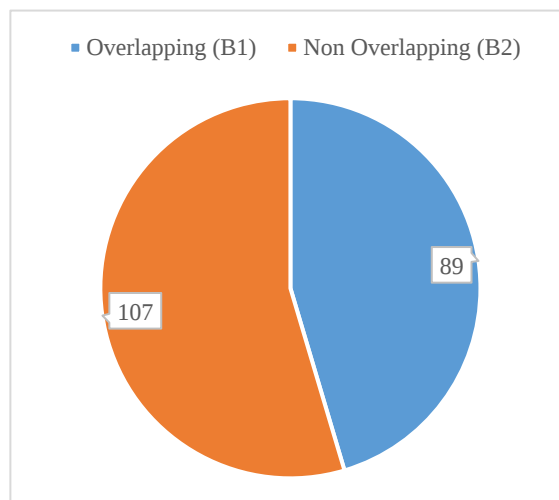


Figure 2: Morphonological Blends

From this chart it is visible that there is no significant difference between the overlapping or non-overlapping blends. This might be caused by the use of overlapping blends need more work than non-overlapping ones. However, because the result of the names looks and sounds better than non-overlapping, these kinds of names must have been put more effort into. Hence, the names created will have more sense in terms of its name and characteristics can help people in remembering names.

Table 3: Examples of Overlapping Blends (B1)

No	Pokemon Name	Source Words
#734	Yungoos	Young + Mongoose
#739	Crabrawler	Crab + Brawler
#750	Mudsdale	Mud + Clydesdale
#784	Kommo'o	Commotion + Mo'o
#797	Celesteela	Celestial + Steel
#800	Necrozma	Necros+ Prisma
#956	Espathra	Esp + Telepathic + Cleopatra

From the result above, there are some examples of Overlapping Blends. The first overlapping blend can be seen in the name 'Yungoos'. This word is made of the word 'young' and 'mongoose' which is one kind of small mammal. This word is overlapping in the sound /ŋ/. The next word is Crabrawler which easily overlaps in the letter 'b'. There is also the word Kommo'o which consists of the words 'commotion' and 'mo'o' which refers to the Hawaiian word for 'dragon'. It overlaps in the syllable 'mo'.

The interesting blend is found in the names Celesteela, Necrozma, and Espathra. The first word is overlapping in the sound /sti:/. The sound /i:/ is still considered an overlap because to produce the sound of the word ‘celestial’ /sɪˈles.ti.əl/, the vowel sound is still essential. The next name is Necrozma. Looking at it phonetically and graphically, this name should not be included in this category because the researcher decided that the overlapping is in the sound or letter /z/ which cannot be found in both words. People may say that it should be the letter /s/ in order to be considered for this kind of blend. Nevertheless, it should be understood that both /s, z/ are Alveolar Fricative sounds. They are only different in terms of their Voicings. It means that they still have a dominantly similar hissing sound concept. The final intriguing example is seen in the name Espathra. This name is special because it contains three words in one name. The first word ‘ESP’ refers to an acronym (Extra Sensory Perception: psychic power), telepathic, and Cleopatra. The overlapping is found in the letter ‘p – a – t’ because the letter ‘p’ overlaps among the three words. The next two letters ‘a – t’ are overlapping only between the word telepathic and Cleopatra. This can be inferred that overlapping cannot only be determined by the sound or the alphabet but must also be determined if it overlaps conceptually.

The next analysis is the non-overlapping blends. This kind of blend is considered ‘the other’ of overlapping Blends. It is because all kinds of Blend are considered non overlapping Blends if they do not overlap. These are examples of non-overlapping blends found in the data source:

Table 4: Examples of Non-Overlapping Blends

No	Pokemon Name	Source Words
#775	Komala	Koala + Comatose
#781	Dhelmise	Helm + Demise
#862	Obstagoon	Obstacle + Raccoon + Goon
#909	Fuecoco	Fuego + Cocodrillo
#963	Finizen	Fin + Citizen

From the above table, it is visible that some words look similar. However, the researcher decided not to put them into overlapping categories. It can be seen from the first name ‘Dhelmise’ that is taken from two words ‘Demise’ and ‘helm’. These two words look as if there is only one word that cancels the overlapping which is the sound ‘l’. However, after taking a closer look, it can be seen that because of that sound, the other sounds like /he/ and /m/ cannot be considered overlapping. Because there is no sound /he/ nor letter ‘he’ in both words. In addition, if the sound /h/ is omitted, it will also be insufficient to consider the sound /e/ and /m/ only can create an overlapping blend because they do not overlap in any ways. Moreover, if the sound /e/ can be considered overlapping, then almost all blending will be considered an overlapping blending because every syllable almost needs a vowel and there must have been similar vowels all over the place. This also happens in the case of the name ‘Finizen’.

The next name is ‘Komala’. This name is created by the words comatose and Koala which do not overlap because the sounds /o/ and /a/ are separated by the sound /m/ and deciding the two sounds as overlapping is impossible. In the next example, there is Obstagoon. It cannot be considered an overlapping blend because it may look like an overlapping in the sound /g/ if the sound /g/ and /k/ are considered similar. However, the researcher finds that the two sounds are different from the case of /s/ and /z/. Both sounds /k/ and /g/ are indeed only different in their voicings. However, they lack important characteristics which is being sonorant sounds. Sonorant sounds can be similar because the sound can be continued non-stop and eventually, they will sound the same. The two sounds /k/ and /g/ are both can called ‘stop’ or ‘plosive’ sounds. When they are seen as ‘stop’ sounds which can be used to stop the air at the end of a syllable, they can be considered very similar. However, when they are seen as ‘plosive’ that needs one push to blow the air after stopping when they are used at the beginning of a syllable, they can be heard to be very distinctive. This is the reason why these two sounds cannot be considered similar and overlapping. This case is similar to the next name ‘Fuecoco’.

The third kind of Blending is the Morphosemantic Blending. There are many rules to consider to decide whether a Pokémon name is a Morphosemantic Blending or not. The following chart shows the frequency of the appearance of Morphosemantic Blendings found in the data source:

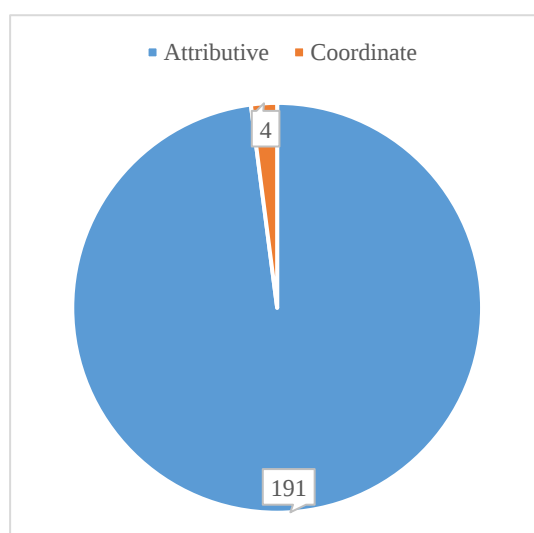


Figure 3: Morphosemantic Blends

The chart shows that Attributive Blends appear very frequently. It might be caused by the need for characteristics for the Pokémon name. It is because Pokémon names are always based on animal or thing names. These nouns are mostly having characteristics like habit, ability, trait, etc. The coordinating Blends appear a few times might be caused by some of the nouns used being coordinated with other similar ideas.

The first analysis is about the Attributive Blends. There are three kinds of Attributive Blends found in the analysis. The first one is the Noun + (that) Verb (s). This can be seen from the names provided in the below table:

Table 5: Examples of Attributive (N + V) Blends

No	Pokemon Name	Source Words
#725	Litten	Kitten + Lit
#758	Salazzle	Salamander + Dazzle
#779	Bruxish	Fish + Brux
#920	Lokix	Locust + Kicks
#946	Bramblin	Bramble + Rambling

Seen from the above table, the names consist of Noun and the Verb that explains what the Noun is doing. The verb is considered as the modifier of the noun because it gives ability to the Nouns as the head. Take one example from the name Sobble. This name consists of the words ‘bubble’ and ‘sob’ which can be created into a clause ‘Bubble (that) sob(s)’.

The next discussion is about the Noun + (that is) Adjective. This attributive blend is the most dominating in the data. This must have been caused by the characteristic given by the modifier that is in the form of an adjective. This can give many characteristics of a Noun. The examples can be seen in the below table:

Table 6: Examples of Attributive (N + Adj) Blends

No	Pokemon Name	Source Words
#818	Inteleon	Intelligent + Chameleon
#877	Morpeko	Morumotto + Harapeko
#910	Crocalor	Crocodrillo + Calor
#928	Smoliv	Smol + Olive
#942	Maschiff	Mastiff + Mischief

The table shows only very little examples of Noun + Adjective Attributive Blends. The first example shows the *crocodrillo* (crocodile) + *calor* (hot) which are taken from Spanish words. The name Morpeko is taken from Japanese words which means *Morumotto* (Marmot) and *harapeko* (hungry). For the third word, it is taken from slang word for ‘small’ and the word ‘olive’.

Table 7: Examples of Attributive (N + N) Blends

No	Pokemon Name	Source Words
#745	Lycanroc	Lycanthrope + Rock
#751	Dewpider	Dew + Spider
#765	Oranguru	Orangutan + Guru
#803	Poipole	Poison + Pole
#878	Cufant	Cu + Elephant

This kind of Attributive Blending uses two or more nouns to give an attribute to the headword. This can be seen for example in the name Dewpider which simply talks about Dew Spider. It can either be a spider that lives in a dew or a spider that looks like dew or a spider that is made of dew. The dew here is always giving an attribute to the headword 'spider'. The next similar example is the name 'Cufant'. This word is made from the word Cu which is a chemistry symbol that can be found in the periodic table for copper. Even though they are in the same word class (Noun), one of the words can become the head. This is because the head has more versatile use than the other and doing the vice versa will make illogical results.

Moving on to the Coordinate Blends, there are also blends that have similar or equal status which makes them cannot be put into the preceding category. However, they do not simply have to be in the same word class. Even in different word classes, as long as they are not attributing the head, they can be called coordinate blends because they have the same equal status that is to merge different ideas into one word. The examples can be seen in the table below:

Table 8: Examples of Coordinate Blends

No	Pokemon Name	Source Words
#741	Oricorio	Oriole + Choreography + Oratorio
#743	Ribombee	Ribbon + Bombyliidae + Bee
#746	Wishi-Washi	Weak + Watery
#763	Tsareena	Tsarina + Queen

From the examples, it can be seen that the two words used do not give attributes. Instead, they are similar words that show two equal qualities of the name. For example, the first name 'Oricorio' is taken from 3 nouns 'oriole, choreography, and oratorio'. These names do not give attributes to one another because they are 3 different words that create 1 Pokémon name. It can be concluded that the name 'Oricorio' is made up of 3 nouns; i.e. Oriole, Choreography, and Oratorio.

In addition, the Pokémon with serial number #763 namely Tsareena is also one of the names created by using Coordinative Blending. The splinters are taken from the Russian word 'Tsarina' meaning 'Queen' and the English word 'Queen'. Both splinters used are of the same word but in different languages. Thus, they are considered Coordinative Blends because they do not give attributes to the headword.

5. Conclusion

The analysis shows that from the 3 latest generations of Pokemon games. There are 195 Blending used to create Pokemon names from Pokemon number #722 to #1000. All kinds of Blending by Mattiello (2013) can be found in the data source. The clearest difference can be seen from the Morphosemantic Blends between Attributive and Coordinative Blends. This is because of the nature of Blending itself which is mostly used to give attribute/identification to simplify complicated and long phrases/ words. This can be found in Attributive Blends. On the other hand, Coordinative Blends are only merging two splinters of similar words that cannot modify one another.

From the analysis, it can be concluded that Blends are made in order to merge more than one idea to create one simple word. In addition, the words are at least using one word to characterize the others. It is needed so the speaker of the word can easily remember the characterization of each of the words. It will make people easier to remember even when there are so many new words invented. The result of this research is contradictive with the result brought by (Arifah & Moehkardi, 2021). It is said in the conclusion that some morphosemantic blends may shift the connotations which could not be found in this analysis.

It is also found that in creating many new Pokémon names. Attributive Blends are used the most because it is the easiest way of telling what kind of thing represents the Pokémon and what attribute it owns.

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***Evaluation of Innovative Teaching Tools 'Canvas' Learning Management System:
A Case Study of Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar***

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on all aspects of life, including education. Many countries opted to physically close all educational institutions. As a consequence, there was a shift towards online teaching and learning methods. Educators and students were unprepared for this transition and encountered numerous obstacles. This study investigates the efficacy of the 'Canvas' learning management system in facilitating learning and education. Using a theoretical framework underpinned by the Technology Acceptance Model, the study employed a research design that combined both qualitative and quantitative methods in a sequential and explanatory manner. The study centers on female students of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women's University, aged 17 to 25, who were enrolled in the Intensive English Language course. US Mission Pakistan delivered This course through the Canvas application in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Simple random sampling was used for the quantitative portion, involving 132 respondents. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling method was employed, involving face-to-face interviews with 10 respondents. SPSS was used to conduct an analysis of the quantitative data. A regression model was employed to assess the impact of the independent variables—perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, behavioral intent, and—on the dependent variable—actual use of the Canvas application. The study's findings show that the utilization of Canvas and its associated tools played a vital role in fostering students' satisfaction and facilitating positive experiences with the platform. Thus, it is also recommended to utilize the Canvas application for accredited campus courses.

Keywords: Canvas Learning Management System, Transition, Distance Learning, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Behavioral Intent, Experiences

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Introduction

The global outbreak of COVID-19 has had a severe impact on the field of education across the globe. Educational institutions encountered various obstacles and had to adjust to new conditions in order to maintain learning, while placing a high emphasis on the safety and welfare of students, educators, and personnel. Many countries implemented the temporary closure of educational institutions as a measure to mitigate the spread of the virus. This resulted in the adoption of online teaching and learning methods. It was noted that higher educational institutions were unprepared for this shift.

The lack of a suitable learning management system posed numerous challenges for both teachers and students. The lectures were presented using PowerPoint presentations, video calls, or videos. However, students expressed a general dissatisfaction with the teaching method. Online education was delivered through various methods, with a crucial requirement of a well-designed learning management system (LMS). A system that allows teachers to easily share resources and enable students to access the educational material, and Students have the convenience of collaborating on assignments and receiving feedback from their teacher, regardless of their geographical location. Research indicates that despite students expressing boredom and a desire to discontinue online classes, the use of online learning with suitable learning management systems (LMS) experienced a notable rise (Costales, et al., 2022).

This research investigates an LMS application for the technology-enabled learning of students according to international standards through virtual learning programs. The evolution of Technology led higher education Institutions and Universities to embrace the new system of learning to spread education around the globe, manage and supervise online learning, reach out the remote audiences, and engage them for their well-being. Teachers who use technology-enabled teaching approaches are more scientific-minded and prefer evidence-based methods in teaching. Teachers' cognition, learning, and practice justify advantages when coupled with multimedia (Cavus & Zabaddi, 2014).

Canvas is a software application where instructions are disseminated through virtual education. Canvas has made countless efforts to assist and support the teachers and the students to create a powerful impact on the students to participate in their desired program and learn directly or indirectly.

The usage of Canvas application in the education sector is the highest one as compared to the other sectors like trade and mechanics. Canvas has a positive effects on student's performance (Yaprak, 2022). Canvas application enables teachers to create customized curriculum plans for the students according to their individual needs, teachers share the learning material with the students, assign them tasks and get feedback from them (Tsang, 2019). This turned the traditional face-to-face classes into interactive online sessions. Canvas application was initially embraced by the Universities and educational institutions as formal web-based learning to benefit teachers and students in some subjects (Davis, *et al.*, 2009; Mpungose, 2020a). Later on, a variety of subjects were offered to the students for effective formal and informal learning (Bates, 2018; Khoza, 2019). Now the Canvas has become the most popular LMS for learning. This application is not only used by the developed countries but the developing countries have also amalgamated it for the spread of education (Cavus & Zabaddi 2014; Mpungose 2020d).

The Canvas application features provide a platform to the users for discussions, tests, lectures, videos, files, announcements, course progress, and others. Canvas learning management system features provides many functions to its users for the successful completion of the course (Cavus & Zabbadi, 2014). Students customize their course according to their interest from the huge variety of course combinations available. Learning takes place via presentations, sharing of views, chats, and discussion Threads, video conferencing on Zoom, webinars, and emails (Mpungose, *et al.*, 2022). Teachers use quizzes and assignments to evaluate the students' performance, progress; and assign grades to them to successfully complete the course (Bates, 2018; Black & William, 2009).

Canvas features are built on modern web based systems to be used on computers, laptops, tablets, and mobile devices. Canvas features include a dashboard, activity tracking, notification alerts, attendance tracking, course management, progress reports, certification, and licensing.

Teachers who incorporate technology into their teaching methods often possess a logical mindset and prioritize research-based approaches. Research has provided support for the advantages of integrating multimedia into teachers' cognition, learning, and practice. Blackboard, Canvas, and Moodle are widely utilized Learning Management Systems in higher education institutions across the United States. Blackboard has the largest market share, with 31%, followed closely by Canvas at 30%, and Moodle at 18%. Enrollment in leading Learning Management Systems (LMSs) has experienced a notable surge, as reported by Canvas Network (2022).

The registration process in Canvas is simple and quick to follow. Students have the option to register for their preferred program, enabling them to access course content, training materials, process seminars, and important announcements on their dashboard. The entire process is organized according to the unit level, activity level, and lesson level. Upon enrolling in the course, a panel containing various sections such as home, assignments, discussions, grades, people, pages, files, syllabus, quizzes, and modules becomes available for use. Upon completing a module, students will gain access to the next module in the sequence, allowing them to track their progress over time. The instructors offer comprehensive technical guidance to the students, allowing them to successfully complete the quiz and achieve favorable outcomes (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 2013). The course is meticulously designed, allowing for seamless execution. The popularity of Canvas has increased due to its features. Canvas is an online learning management system (LMS) that caters to the needs of the growing population of students who are opting for online education. The platform caters to the needs of educators and learners in the digital education space (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). Research conducted by Fisher et al. (2010) indicates that there is no significant difference between the outcomes of online courses and face-to-face sessions. Online courses have created opportunities for a wide range of users to acquire new skills through flexible learning methods.

Objectives

The study objectives were to:

1. Investigate the effect of perceived ease of use and the actual use of the Canvas learning management system.
2. Examine the effect of students' perceived usefulness and satisfaction on the actual usage of Canvas.

Research Questions

This study sought to investigate the following research questions:

- i. What is the relationship between students' perceived ease of use and actual use of Canvas in their virtual classrooms?
- ii. What relationship exists among students' perceived usefulness, satisfaction, and actual use of canvas application?

Research Hypotheses

- H₁. There is no significant relationship between the perceived ease of use of students' actual use of Canvas learning management system.
- H₂. There is no significant relationship among students' perceived usefulness, satisfaction, and actual use of Canvas application.

Theoretical Framework

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

In this study, a Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is used. TAM reveals that Variables are reliant on each other and perceived ease of use affects the perceived usefulness (Davis *et al.*, 2009). This model identifies the relationship between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward using, behavioral intention to use, and actual usage. If the technology is useful and enhances the performance of the user then the user develops a Positive attitude, which affects the behavioral intention to use the technology. If the behavioral intention is positive, then the user uses the technology in order to achieve a positive result.

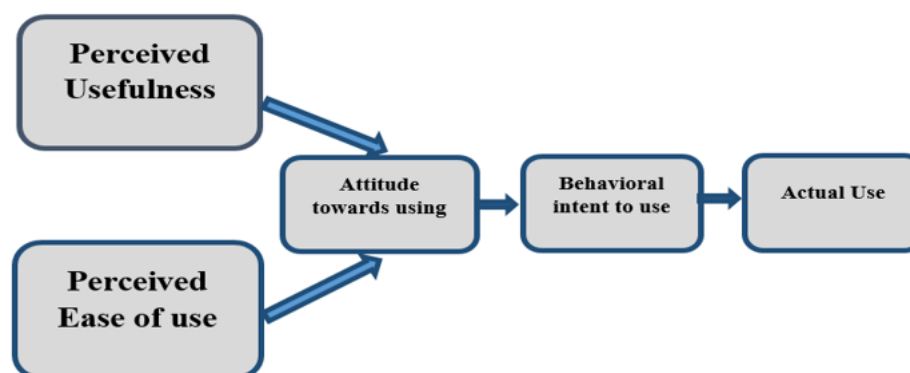


Figure 1: Research Framework: TAM Model

Technology Acceptance Model and Canvas

The widely used Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has had a huge impact on the field of technology adoption and innovation. It sheds light on what factors promote technology adoption acceptance and usage. For years these have been well-studied academic models; therefore they can be used to develop highly accurate models of technology adoption behavior. Their concise nature and academic quality make them particularly useful.

The current study is based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to its attitude and use of Canvas applications among teachers' students. The core ideas of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) argue that the relationship between variables should be examined mindfully, and perceived ease of use will increase perceived usefulness. The ultra-user-friendly characteristics of the Canvas platform have been highly acclaimed. The study aimed to gauge users' satisfaction with and how well they can find information in system navigation among people engaged in the educational process -- students, lecturers, and tutors or instructors. When a digital platform for educational purposes is designed to be user-friendly, user adoption is more rapid. This study covers a variety of Canvas application scenarios, including how easily people can communicate online with their fellow students or colleagues, submit assignments, access course materials and other related information. TAM is a well-accepted tool for assessing learning management system implementation in education scenarios. By focusing on the platform's features and user makes it possible to create better engagement.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the feeling of happiness after the desire is fulfilled. Students are satisfied when their perceived results are equal to or greater than their expectations (Elliot, *et al.*, 2022). On the other hand, dissatisfaction occurs when the results are less than expectations which leads to withdrawals from the course.

Perception of Students About LMS

Perception means how an individual see the world around them, their understanding depends upon their experiences and beliefs. The perception of students about LMS determines the Adoption and usefulness of LMS. Disseminating the use of educational technology involves several influential factors.

Perceived Utilization (Usefulness)

The definition of perceived usefulness is "the extent to which an individual believes that utilizing a particular system would improve his or her job performance" (Davis, *et al.*, 2009). Numerous empirical studies (Bagozzi, *et al.*, 1992) demonstrate that end-users' intentions to adopt a new system are heavily influenced by their perception of its usefulness.

Attitude Toward Using (ATU)

An individual's attitude toward using technology is a crucial factor that decides whether students are going to use technology in the class. If instructors have a positive attitude toward the technology they are considering implementing, they should do so (Aldunate & Nussbaum, 2013). The individuals who adopted technology early and spent more time learning about it had a more favorable attitude toward it. However, their attitude towards the new technology depended on how difficult it was to use.

Behavioral Intention to Use (Intent)

Initiating actions and behaviors constitute the cognitive process or planning that leads to actual use of application. Recent research conducted by Schonenboom (2014) demonstrates a statistically significant correlation between behavioral intention to use and both LMS

usefulness and ease of use. Low LMS intention was explained by low task importance, low task performance, low LMS utility, and low LMS usability (Schoonenboom, 2014). Schoonenboom (2014) utilized the TAM to explain why some instructors intend to utilize certain LMS tools more than others. Confirming previous research (Chen & Tseng, 2012; Lin & Chen, 2013; Motaghian, *et al.*, 2013), perceived utility and ease of use affected behavioral intent to utilize technological tools. In a qualitative study, it was discovered that instructors' behavioral intention to use LMS features was influenced by features that appear to provide an efficiency gain, the convenience of online grading, as well as peer and student pressure (Tsang, 2019). Teachers found the novel features on which they were trained to be beneficial, influencing their behavioral intent to use. The integration of new features of Canvas may have also inspired users to modify their intent to use the system.

Actual Use of the System (ASU)

TAM originated from the Theory of Reasoned Action by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Within TAM, "perceived usefulness" and "perceived ease of use" are recognized as two key internal beliefs (Towne, 2018). External variables are the main inputs to these two "main internal beliefs." Together, perceived ease and perceived usefulness shape users' attitudes and perceptions of the feature. A user's attitude influences their behavior, which in turn leads to their desire to use the system, which leads to actual system use (Wang & Wang, 2009).

The study explores the dynamics of technology integration in education through the Technology acceptance model (TAM). TAM provides a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between user perception and technology adoption, emphasizing the role of attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Together, these perspectives underscore the significance of technology in education, highlighting its potential to shape the learning experience and outcomes.

Significance of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions to the traditional mode of face-to-face education, resulting in various challenges for students and teachers as they strive to maintain their educational programs. Institutions that implemented an advanced Learning Management System (LMS) and embraced hybrid learning methods encountered fewer interruptions and attained superior outcomes. Before the pandemic, traditional classrooms were the norm, characterized by limited utilization of technology. Nevertheless, the extensive integration of technology and shifts in educational systems have proven that utilizing technology improves academic achievement. Asynchronous learning, which involves accessing video lectures through an LMS, has the advantage of reducing costs and allowing for a greater number of students to enroll.

It is a valuable tool for fulfilling students' academic requirements. The implementation of Canvas LMS at Benazir Bhutto Women's University for the Intensive English Language and Soft Skill Development course during the COVID-19 pandemic has been remarkably successful. This study has the potential to offer valuable insights for policymakers and educators who are considering the implementation of Canvas LMS in various subject areas to enhance and optimize the learning process. Canvas enhanced the learning experience for students in the Intensive English Language and Soft Skill Development course, making it more efficient and dynamic. The positive outcomes of integrating Canvas LMS into the

Intensive English Language and Soft Skill Development course during the pandemic demonstrate its ability to improve learning across different disciplines. Policymakers and teachers should consider this study when making decisions about adopting educational technologies and platforms for online education that are effective and engaging.

Methodology

The study used a sequential explanatory research design, which combines both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale. The model of regression was used to quantify the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variables. This study examines the impact of the program's actual use on many independent variables, including perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, satisfaction, and intent to use the application.

The study population consisted of 200 female students from Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women's University who participated in the rigorous English Language and soft skills development virtual course between 2021 and 2022. Raosoft table has been utilized to determine the sample size for quantitative data, which in this case consisted of 132 respondents. Regarding the qualitative aspect, went through interviews with a total of 10 respondents, and the data obtained reached a point of saturation. This research used a simple random sample procedure for the quantitative component. The qualitative section of the research included purposive sampling.

Tools for Collecting Data

The data collection tools used in the present research consisted of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. To collect quantitative data, a questionnaire was created using themes derived from the study goals and research questions. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale. Interviews provide a method of actively and systematically conversing in order to get an in-depth understanding of particular scenarios.

Data Analysis

An analysis was undertaken separately for both quantitative and qualitative data. The collected quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 23:

1. The data is given in a descriptive manner, including information on frequency and proportion.
2. The regression model is used to assess the assumptions in the technology acceptance model.

The data collected from interviews is analyzed using theme analysis. The patterns and themes in the answers are thoroughly analyzed. The theme analysis focused specifically on obtaining a deeper understanding of the viewpoints and intricacies related to student experiences.

Section A: Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data comprises the following themes: (i) Perceived ease of use, (ii) perceived usefulness, (iii) behavioral intention to use, and (iv) actual use. At the end Regression Model is applied and an interpretation of the hypothesis is presented.

Table 1: Perceived Ease of Use

S#	Statement	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
1.	Initially, I used to be told about the functions of each tab.	25 (19.1)	84 (64.1)	12 (9.2)	10 (7.6)	0 (0)
2.	My interaction with LMS is clear and understandable	35 (26.7)	83 (63.4)	13 (9.9)	0 (0)	0 (0)
3.	My dashboard tab notifies me about the course I am registered in and shows me the progress of my course.	59 (45)	67 (51.1)	5 (3.8)	0 (0)	0 (0)
4.	I complete my assignments on Canvas before deadline.	32 (24.4)	82 (62.6)	10 (7.6)	6 (4.6)	1 (0.8)

Item 1 signifies that 83.2% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that initially, they used to be told about the functions of each tab, 7.6% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 9.2 % of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 2 indicates that 90.1% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had clear and understandable interaction with LMS, 0% of the respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement; whereas only 9.9 % of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 3 highlights that 96.1% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their dashboard tab notifies them about the course they have registered in and shows them the progress of their course, 0% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 3.8% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 4 shows that 93.1% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that different avenues within the canvas have been helpful for me to locate files, modules, assignments, people and grades, 1.5% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 5.3% of the respondents remained undecided.

Table 2: Perceived Usefulness

S#	Statement	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
1.	After the online class, I did the assignment on Canvas related to my topic which strengthened my understanding of the topic	47 (35.9)	70 (53.4)	8 (6.1)	2 (1.5)	4 (3.1)
2.	Canvas quizzes have a significant role in formative assessment of the topic.	48 (36.6)	70 (53.4)	11 (8.4)	2 (1.5)	0 (0)
3.	The time duration to attempt the quiz is enough on Canvas	47 (35.9)	71 (54.2)	11 (8.4)	2 (1.5)	0 (0)
4.	Canvas increases my productivity and it is easy for me to become skillful by using Canvas application	36 (27.5)	73 (55.7)	18 (13.7)	4 (3.1)	0 (0)

Item 1 indicates that 89.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that after the online class, they did the assignment on Canvas related to their topic that strengthens their understanding about the topic, 4.6 % of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 6.1% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 2 reveals that 90% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Canvas quizzes has a significant role in formative assessment of the topic, 1.5% of the respondents disagreeing or

strongly disagreeing with the statement; whereas only 8.4% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 3 signifies that 90.1% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the time duration to attempt the quiz is enough on Canvas, 1.5% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 8.4% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 4 shows that 83.2% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Canvas increases their productivity and it is easy for them to become skillful by using Canvas application, 3.1 % of the respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement; whereas only 13.5% of the respondents remained undecided.

Table 3: Behavioral Intention to use

S#	Statement	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
1.	Are you satisfied with the use of canvas	50 (38.2)	60 (45.8)	17 (13)	4 (3.1)	0 (0)
2.	Canvas gives me 2 nd chance to attempt my quiz; if I score below 70 in the first attempt, which gives me space to improve	51 (38.9)	75 (57.3)	3 (2.3)	2 (1.5)	0 (0)
3.	When my quiz disappears I have to re-attempt the quiz and submit it which is very time-consuming	14 (10.7)	45 (34.4)	31 (23.7)	38 (29)	3 (2.3)
4.	It's well organized and I can keep track of my grades and activities	16 (12.2)	31 (23.7)	39 (29.8)	34 (26)	11 (8.4)
5.	I strongly prefer using the canvas tool for the digital learning environment. This is my first time and the traditional classroom seemed very outdated to me	34 (26)	77 (58.8)	15 (11.5)	2 (1.5)	3 (2.3)

Item 1 signifies that 84% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the use of Canvas, 3.1% of the respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement; whereas only 13% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 2 shows that 96.2 % of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Canvas gave them 2nd chance to attempt my quiz; if they scored below 70 on the first attempt, it gave them space to improve, 1.5 % of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 2.3% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 3 reveals that 45.1 % of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that when the quiz disappeared they had to re-attempt the quiz and submit it, which was very time-consuming, 31.3% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 23.7% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 4 shows that 35.9% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that It was well organized and they could keep track of their grades and activities, 34.4% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 29.8% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 5 indicates that 84.4% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they strongly preferred using the canvas tool for the digital learning environment, the traditional classroom

seemed very outdated to them, 3.8% of the respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement; whereas only 11.5% of the respondents remained undecided.

Table 4: Actual Use

S#	Statement	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
1.	Once I started using Canvas I found it hard to stop	39 (29.8)	86 (65.6)	5 (3.8)	1 (0.8)	0 (0)
2.	In my University students who use LMS are considered more prestigious	26 (19.8)	60 (45.8)	17 (13)	25 (19.1)	3 (2.3)
3.	According to the security point canvas is a secure platform that does not share data without permission	27 (20.6)	57 (43.5)	37 (28.2)	7 (5.3)	3 (2.3)

Item 1 indicates that 95.4% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that once they started using Canvas they found it hard to stop, 0.8 % of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 3.8% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 2 signifies that 65.5% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the University students who used LMS were considered more prestigious, 21.4% of the respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement; whereas only 13% of the respondents remained undecided.

Item 3 shows that 64.1% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that according to cyber security canvas is a secured platform which did not share the data without permission, 7.6% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, whereas only 28.2% of the respondents remained undecided.

Table 5: Regression Model

Hypotheses	R	R2	F	p-value
H01: There is not a significance relationship between the perceived ease of use and actual use of Canvas learning management system.	.576	.332	92.41	0.003

H01: Regression model was used to test the hypothesis that there is not a significant relationship between the perceived ease of use and actual use of Canvas learning management system. Independent variable *perceived ease of use* which is has significant influence on dependent variable and *actual use of Canvas learning management system*; results are significant at level 0.05.

The finding of the analysis is significant ($F=92.41$) with $p=0.003$. The results also show that a linear combination of the two variables *perceived ease of use* on and *actual use of Canvas learning management system* has a significant influence, the correlation coefficient ($R=.576$)

shows strong influence between *perceived ease of use of student's learning* and *actual use of Canvas learning management system*; thus the model has significant influence. Moreover, $R^2 = .332$ indicates that 33% difference is found in the model for the respondents. Hence, we reject our null hypothesis that Regression model is used to test the hypothesis that there is not a significant relationship between the perceived ease of use of student's learning and actual use of Canvas learning management system.

Table 6: Regression Model

Hypotheses	R	R ²	F	p-value
Ho2: There is no significance relationship among students' perceived usefulness, satisfaction and actual use of Canvas application.	.672	.452	153.14	0.000

Ho2: There is not a significant relationship among students' perceived usefulness, satisfaction and actual use of Canvas application. Independent variable *perceived usefulness*, and *satisfaction* has a significant influence on dependent variable *actual use of Canvas application*, results is significant at level 0.05. The findings of the analysis is significant ($F=153.14$), with $p=0.000$. The results also discover that there is linear combination of two variables (*perceived usefulness*, *satisfaction* on dependent variable *actual use of Canvas application*) has a significant influence, The correlation coefficient ($R = .672$), shows that *perceived usefulness*, *satisfaction* has very strong effect on dependent variable *actual use of Canvas application*; thus the model has significant influence. Moreover, $R^2 = .452$ indicates that 45% of the difference is found in the model for the respondents. Hence, we reject our hypothesis that the Regression model which is used to test the hypothesis that there is not a significant relationship among students' perceived usefulness, satisfaction, and actual use of the Canvas application.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis of Students' Interviews

Thematic analysis was carried out after conducting interviews with students supported by quotations gleaned from the statements.

One of the respondents stated:

In this course, we attended webinars, which are a great to expand your knowledge and gain new insights on a variety of topics. It's important to continually learn and grow in our understanding of the world around us, and webinars provide a convenient way to do so, if I learned about a new productivity tool during a webinar, I tried to incorporate it into my work routine to see how it can increase my productivity. (Respondent 1)

It's the best platform for virtual learning. Canvas is worth using as it is a popular cloud-based learning management system (LMS) that allows educational institutions, businesses, and organizations to manage and deliver online courses and training programs. (Respondent 1)

If I get the opportunity to use Canvas I definitely use it in the future. (Respondent 1)

I definitely recommend it to my friend and I actually recommend it to all my fellows because of the educational and professional benefits of the courses. (Respondent 1-10)

The majority of the respondents reported that Canvas's easy-to-use design is one of its best features, it also has a number of tools, that make it easier to work together or individually in an effective way, and it has a user-friendly interface and mobile accessibility. Hence, it all-around worthwhile option to enhance the learning experience, So Canvas is worth using as an LMS. Canvas offers a great benefit in its capacity to interface with an extensive array of educational technologies. Students give great value to this application and programs offered through it and recommend it to others as well so everyone could benefit from this great educational application.

Conclusions

- The study has provided a comprehensive analysis of students' perceptions and experiences regarding the Canvas application and its associated tools in the context of online learning. In this concluding section, the key findings from the study are synthesized, and conclusions are drawn regarding the impact of Canvas on online education. The study has examined various aspects, including students' perceptions of Canvas, its ease of use, perceived usefulness, behavioral intentions to use, and actual use.
- From one of the prominent findings of the study, it can be concluded that there is an overwhelmingly positive perception of Canvas among students. Students generally appreciated its user-friendly nature and found it easy to navigate, especially after becoming familiar with the platform.
- It can be concluded that a significant portion of students expressed satisfaction with Canvas as a digital learning platform.
- In essence, Canvas was valued for its user-friendly design, convenience, and ability to facilitate a variety of learning activities. The study indicated that while Canvas is effective for many students, its suitability varies with individual digital skills and highlighted the benefits of flexible online learning. Further improvements in system performance, technical support, and addressing technical issues are necessary to enhance the overall learning experience for students using Canvas and associated tools. Despite some challenges, Canvas remains a valuable platform for managing courses and engaging in online learning activities.

Recommendations

- The study explored that the Canvas application is heavy for their system, which leads to reloading problems and causes frustration for students, so it is recommended that the application server be improved.
- Based on the study's findings, Canvas's self-paced classes are good for intrinsically motivated students, but it has been found that some students lack intrinsic motivation and

lose their focus in virtual classes, so it is recommended that instructors take feedback from all the students and motivate such students who lose their interest in the class.

- The technical support system should be improved for a more user-friendly interface to resolve the issues.
- Canvas LMS is used for a non-credited course of English language and soft skills development, but as this study proved, students are satisfied with the use and features of Canvas, so it is recommended that the policymakers should employ Canvas application for campus courses as well, or a similar compatible system should be introduced on campus to enhance students technological experience for advanced learning.
- A future study can be conducted to compare Canvas with other learning management systems (LMSs) to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in supporting teaching and learning. This study could also compare the user experience of Canvas with other LMS.
- This study considers only female students, and it is suggested that in the future, research should be conducted with both male and female students.
- This study investigates students' perceptions of Canvas in a virtual learning environment for future research. It is interesting to investigate the use of Canvas learning management systems in a different learning environment, such as blended environment.
- This study has the potential to provide valuable insights for stakeholder's policymakers and educators who are considering implementing Canvas LMS in different subject areas to improve and maximize the learning process.

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***The Japaneseness of Japanese English:
Thinking Through Esyun Hamaguchi's Contextualism***

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Abstract

This research explores the phenomenon of Japanese English (JE) as a reflection of Japanese cultural identity within the broader paradigm of World Englishes (WE). Focusing on the city of Kyoto, the study delves into how Japanese speakers' English usage exhibits distinct cultural patterns, influenced by Japan's linguistic heritage and cultural values. Using Van Manen's phenomenological approach, the research reflects on the lived experiences of Japanese individuals engaging in English conversations, aiming to uncover the nuanced ways in which Japanese cultural patterns are expressed through language use. The study first provides an overview of JE within the WE framework, highlighting its unique phonological, lexical, syntactic, and discoursal features. It then employs Esyun Hamaguchi's concept of Contextualism to analyze the cultural underpinnings of JE, revealing how Japanese speakers prioritize relationships and context in their communication, often employing back-channeling and topic-comment constructions that reflect their cultural norms. The findings suggest that JE is more than a mere linguistic variation; it is a legitimate variety of English that embodies Japanese cultural identity. By recognizing JE and its distinct features, Japanese speakers can communicate more effectively and confidently, preserving their cultural identity in global interactions. This study contributes to the understanding of JE as a valid form of English and underscores the importance of incorporating cultural perspectives into the study of language varieties.

Keywords: World Englishes, Japanese English, Contextualism, Esyun Hamaguchi

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Introduction

Kyoto, a city of unparalleled beauty, epitomizes traditional Japan. Despite its age and delicate heritage, Kyoto stands at the forefront of global cultural exchange, attracting visitors worldwide who come to experience its unique “Japaneseness.” This term encompasses expressions of Japanese spirit, culture, and values. The juxtaposition of tradition and globalization places Kyoto squarely within the broader national dilemma of balancing indigenous values with global needs. Hino (2009) highlights the tension between the dominant use of the Japanese language in domestic life and the global demand for English proficiency. Japan faces the significant challenge of integrating English into its educational system and daily life without compromising its cultural and linguistic heritage.

In Kyoto, English conversations are common in temples, shrines, campuses, and virtually everywhere, as Japanese and foreign visitors engage in dialogue. This phenomenon underscores the city's role in addressing this national issue. While the Japanese language and cultural heritage are deeply rooted in Kyoto, the necessity for English proficiency reflects the increasing influence of globalization. The dilemma is further complicated by the fact that English, with its Anglo-American cultural roots, is linguistically distant from Japanese, making it a challenging language for Japanese learners. Thus, Kyoto exemplifies the challenge Japan faces in harmonizing the preservation of its rich cultural identity with the practical demands of global communication, serving as a microcosm of the national struggle to navigate this complex linguistic and cultural landscape. As an international student living in Kyoto, I find great joy in listening to or participating in these conversations. They are like intricate cocktails, each one offering endless creativity and possibilities. Immersing myself in these dialogues, I began to notice a distinct pattern in how Japanese speakers use English. This observation sparked my curiosity: Why do the Japanese speak English in this particular manner? This question led me to explore the cultural foundations of English acquisition in Japan. I realized that from ordinary citizens to academic scholars, regardless of their English competency, many possess a pattern of expressions—a certain Japanese English, or “English with Japanese flavor as a reflection of Japanese values” (Hino, 2021, pp.4).

To delve deeper into this phenomenon, this study will first review the characteristics of Japanese English from the perspective of World Englishes, providing a foundational understanding of how Japanese English fits within the broader paradigm. Following this, this research employs Van Manen's phenomenological approach to reflect textually on the lived experiences of Japanese English conversations to uncover the nuanced ways in which Japanese cultural patterns are expressed through language use. Phenomenology, as defined by Van Manen (2016), is the study of human science that aims to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence. This approach, deeply rooted in the German concept of “Geist,” focuses on the study of “persons”—beings that possess “consciousness” and “act purposefully” within the world, creating objects of “meaning” that are “expressions” of their existence. Unlike other social science methodologies, phenomenology seeks to engage with human beings' lived experiences as they naturally occur in their worlds. Lived experience, a central concept in phenomenology, refers to the immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life. It represents a determinate and meaningful aspect of one's life, capturing the essence of how individuals exist and interact with their surroundings. Consider a scenario where you are participating in a panel discussion. Suddenly, all eyes are focused on you, and this intense gaze disrupts your natural relationship with your voice and body, forcing you into awkward movements. However, once you become engaged in the debate, the presence of the audience fades from your consciousness, allowing you to immerse yourself directly into the activity

again. The latter moment, where you are fully engaged in the activity, is what can be termed as "lived experience." This lived experience can be understood as a unified whole, given a distinct significance. Such experiences are constructed through reflection and inherently possess a temporal structure. They cannot be grasped directly as they occur; rather, they are apprehended reflectively as past occurrences. We cannot capture the "living experience" itself, as it always becomes meaningful only when we reflect upon it as something that has already been lived. In the context of this study, the lived experience is the moment of "engaging in English conversations with Japanese." At the time, I was deeply engaged in my role, unaware of the significance of my observations. It was only through later reflection that I could demarcate this experience as a unified whole, imbued with special meaning. This lived experience, constructed in hindsight, revealed the complexity of cultural interaction and language use in a way I hadn't grasped in the moment. The temporal structure of the experience became apparent; its significance emerged only as I looked back, assigning meaning to what had already transpired. Thus, the manifestation of Japaneseness became a profound reflection on cultural expression and communication, a moment that was lived and later understood.

In reflecting on this experience, phenomenology aims to insightfully describe and express the essence of how we pre-reflectively engage with the world, without categorizing, classifying, or abstracting these experiences. By elucidating the meaning of lived experience through phenomenological description, we are guided toward a more direct interaction with the world of Japaneseness. The text, once reflectively expressed, is lived again in a non-reflective manner, undergoing repeated cycles of reflection and lived experience. The choice to apply a phenomenological approach is motivated by the desire to deeply understand the manifestations of Japaneseness in the speech of English speakers in Japan. This research is not merely an academic exercise but a personal journey to articulate and interpret my own experiences within the Japanese cultural context. By doing so, I aim to connect with readers, particularly Japanese English speakers, who may share similar experiences and perspectives, thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of the research. In contrast to traditional studies that often draw on Western theorists, this research is anchored in the works of Japanese scholars. This decision underscores the importance of an emic perspective—understanding phenomena from within the cultural context itself. Japanese thinkers provide insights that are closely aligned with the cultural and social realities of Japan, offering a more intimate and resonant framework for analysis.

JE: A Legitimate Variety?

The global dominance of English leads to the emergence of diverse, localized varieties of English, each reflecting distinct cultural and linguistic influences. The World Englishes (WE) paradigm developed by Kachru (1985) was therefore established to examine the different varieties of English spoken around the world, and these varieties can be distinguished by their various phonology, lexicon, syntax, pragmatic and cultural patterns. He presented a model of three Concentric Circles to analyze the spread of English. The Inner circle includes countries that are considered the traditional bases of English, and where English is primarily used as L1 or mother tongue, such as United Kingdom, United States, anglophone Canada, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. The Inner circle produces norms because of its authentic cultural and linguistic base of English. Included in the Outer Circle are countries where English is spoken as an official, and domestic communication language, such as India, Pakistan, Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore. Many countries of the Outer circle are significantly and historically influenced by the Inner circle's countries, often as their former

colonies and thus norm-developing. Today, English is still considered to be a dominant language after their independence. Finally, the Expanding circle is made up of the vast number of countries that do not hold historical and governmental significance towards English, but speak and teach English as a foreign language of the most importance. It includes, for example, China, Japan, South Korea, Egypt, and Indonesia. These countries are norm-dependent.

JE is often viewed through the lens of WE as a variety of English influenced by the Japanese language and primarily used by speakers in Japan. In Japan, English is the most widely studied foreign language, with almost all students learning it from middle school onward (Ikegashira et al., 2009). Despite this widespread study, JE remains a performative rather than an institutionalized variety due to its limited use within Japan (Morrow, 2004; Yano, 2001). This raises the question: Can JE be considered a distinct variety of English? Numerous studies have identified unique phonological, lexical, syntactic, and discursal characteristics of JE, suggesting it is indeed a legitimate variety despite its performative status.

English vowels pose significant challenges for Japanese speakers due to their wide range of sounds. D'Angelo et al. (2021) cite Thompson (2001) to emphasize that Japanese learners often default to their native /a/ sound when attempting to pronounce several English vowels, such as /æ/ and /ə/. Wiltshire (2014) notes that while many non-native English accents blur the tense/lax distinction, JE speakers uniquely retain it, highlighting the deep influence of native Japanese phonology. Except for familiar English vowel sounds like “i” in “happy,” “e” in “bet,” and “a” in “heart,” many English vowels can be problematic for Japanese learners. Consequently, vowels like the “i” in “bird” or the “a” in “arrive” often shift towards the more recognizable Japanese “a” sound.

Studies of Japanese speakers' spoken and written English also indicate the distinctiveness of JE. D'Angelo et al. (2021) found that while Japanese grammar includes a past tense, JE speakers exhibit diverse tendencies when using it. Some adhere strictly to standard past tense rules, even if they omit tenses in their native language. Others default to the present tense for past events, leading to expressions such as “Canada summer is not hot” instead of “The summer in Canada was not hot.” Another group switches between past and present tenses within the same context, revealing inconsistent application. Additionally, plural formation in JE is influenced by the notion of countability rather than strict grammatical rules. For instance, nouns like “seasons” are typically pluralized, but more abstract concepts are not, reflecting the influence of Japanese grammar on JE (Yamaguchi, 2018).

JE is further distinguished by its discursal and pragmatic features, influenced by the Japanese topic-comment structure and culture. For example, a native English speaker might say, “I saw many people at the park,” whereas a JE speaker is more likely to say, “There were many people at the park,” emphasizing the setting. This frequent use of the there-construction reflects the Japanese inclination to emphasize settings or situations over subjects or agents, mirroring the topic-comment construction in Japanese (D'Angelo et al., 2021).

JE is also characterized by frequent back-channeling, where short words, phrases, or sounds indicate active listening. Studies by White (1989) show that Japanese speakers in English conversations use back-channeling more frequently than American speakers. This is not merely an imitation of Western styles but a manifestation of Japanese cultural emphasis on making others feel comfortable (Todd, 2019). The word “hai” in Japanese, often translated as “yes,” can also indicate listening or understanding, even without agreement (Galtung &

Nishimura, 1983). Thus, frequent back-channeling in JE helps maintain smooth communication and confirm relationships.

While JE is often perceived to have “washu” (the scent of Japan) and be understood primarily by Japanese speakers, studies suggest that JE is intelligible, acceptable, and comprehensible to English speakers (D’Angelo et al., 2021). It operates under a different set of rules than the English of Inner Circle countries, legitimizing JE as an independent variety of English. This perspective supports the view that JE, although performative, is a valid and distinct form of English.

JE as a Language of Self-Expression

In my participation in dialogues between Japanese individuals fluent in English and native English speakers, I’ve noticed that Japanese individuals often struggle to express certain concepts or emotions in English. Consequently, they prefer to use Japanese to convey certain attitudes or cultural contexts, regardless of whether the non-Japanese speakers can understand them.

During my Master’s studies, I worked part-time as a concierge at Kyoto City Bus in Kyoto Station. My coworkers are fluent in English or capable of communicating effectively in English. We are required to perform “omotenashi” when providing route guidance to our guests. While “omotenashi” translates to “hospitality,” its connotations run deeper, indicating a heartfelt, earnest approach that suggests an intuitive understanding of others’ needs before they’re even voiced (Morishita, 2021). The service given is unselfish, expecting no reward and viewed as an act of sacrifice. I observed that my coworkers, when interacting with English-speaking guests, use certain phrases to try and convey the spirit of “omotenashi.” When bidding guests farewell, they use the honorific Japanese phrase “O ki wo tsukete itterasshaimase,” which translates to “Take care and be safe on your journey,” a phrase carrying implicit concern for the guest’s well-being. However, having lived in New Zealand and accustomed to communicating in English, I prefer to use more typical English expressions like “Have a nice day.”

The observed phenomenon can be interpreted from several viewpoints. Firstly, it’s legitimate to consider the language proficiency of my coworkers. Their English skills might not be sufficient to find an equivalent English phrase that fully captures the essence of “omotenashi.” This explanation is plausible, given that English proficiency is not necessary for the job. However, it falls short in accounting for why some coworkers, who have advanced English skills due to their overseas education, still opt for Japanese phrases instead of typical English responses. Secondly, we could consider the possibility that this practice adheres to company guidelines, emphasizing the use of Japanese to maintain the spirit of “omotenashi.” However, this explanation presents a paradox. If the spirit of “omotenashi” is maintained throughout the English-language route guidance, the sudden switch to Japanese for farewells seems inconsistent. Why should there be a linguistic transition at the conclusion of the service interaction, particularly when the rest of the conversation has been in English? If the use of non-Japanese language for farewells is indeed restricted, why am I granted the flexibility to use English? This exception contradicts the supposed rule and raises further questions about the actual reasoning behind the language choice. Another possible explanation is that my coworkers acknowledge the limitations of the English language in expressing the depth and nuances of “omotenashi.” In other words, they might believe that

the concept can be truly conveyed only in its native language and thus deliberately switch to Japanese for farewells after providing route guidance in English.

The phenomenon in question is not exclusive to my experience. A close look at these various phenomena leads to an interesting realization. The choice to employ specific Japanese terms and phrases, even when fluent in English, goes beyond linguistic preferences. It captures the distinctiveness deeply rooted in the Japanese worldview by speaking to the interplay of language and culture. It isn't merely about words but the embodiment of values and cultural nuances that cannot be conveyed accurately through translation. Despite being able to speak English, why do the Japanese still choose to use Japanese for certain expressions? There are deeply embedded aspects of Japaneseness that are hard to express in English, so they choose to use Japanese eventually. These phenomena implicitly hint at a preference among Japanese individuals for applying this Japaneseness in their interactions. It demonstrates the profound ways in which language preserves and reflects the fundamentals of a culture, affirming that some things are preferred in their distinctiveness, transcending the simple use of words and finding expression in the interdependence of human connection.

Reflecting philosophically on Hino's claim, it is insightful to recall Kitaro Nishida's observation. Nishida, a prominent Japanese philosopher and founder of the Kyoto School of philosophy, states:

"I think that often the study of things Japanese is equated with the Japanese spirit and that it is forgotten that the Japanese spirit comes alive in the Japanese way of looking at things and thinking about things. We should not forget that the Japanese spirit can manifest itself through that study. And this Japanese spirit, in turn, works toward things Japanese. We must not be misguided by mere outward labels." (Theodore et al., 2005, p. 1171)

As Nishida points out, the study of things Japanese cannot be divorced from the unique Japanese spirit. This spirit is not just about the tangible products of the culture; more significantly, it manifests in the distinct Japanese way of thinking and perceiving things. Similarly, when a Japanese individual communicates in English, their distinct cultural perspective and way of thinking are likely reflected in their English use. This aligns with what Nishiyama (1995) identified as "speaking English with a Japanese mind."

In conclusion, the use of Japanese phrases by fluent English speakers in Japan reflects a deeper cultural phenomenon. It is a conscious choice to convey specific cultural values and nuances that cannot be fully captured by English. This practice underscores the importance of recognizing and respecting the cultural context in language use, and it highlights the intricate relationship between language and culture.

The Japaneseness in Japanese English

In the previous section, I have explored the manifestation of Japaneseness when Japanese people speak English. The exploration into the Japaneseness of JE has remained somewhat underdeveloped in the thesis so far, with linguistic investigations predominantly orienting towards the phonological dimensions of language (Suzuki, 1973). The culture embedded within languages was largely sidelined, deemed as a non-linguistic phenomenon, and thus almost excised from the core linguistic discourse. This exclusion predominantly stemmed from the perception of culture as an elusive, abstract domain that ostensibly offered no

tangible material for objective examination. Even as we delineated the distinguishing attributes of JE, the examination from a cultural lens remains scant, highlighting a substantial gap in existing literature.

This calls for an investigation into the Japaneseness embodied in JE. It is here that the concept of Kanjinshugi (Contextualism), as proposed by the Japanese sociologist, Etsun Hamaguchi (1982, 1988), emerges as a potentially illuminating framework, offering a lens through which the cultural pattern of JE could be reinterpreted and understood anew.

According to Hamaguchi et al (1988), contextualism refers to a way of living where one places importance on relationships between people and finds one's own identity within those relationships. It differs from those general contextualisms at the epistemological level but dives into the ontological level. The term "Kanjin" is crucial in grasping the concept of contextualism.¹ Kanjin signifies the interconnectedness of individuals, emphasizing that one's sense of self is deeply rooted in the relationships they forge with others.

Every culture has its own perspective on humanity, which is essentially an understanding of human nature (Hamaguchi et al., 1988). This belief in each society serves as a clear benchmark for comprehending what it means to be human, and "self," helping members of that society recognize how individuals socially coexist. In certain cultures, there is a strong conviction that humans fundamentally exist as distinct and autonomous entities. In contrast, other cultures see it as a natural condition for individuals to rely on one another when they are part of a community. According to Hamaguchi et al (1988), East-Asian people including the Japanese emphasizes the importance of relationships in shaping an individual. In this model, an individual is not determined a priori but by their interactions and relationships with others. This individual recognizes the functional ties they share with others and forms a cohesive system by integrating these relational roles. Self-recognition is progressively built through personal interactions with those in proximity, and behavioral guidelines emerge from these interactions. In such a view of a human being and self-existence, Hamaguchi, referencing the philosopher Arimasa Mori, pointed out that one does not engage with the other simply as "I" to "you." Instead, one always interacts as "your you," perceiving oneself in a relative context to the other.

This concept from Mori can be puzzling. To better understand his words, let's consider the lyrics from a Japanese song, "Kimi ga tame" (For Your Sake). The song goes:

*In what kind of color am I reflected in your eyes?
If you wish it to be deep red, then I shall give you the light of the sun.*
...
*In what kind of color am I reflected in your eyes?
If you wish it to be deep indigo, then I shall give you the endless sky.*
...

Here, the recurring question, "In what kind of color am I reflected in your eyes?," we are confronted with a metaphorical quest for self-understanding. This isn't just about an internal

¹ For the usage of the word "contextual" as an English translation of "kanjin," see Kumon Shumpei, "The New Middle Mass in Japan," Proceedings of the International Symposium "Japan Speaks," 1980, 11-15. See also Kumon Shumpei, "Some Principles Governing the Thought and Behavior of Japanists (Contextualists)," Journal of Japanese Studies, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1982), p. 19. As a more precise expression for kanjin, we may use "manin-nexus." (See Hamaguchi, "Nihon shakai-ron no paradaimu kakushin o mezashite," (p. 38-39.)

self-assessment, but about how one is perceived by others. The “self” is not purely intrinsic. It's shaped by the reflections, perceptions, and relationships with those around us. As we navigate this relationship, it becomes evident that our understanding of “I” or the “self” is influenced, if not defined, by the “other.” Consequently, while seeking answers about oneself, it might be said that in many ways, the “I” is not just influenced by “you” but becomes “you.” The “I” or “self” is not an intrinsic or inherent entity, but a self-perceived from the perspective of another.

For Japanese, Hamaguchi argued, the concept of “self” does not refer to an abstract and inherent entity within oneself. Instead, it signifies a reality that is continually adapted and acquired in “Hito to Hito no Aida,” the space between oneself and others. The Japanese do not view the self as having its foundation rooted within. Who one is, and who the other is, is determined by the human relationship between them. There exists a human relationship before an individual is identified as such. Such pattern of the Japanese belongs to a type that sets its reference point based on others, emphasizing relationships and an interdependence nature. This stands in contrast to the Western individualism, where actions are based on an inner set of standards, “the self.”

Further, the lyrics also suggest a willingness to unlearn a “self” while adapting another “self,” that is to embody the “light of the sun” if seen as deep red or represent the “endless sky” if perceived as deep indigo. This coincidentally resonates with what Hamaguchi called “outside-in” type of behavior of the Japanese in which they behave with the frame of reference set in the partner. Generally speaking, Euro-Americans base their social actions on the ego, the “self,” acting from an individual-centric viewpoint and are “inside-out”. In contrast, the inclination of Japanese is to adjust their behavior based on the environment, and the people they're with, applying an “outside-in” approach. This is why the Japanese can navigate interdependence effectively by empathizing and seeing things from others' perspectives. Japanese indigenous concepts such as “Omotenashi” can therefore be explained thorough this perspective. “Omotenashi” is not just about reacting to expressed needs but proactively anticipating them. This anticipation requires an acute sensitivity to one's surroundings and a keen ability to read subtle cues, both verbal and non-verbal. Such attentiveness is deeply ingrained in the “outside-in” approach, where the contextualism, the in betweenness shapes individual and influence individual behavior.

To wrap up, the Contextualism is not just an intellectual concept, but a profound insight into the way many in East Asia, perhaps especially the Japanese, perceive their place in the world. It underscores the significance of interconnectedness, where the perception of “self” is not just isolated nor inherent, but a dynamic and fluid understanding molded by relationships with others.²

The Intersection of JE and Contextualism

Although many scholars have successfully identified pragmatic characteristics of JE, they failed to dive deeper and ask how Japanese culture is manifested in JE. In this section, I shall apply Contextualism to analyze the pattern of Japanese language by contrasting it to English, and explore how it effects Japanese people when speaking English.

² However, it should be reminded that neither Hamaguchi nor I is claiming the distinctiveness of Japaneseness drawn from contextualism is so unique that it cannot be observed in another cultural context. We're simply saying that Japan puts more emphasis on this interdependence orientation.

In the English language, the distinct prominence of the capitalized "I" serves as a symbol of the culture's emphasis on individualism (Galtung & Nishimura, 1983; Kashima & Kashima, 1998). For instance, statements often begin with a clear "I think" or "I believe," highlighting personal opinions and stances. This frequent and assertive use of "I" is a linguistic pattern which encapsulates the Western ethos of personal autonomy and self-expression.

On the contrary, "I" in the Japanese language can be understood better when viewed through the lens of Contextualism. As previously discussed, Contextualism emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals and the importance of relationships. In the Japanese language, this interconnectedness becomes evident through the multiple ways one can refer to oneself, each signaling different nuances about the speaker's identity, relationship to the listener, and the context in which it's spoken. For instance, "Watashi" might be used in generic situations, not tying the speaker down to a particular gender or age, making it neutral and adaptable to different contexts. "Boku" or "Ore," on the other hand, provides information not just about the speaker's gender but also about their relationship with the listener, be it one of respect, camaraderie, or dominance. Further, historically, "Chin" is used by emperors to refer to themselves, it carries with it not just the weight of individual identity, but a whole institutional and historical context. Its use symbolized the emperor's unique position in the societal and cosmic order (Makino & Tsutsui, 1986).

Based on these examples, each term for "I" in Japanese serves as a marker, as a relational concept, of their relationship to the listener and the wider context. I'm a teacher, not by destiny's design, but because there are students, seeking knowledge, awaiting my words; An "I" is defined not only by birthright but by the place as a leaf on the family tree, as a treasured friend, and as a memory in the hearts known and unknown. I am Nishida Kitaro, beginning with the family name "Nishida" to signify biological ties, followed by "Kitaro," what a Westerner might understand as "myself." The notion of "I" is only grounded when there's a relational context.

The relational approach to self-existence is deeply embedded in the Japanese language and culture and stands as evidence to the profound influence of Contextualism. When Japanese speak English, this approach is carried over as they often prioritize and give precedence to context before delving into other details. Take one of the characteristics of JE, for example, topic-comment construction as I previously mentioned. It's a structure where the background, setting, or context (the topic) is introduced before any action or specific detail (the comment) is provided. It allows for diverse connections between a subject and a verb, as the function of a subject often serves as the "topic" of a sentence, while the predicate provides a descriptive "comment" about it, such as in "Kyo wa isogashii (Today is busy)" (D'Angelo et al., 2021). When a JE speaker says, "There were many people at the park," the emphasis is immediately on the setting, the park. The park, as the topic or context, is brought to the forefront, anchoring any subsequent information within that setting. This reflects the topic-comment construction of the Japanese language, which, influenced by Contextualism, prioritizes context over individual agents. Contrast this with standard English, where the subject or agent is often given prominence, as in "I saw many people at the park." Here, the emphasis starts with the individual "I", reflecting a more individualistic or agent-driven approach.

Another characteristic of JE, frequent back-channeling, a prevalent characteristic among JE speakers, is deeply rooted in the cultural framework that emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between the speaker and the listener. Japanese often use words such as "hai" to signal the speakers that "I'm listening," "I'm receiving the signals you emit" (Galtung &

Nishimura, 1983). Even when speaking in English, Japanese speakers carry over this ingrained habit, highlighting its significance in their interpersonal communication style. When a JE listener frequently nods or uses short affirmative responses, they're doing more than signaling that they're following along. Each nod and every "mmhm" or "uh huh" is a reaffirmation of their presence in the conversation. It's as if they're continuously saying, "I'm here, I'm with you, and I value what you're saying" in order to maintain the relationship and have a smooth conversation. And if the listener stops giving these "mmmhmmm" vocalizations, the JE speaker will usually stop. Meanwhile an American or Australian will just keep on going.

Although there is much more to explore regarding how JE is influenced by its Japaneseness through Contextualism, the pragmatic characteristics of JE are more than just linguistic features. They are manifestations of a philosophy deeply rooted in Japaneseness that places importance on the intricate web of interpersonal relationships. This perspective offers an alternative understanding of self-existence and stands as a principle central to Contextualism. Encapsulating philosophical studies within Global Englishes is essential, as it aids in fostering cross-cultural studies and communication, enabling us to uncover the hidden patterns of an English variety.

Conclusion

Over the decades, linguistics has significantly evolved, largely due to Chomsky's theories (Everett, 2009). Contemporary linguistic studies often focus on analyzing the phonology and grammar of languages, frequently sidelining the people and cultures associated with these languages. Most linguistic theories today do not adequately acknowledge or incorporate the role of culture in shaping a language's structure and usage. This oversight underscores the importance of studying English varieties, such as JE, where cultural influences distinctly shape the language in ways not typically envisioned in traditional linguistic theories. The question arises: How should we speak English—Americanly, Britishly, Chinesely, Japanesely, or internationally? The ultimate goal of mastering a language is to convey the speaker's intended nuances of meaning, facilitating effective communication and interdependence. Simply imitating native English speakers would not necessarily allow Japanese speakers to express their distinct viewpoints and cultural contexts effectively (Saito, 1928). Language is not just a decontextualized tool for communication; it is a reflection of worldview. Speaking JE represents more than a linguistic combination of Japanese and English. It embodies the Japanese spirit articulated by Nishida, allowing speakers to respect and maintain their Japanese identity without compromise.

By acknowledging JE and increasing studies of Japaneseness reflected in JE, Japanese speakers can communicate more positively and comfortably, expressing themselves in English. The significance of JE lies not just in effective communication but in the preservation and promotion of cultural identity and worldview in a global context. Through this approach, a Japanese individual can confidently declare, "I speak English."

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

I utilised generative AI and AI-assisted technologies, specifically ChatGPT-4 (<https://chatgpt.com/>), to enhance the readability of my paper. However, I did not use any AI

to generate information for background research, nor did I employ it during the drafting stage or in creating the outline structure for this paper.

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The Future of English as the Lingua Franca for Young Scientists in EFL Contexts

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Abstract

The future of English has become a hot topic of discussion in recent years where stakeholders in EFL contexts are considering the current and future needs of students. This three-year research project in a research university in Japan aimed to contribute to this discussion where current talks about the curriculum raised questions about the role of English as a lingua franca for young researchers. Two key questions which this project sought to answer regarded the changing role of English for the future of young researchers and if current curricula met their needs. A mixed method approach was taken through conducting surveys and semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders—student surveys (n=78) and interviews with professors (n=3), and industry experts (n=2). Interviews were recorded, and analysis was done by identifying areas of similarities in perceptions and gaps which emerged through differences. Initial findings showed similarities in the need for more opportunities for academic and research discussion with international students to be provided such as real-life simulations of specific future research and professional situations they will encounter. Core differences identified included perceptions of language and professional skills required to prepare students adequately for future research and job-related tasks. The key insight gleaned from this research is that although English remains the international language among researchers in global contexts, without ample opportunities for university-wide scientific discussions and a core understanding of skills needed to succeed, students cannot prepare sufficiently for their professional lives.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Student Professional Development

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Introduction

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has been at the forefront of the second language classroom for decades, especially for students in research universities. Numerous studies over the years have questioned, debated, and espoused the development of proficient English speakers as essential for students to navigate life successfully after graduating from university and entering the professional world of research or specific industry-related jobs (Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins, 2017; Seidlhofer, 2004). As technology continues to insert itself into all aspects of education—generating language to write research, and improving collaborations on global research projects through real-time translation of documents and interactions, universities are revisiting the concept of ELF as the core element for young researchers.

Over the years, English has become the established international language as it has helped to streamline communication around the world. In Japan, the focus on developing communicative “competent” English speakers had resulted in several guidelines from the Ministry of Education to be implemented from kindergarten to upper secondary schools. The 2002 Strategic Plan (MEXT, 2002) set out to foster “Japanese with English abilities” [*Eigo ga tsukaeru Nihonjin*], and described English as essential for the students’ future and the development of Japan in a globalized world:

With the progress of globalization in the economy and in society, it is essential that our children acquire communication skills in English, which has become a common international language, in order for living in the 21st century. This has become an extremely important issue both in terms of the future of our children and the further development of Japan as a nation.

A year later, in 2003 (MEXT, 2003), a more detailed Action Plan followed to cultivate “Japanese with English Abilities” [*Eigo ga tsukaeru Nihonjin” no Ikusei no tame no Kōdō Keikaku*].

In 2010, seven years later, MEXT began to make a shift towards building stronger relationships with neighboring countries in Asia focusing on intercultural development (MEXT, 2010). The mode of communication during these international exchange programs was English, further emphasizing the importance of ELF. Further reform in the following years continued to place English as the dominant language in the Japanese educational context, which led to institutions developing various mandatory language programs and courses which students were required to take to gain enough credits for graduation.

In 2011 (MEXT, 2011), the following year, MEXT published “Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication”:

1. English ability required of students – assessment and verification of attainment level
2. Promoting students’ awareness of necessity of English in the global society, and stimulating motivation for English learning
3. Providing students with more opportunities to use English through effective utilization of ALTs, ICT and other means
4. Reinforcement of English skills and instruction abilities of English teachers/Strategic improvement of English education at the level of schools and communities
5. Modification of university entrance exams toward global society

In 2013, the Ministry published the “English Education Reform Plan Corresponding to Globalization” [*Gurobaru-ka ni taio shita Eigo Kyoiku Kaikaku Jisshi Keikaku*] (MEXT, 2013), which promoted a more communicative style of language teaching over the typical test-taking, academic approach typically found in secondary schools. In 2018, a massive reform was implemented in secondary schools to focus mainly on logic and expression [ronri hyogen] which encouraged teachers to focus more on debate and discussion.

Thus, with the past two decades of MEXT implementing various reforms to promote ELF, students have naturally entered the tertiary classroom with the idea that English proficiency is at the core of their academic and professional life, with little thought given to other factors. In this kind of landscape, ELF has been positioned at the center of education for young researchers. However, questions have recently been asked by young researchers in post-graduate programs and instructors regarding whether English proficiency solely is enough to prepare students for the world after graduation.

The researchers in this three-year project thus sought to identify the current state of English as a Lingua Franca for young researchers from the perspectives of students, professors, and industry experts, and secondly, if the current methods of teaching were sufficient to prepare students for their future professional lives.

Research Context: A Multinational Learning Space

This research took place at a highly ranked research university in Japan. There is intense competition among students to secure a place in Japan’s top universities with an acceptance rate of about 25%. Students who are successful are usually the best in their fields and considered to be the ones who will contribute positively to the future of Japan. Graduate students are expected to give presentations in international conferences as part of their preparations for graduation. Students join small labs and engage in discussion and presentations about their research in their L1 and L2. Depending on lab professor’s expectations for students, there is a wide range of English proficiency levels across labs in different faculties. Labs consist of both Japanese and international students and there are few (or no) opportunities for communication between labs in different faculties. Participants in this study were purposively selected from students who enrolled in intensive presentation courses which aimed to assist students with their preparations for international conferences.

There was a mix of students from various faculties (e.g., Medical, Engineering, Agriculture, Integrated Human Studies, Economics, among others). Within each faculty, there were further subdivisions of departments, thus even if students were in the same faculty, they belonged to different labs and conducted research in vastly different areas. The presentation course mostly comprised of students from Japan, but there were also international students from countries such as China, Korea, Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Thailand, and France. Language proficiency among learners ranged from intermediate to fluent (CEFR¹ B1-C2) (CEFR, 2024). The various types of research content, different nationalities, and range of English proficiency levels made for an authentic international experience which students would face when they presented their research to a global audience.

¹ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an international standard for describing language ability. It describes language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for those who have mastered a language.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This qualitative research employed surveys and interviews to collect data from participants based on first-hand accounts. Over a period of two years, 78 graduate and doctoral students completed open-ended surveys including questions asking which professional skills they felt they required to become successful researchers and employees, which language skills were most important to achieve this success, and if the university provided sufficient services and opportunities to prepare them sufficiently for their future. Interviews with three professors and two industry experts asked comparable questions in the hope to understand similarities and differences in perceptions and identify gaps (see Appendix). Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and were transcribed. One professor did not have time for a long interview and chose to respond to interview questions over a few days in writing.

Data analysis was done by carefully reading through the survey results and transcripts and categorizing the data into areas of similarities and differences between students, professors, and industry experts. Both researchers conducted their own analysis of the data at first and then met later to share their interpretations. From the analysis, the researchers could construct a story and share their individual analysis of the data. Having two researchers analyze data in this way minimized the risk of applying pre-existing knowledge or biases to the data and allowed for a more objective examination. The key findings will be discussed in the following section.

Results and Key Findings

The researcher first sought to identify similarities and any gaps which emerged through differences in perceptions. This section provides findings in three main areas:

1. Perceived requirements for the future professional life of young researchers
2. Perceived core language and professional skills required for young researchers
3. Gaps identified by stakeholders and suggested course of action

Perceived Requirements for Future Professionals

Research students in Japan have been taught since secondary education that a high proficiency in English is essential for success in their future. Survey data showed that while English is indeed the most important requirement for effective participation in the global arena, other skills also need to be acquired. Based on survey and interview data, six points were identified which would benefit students as they prepared for their future professional life (Table 1).

Skill (ranked from most to less important)	Descriptor
1. English	The ability to convey thoughts about one's professional field in English.
2. Research	The ability to create innovations for a sustainable society or provide fresh ideas to the industry.
3. Code of Conduct	To understand the rules, the purpose of the rules, and how to act in an international situation to follow/participate in them.
4. Professional Development	To acquire skill sets and mindsets that would be helpful in the real professional field for example, business or research based and to exert leadership.
5. Interdisciplinary	To communicate and share ideas with peers who may not be from the same background.
6. Confidence	To have a positive attitude towards research and daily work activities.

Table 1: Perceived requirements for future young professionals

Regarding English as a Lingua Franca, as can be seen from Table 1, young researchers, professors, and industry professionals all considered English to be the lingua franca for sharing research and ideas in a global context. It was noted however, that English competency does not necessarily equate to having a successful future in a particular field. For all participants, having the ability to do research to create a sustainable society or to keep an industry moving forward into the future were also essential skills. Without deep knowledge of one's research field, it would not be possible to be an indispensable part of a team in the future. A surprising finding was students' concept of acting with a specific code of conduct. This idea featured strongly in the data, possibly because there were a significant number of medical students participating in the course who were bound by strong ethical guidelines. However, students in other faculties also agreed that having a strong code of conduct in research practices transferred to other areas of life as it ensured credible and transparent practices. Professional development skills did not lie only with the ability to communicate effectively in English (both speaking and writing) as today's AI generative technology makes communication easier. More importantly, participants noted that the ability to show leadership skills and problem solve were essential whether as a researcher or employee. A few students and an industry professional also mentioned that being able to learn tasks quickly in unfamiliar environments, being flexible, and managing stress well were other important skills when starting out as a new employee or working in a research lab. The final two skills, although less important to participants, were also key. Being able to share ideas effectively and keeping a positive attitude during daily tasks created a positive environment which would promote more teamwork and improve the collective mindset.

Perceived Required Core Language and Professional Skills

Participants were further asked their perception of which language and professional skills were most important for their future. Student perceptions were compared to professors and industry professionals to see if a gap existed. Regarding language skills, there was a small difference in perceptions when ranking them. Professors and industry professionals agreed that students should place importance first on speaking, then listening, reading, and finally writing. Students placed emphasis on listening as the primary skill followed by speaking. The

researchers followed up on this response by asking participants to explain the main reasons for their choice.

Skill (ranked from most to less important)	Reason
1. Speaking	• Giving effective scientific presentations to share research findings • Informal dialogue during daily routines in the lab or office • Giving feedback to others about their performance
2. Listening	• Understanding instructor and employers' guidance • Actively listening to presentations to deepen knowledge
3. Reading	• Keeping up to date with current research • Accessing relevant information to improve the quality of research or job-related assignment
4. Writing	• Accuracy on presentation slides

Table 2: Main reasons for ranking language skills in order of importance

For students, most of their reasons were connected to their current lab experiences in which they mainly gave presentations about their research progress. They did not think more broadly about their future after graduating. Professors and industry professionals, on the other hand, considered the wider world in which students would have to negotiate unfamiliar situations. In this case, having more “functional” language was most essential to adapting to various situations—delivering strong presentations for research or product launches, networking, seeking collaborators on new research projects, asking questions about how to perform a specific role, and making meaningful contributions during meetings.

Regarding skills for the workplace, many students had done part-time jobs as an undergraduate student and relayed what they thought was most important. Two main points were given by all participants: People skills and professionalism. First, students wanted to understand how to interact smoothly with researchers in similar fields as well as those in other fields to expand their network. Industry experts and professors encouraged the same. Concerning professionalism, students felt that it was important to be quick to learn new things in the workplace to establish a routine quickly. They further felt that it was important to have a critical mind to solve problems. Industry experts and professors agreed with this, but also added the necessity of understanding strong teamwork and collaboration.

Gaps Identified and Actions Taken

Based on results from surveys and interviews, participants were later asked what kind of action they could take to close the gap between their academic and research life, and the real world.

Language skills: Students noted that their language classes focused mainly on academic writing and reading with few courses focused on presentations. They explained that there are few university-wide courses teaching how to give effective scientific presentations, so students learn these skills independently through observing others as well as trial and error. One of the actions taken by the researchers to help narrow the gap was to offer presentation workshops and develop a presentation course for young researchers based on their immediate needs. The researchers also organized a mock international conference at their respective

universities, so students had an opportunity outside their labs to practice networking and presenting. After the event, the researchers were asked to make it an annual event so that students could continue to meet students from other labs and get to know what kind of research was being conducted at the university on a wider scale.

Functional English: Regarding functional English, students noted that when they entered their graduate labs, they were suddenly forced to communicate with international students and give weekly presentations in English about their research progress. This was especially challenging for students who had a lower proficiency level. Professors who took part in this study were informed of the result and one of the solutions discussed was to encourage Japanese and international students to eat lunch together and engage in a daily language exchange. One of the professors in this study had already established a bilingual policy in his lab. That is, all Japanese students were asked to communicate in English as often as possible while in the lab while international students had to practice their Japanese language skills in order to become more familiar with Japanese culture and customs. This professor later encouraged other heads of departments to take a similar action. Industry professionals encouraged students to try and develop a more professional mindset upon entering graduate school so that they showed the appropriate level of social decorum and developed the confidence to communicate appropriately with people in senior, as well as junior positions.

Conclusions

This research examined first-hand account of the current situation young researchers were experiencing and if it was sufficient enough to help them to perform effectively in the real-world after graduation. The researchers questioned if English was still the lingua franca of the scientific community in this quickly changing world of technology and global partnerships. The response to this question was a resounding affirmation that English is indeed still the common language for global research and business practices and will continue to be the lingua franca in the near future. However, all participants stressed that this was not enough to be successful. There are three main points that the researchers gleaned after conducting this study.

The first is that practical actions need to be taken to prepare students for the real world. According to industry professionals, students should have a high enough level of communicative skills (as opposed to strong academic language skills) in order to operate in unfamiliar environments and when doing new tasks. In particular, professionals encouraged students to develop a sense of professionalism as early as possible. Professors highlighted the need for university labs to engage in multilingual practices to prepare students for the global arena.

The second is creating more opportunities for students to experience what life will be like after graduation, whether continuing in their respective research fields or entering employment. Joining university events such as the mock international poster session or other activities with international students would help students learn how to network and form strong relationships. In the first year of this study, weekly lunch time consultations were organized by the researchers to help students understand how to write CVs, improve scientific presentation points, and write grant proposals. Industry professionals thought that students could apply for internships to understand skills needed in the workplace and practice professionalism in their labs before they graduated.

Finally, a major gap was found between current university curricula and language skills needed for students' future needs. While a focus on academic skills is useful to build language skills during students' undergraduate years, it was found that there were not enough English courses in their third and fourth year of undergraduate school which may become a challenge for lower proficiency learners to communicate effectively with international students and present their research coherently. The researchers are thus in the process of writing a proposal for the administrative office recommending that an English course be offered at the end of undergraduate study focusing on functional language students need for research and business environments. As a university's curriculum cannot be changed overnight, students have been encouraged to use more self-study learning materials (apps, websites, or services at the university) to expose themselves to more English. The researchers subsequently developed a database of useful websites and apps for self-study that students could access for free.

To conclude, research on English as a lingua franca continues to be conducted as the world becomes more technology dependent. This study has shown that ELF is indeed essential for young researchers for future research and business contexts. It has further shown the need for universities to offer more practical courses to help student prepare for graduate school and beyond. The limitation of this study is that findings based on the small sample population (87 students, 3 professors, and 2 industry professionals) cannot be generalized to the larger university population. As such, the researchers hope to collect more responses from students and professors across all faculties at the university to gain a wider perspective.

After concluding this research, the implications going forward for young researchers are that they should build a catalogue of useful skills to perform effectively in unfamiliar environments and develop a sense of professionalism early in their research careers. By considering life outside of their immediate research space, opening themselves up to new opportunities and reflecting on future skills they will require, they will certainly be able to feel more prepared for the new experiences they will face beyond the walls of the university.

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Appendix

Survey questions for student participants

1. What does the term “professional development” mean to you?
2. Which skills do you think are most important for your life as a research or working in your specific field (e.g., research skills, language skills, communication skills, etc.). Please explain.
3. Do you feel that the university is preparing you sufficiently for your future careers as a researcher or employee? Please explain. (e.g., services provided, lab experiences, etc.)
4. How important is learning English for your future? If you responded no, what kinds of courses or services would you like the university to offer?
5. Rank in order English language skills that are most important to least important for your future as a researcher and also as an employee (reading, speaking, listening, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar).

Semi-structured interview questions for professors and industry-experts

1. What is your role in your current position?
2. How important is English language proficiency in your lab/workplace today? Do you think English is as important today as it was in the past in global settings?
3. How is English used on a daily basis in your environment? (e.g., reading and responding to emails, attending meetings, networking, etc.)
4. How important is English for young researchers? Are there any other skills that will prepare students better for their future?
5. How are you preparing your students currently for a future in research?
What do you expect from new employees when they first enter the workforce?
6. What piece of advice would you give young researchers before they graduate from university?

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Uncovering Students' Perceptions on Using Interactive Writing Tools

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Abstract

Selecting the right medium for teaching writing is an essential task. Increasingly, research on language instruction is focusing on the integration of various writing tools to enhance student engagement in writing. Despite numerous efforts to motivate students, writing remains a challenging task for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. This paper explores reimagining writing instruction and modifying current teaching approaches. Additionally, it reviews various digital tools and interactive strategies that could increase students' interest and participation in the writing process. The study investigates the impact of Canva, Google Docs, Mentimeter, Mind Maps, Poll Everywhere, Slido, Blogs, Padlet, and QR codes on improving student engagement in writing activities. In this context, the paper examines students' perceptions regarding using digital tools to create new writing experiences. According to the findings, incorporating interactive writing tools increased students' motivation, and encouraged them to write more. The study suggests that the integration of digital tools into writing instruction can enhance the overall learning experience by making it more interactive, personalized, and engaging. Moreover, students' writing skills were significantly enhanced. Consequently, a novel learning experience tends to create students' motivation, and boost their engagement, which could be done through implementing interactive digital tools in the classroom.

Keywords: Writing Skills, Engagement, Digital Tools, Interactive, Motivation

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Introduction

Many students struggle to express their ideas, interests, experiences, and feelings in written form. It is important to highlight that strong writing skills are crucial in the professional world, where effective and concise communication can significantly impact decision-making and collaboration (Rao & Durga, 2018). The National Commission on Writing (2004) emphasizes that writing is a critical skill for academic and professional success. Writing is considered a highly complex and mentally demanding activity. Similarly, Rena, Musarokah, and Priharyanti (2023) point out that “writing ability can be a challenging task for students. They often find it uninteresting as they struggle to express their ideas” (p.309). Teaching writing to English language learners (ELLs) involves several challenges, mainly due to linguistic differences. ELLs frequently have difficulties with grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, hindering their ability to clearly and accurately articulate their thoughts in writing. Moreover, ELLs often lack confidence in their writing skills, resulting in anxiety and hesitation to participate in writing activities fully.

It is crucial to change how teachers teach writing skills to meet the diverse needs of today's students and to adapt to the evolving demands of the modern world. Using irrelevant teaching strategies is the primary reason for lacking writing skills (Abhari & Salehi, 2021; Mahmood, 2020). Traditional methods frequently emphasize rote learning and formulaic writing, which can hinder creativity and fail to captivate students. By shifting to more dynamic and student-centered approaches, teachers can nurture a deeper understanding and appreciation of writing. Incorporating technology, collaborative projects, and real-world writing tasks can make learning more relevant and engaging for students. Warschauer (2010) stated that “new digital media have played an important role in the teaching of writing, through both the cognitive era that began in the 1980s” (p.3). Providing personalized and constructive feedback using digital tools, rather than generic grading, helps students understand their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering a growth mindset. By implementing these changes, educators can create more engaging, inclusive, and effective writing classes that not only enhance writing skills but also contribute to overall academic and personal development.

This research examines the impact of integrating digital tools on students' engagement and motivation. Besides, it analyzes how various digital tools (e.g. Google Docs, Padlet, Canva) influence the development of students' writing skills, and investigates the perceptions of students regarding the use of digital tools in writing classes. Based on these objectives the following research questions have been formulated.

Research questions:

1. How does the integration of digital tools impact students' engagement and motivation in writing classes?
2. How do different digital tools (e.g. Google Docs, Padlet, Canva) influence the development of students' writing skills?
3. What are the perceptions of students regarding the use of digital tools in writing classes?

The Importance of Integrating Digital Tools in Writing Classes

Many educators and researchers have encouraged teachers to incorporate digital technologies into their teaching. However, there is increasing concern that teachers are not embracing these new technologies (Pearson & Somekh, 2006). Since the COVID-19 pandemic,

technology has revolutionized the education system, bringing about new methods of teaching and learning. Incorporating technology in writing classes provides numerous benefits that go beyond just enhancing engagement and improving skills. Technology provides numerous advantages, such as enhanced learning outcomes, instant feedback, greater student engagement as well as opportunities for personalized learning and self-directed (Memon et al., 2022). Puspitasari et al. (2021) suggest that with the rapid pace of technological advancement, teachers need to be flexible in incorporating technology as a teaching tool, despite some teachers being hesitant to integrate it into their instructional method. Traditional teaching methods have often been criticized for their lack of ability to engage students and encourage active participation in the learning process (Deslauriers et al., 2019).

As technology continues to reshape the education system, new tools and platforms that enhance learning are constantly emerging. Integrating digital tools into writing classes is essential because they make learning more interactive and engaging. Students are more likely to participate and stay motivated when they use technology that resonates with their everyday experiences. Research has shown that the use of technological tools is an effective resource for helping students improve their writing skills (Aghayani & Hajmohammadi, 2019; Sa'diyah & Cahyono, 2019; Somani & Rizvi, 2018). Besides, Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich (2013) note that “a survey of 2,462 Advanced Placement (AP) and National Writing Project (NWP) teachers finds that digital technologies are shaping student writing in myriad ways” (p.2). It is noteworthy to mention that in today’s digital world, proficiency in using technology is a key skill. By integrating digital tools in writing classes, educators are preparing students for future academic and professional environments where these skills are essential.

Canva	Musarokah and Priharyanti (2023) assert that the quality of students' writing can be greatly enhanced by using Canva as a technological tool. Canva's features allow students to design visually appealing presentations, infographics, and digital stories, enhancing the engagement and impact of their writing projects.
Padlet	Padlet functions as a flexible digital platform where students can brainstorm, organize research materials, and share multimedia content for their writing projects (Wong & Yunus, 2020). Since interactive writing involves students in planning, revising, and editing a group text, Padlet helps create an organized, cooperative working environment where students can provide peer feedback (Clay, 2001; Jun, 2008).
Google Docs	Incorporating Google Docs as a teaching tool encourages active participation and the sharing of ideas among students (Deni & Zainal, 2018). Teachers can easily track students' progress and provide feedback.

Blogs	The researchers discovered that students have a positive attitude toward using blogs as a medium in writing classes (Sanjaya, Apriani, & Edy, 2020). Blogs give students access to a real audience outside the classroom, encouraging them to produce writing that is meaningful and of high quality.
Poll Everywhere/ Mentimeter	García (2022) examined the use of Mentimeter to improve writing skills by incorporating a variety of tasks. Incorporating real-time polls allows teachers to promptly assess students' prior knowledge, misconceptions, and interests, facilitating more targeted instruction and personalized learning experiences.
Mind Maps	In Wahyu (2019) study “it can be concluded that the use of mind mapping technique in learning writing is effective to increase students’ engagement and interest” (p.247). Mind maps assist students in visually organizing their ideas, which can foster creativity, leading to more dynamic and well-organized writing.
Slido	The interactive features of Slido, including quizzes, polls, and surveys, facilitate instant feedback and boost student engagement. In Ningsih (2023) study Slido was utilized to create engaging learning environments that enhanced participation, motivation, and overall outcomes. By actively engaging in Slido activities, students were able to develop practical language skills relevant to real-world situations.
QR Codes	It was found out that QR codes could facilitate both independent and collaborative learning as well as it increases students’ motivation and engagement (Rikala& Kankaanranta, 2012). Teachers can use QR codes to make the writing process more interactive. For example, they can plan stages such as brainstorming, feedback, and revision.

Table 1. List of digital tools used in writing classes

Methodology and Methods

Goal of Research and Research Paradigm

This study employed a quantitative data collection and analysis techniques, in order to examine the students' perceptions regarding the use of interactive writing tools. The quantitative component involved the collection of numerical data through a Google form. Surveys allow the efficient collection of data from a large number of respondents, providing a broad perspective on the research topic. It is also time-efficient method for gathering a large amount of data (Dawadi et al., 2021). An online survey consisting of 8 questions, a mixture of multiple choice, Likert-style, and open-ended questions. Average time spent on completing was 6 minutes. Two questions were aimed at collecting background information about the participants. Other questions focused on addressing the research objectives. Upon

participants' consent and assured anonymity and confidentiality. For ethical reasons, the research is described as carried out at 'X' private university.

This study explores the effect of incorporating digital tools on students' engagement and motivation. Additionally, it evaluates how different digital tools (such as Google Docs, Padlet, Slido, Polleverywhere, Mentimeter, Blogs and Canva) affect the development of students' writing skills, and examines students' perceptions of using these tools in writing classes.

Participants and Research Context

The participants for this study were chosen from 'X' private university, majoring in English Philology and Business Administration. This selection aligns with the research objective of exploring the effectiveness of using interactive digital tools in writing classes among students in Higher Education Institutions. The sample size of 60 participants was randomly chosen using an online survey. The participants of this study were students from the School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences; School of Business. The study was carried out among Bachelor's degree students, who had covered academic writing, General English, essay writing, or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Thus, the respondents have experienced working on improving writing skills in different courses.

Limitations of the Research

The research had several limitations. Firstly, the number of participants was limited. Therefore, future studies should include a larger group of students to obtain more generalizable results. Secondly, the study was conducted at one university, so it is advisable to include more universities in future research. More digital tools could be implemented in different study courses, in order to measure the effectiveness of interactive tools on students' motivation and engagement.

Findings

Research sample	N	%
First cycle	41	68.3
Second cycle	13	21.7
Third cycle	2	3.3
Fourth cycle	4	6.7
School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences	55	91.7
School of Business	5	8.4

Table 2. Structure of research sample

This research sample was chosen randomly from a larger population for the purpose of conducting a study. The sample allows to draw conclusions that can be generalized to the larger group. Majority of participants are from School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, as they have more courses related to improving English language skills. So, compared to students from the school of Business, they are expected to write more, and create academic paper.

Question: How skilled do you perceive yourself in writing competencies? Please tick as appropriate

Statements	4 Highly skilled	3 Skilled	2 low skilled	1 not skilled
Use of correct grammar	18.3 %	76.6%	5%	-
Use of specified vocabulary	16.6%	76.6%	6.6%	-
Use of imaginary	38.3%	56.6%	3.3%	1.6%
Use of figurative language	11.6%	71.6%	16.6%	-
Use of critical thinking for writing	40%	55%	5%	-
Managing the writing process (Brainstorming, Planning, revising, Drafting)	35%	53.3%	11.6%	-
Organizing ideas	41.6%	51.6%	5%	1.6%
Collaborative writing	33.3%	51.6%	10%	5%
Sentence construction	31.6%	65%	3.3%	-
Researching information	43.3%	53.3%	3.3%	-

Table 3. Students' perceptions regarding their writing skills

According to the given table, it could be clearly seen that the majority of participants (76.6%) are skilled in using correct grammar, with a significant number (18.3%) being highly skilled. Only a small percentage (5%) are low skilled, indicating that grammar is generally a strong area for most participants. Similar to grammar, most participants (76.6%) are skilled in using specified vocabulary, with a smaller number (16.6%) being highly skilled. A few participants (6.6%) struggle in this area. Other competencies as given in this table are considered to be an important part of writing skills. Since writing is not only about the language competency, but it is also about using other skills that help to compose a written work. In light of this, the students expressed their self-perceived level of other writing skills. For instance, a considerable amount of respondents (38.3%) are highly skilled in using imagery, with the majority (56.6%) being skilled. A minimal percentage (4.9%) find it challenging, indicating overall strong competency in this area. In case of using figurative language, only 11.6% are highly skilled, suggesting a potential area for improvement. Moreover, most students (40%) are highly skilled in critical thinking, which definitely helps to express their ideas better in a written form. The results show that students are skilled enough in managing writing process (53.3%) and organizing ideas (51.6%), which are considered to be essential skills while brainstorming and making an outline for writing. Based on these findings, the majority of participants are skilled in most areas, particularly in using grammar, vocabulary, critical thinking, and researching information. On the other hand, certain areas such as the use of figurative language and managing the writing process show a need for improvement. More focus needs to be given on weaker areas like figurative language and collaborative writing, in order to enhance overall writing proficiency.

Question: If you have experienced using digital tools in writing classes, please tick as appropriate

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Use of digital tools help me generate a lot of ideas for writing assignments.	53.3%	30%	13.3%	3.3%	-
Use of Canva/Padlet/Blogs/Google docs give me interesting experience in writing English. I feel motivated.	56.6%	26.6%	11.6%	5%	-
While using Padlet or Canva - I do not feel under the pressure to create the perfect first draft.	48.3%	28.3%	16.6%	3.3%	3.3%
While using Canva/Padlet/Blogs - I do not feel stressed when receiving feedback from my peers and teacher.	46.6%	30%	18.3%	5%	-
Use of Canva/Padlet/Blogs/Google docs help me track my writing progress.	50%	33.3%	13.3%	3.3%	-
Use of PollEverywhere/Mentimeter/Slido make the writing process more interesting and interactive	41.6%	31.6%	23.3%	-	3.3%
Use of Canva/Padlet/Blogs/Google docs make me more responsible for my own writing.	48.3%	38.3%	11.6%	1.6%	-
I find QR codes easy to use in the class to make writing process more interesting.	55%	30%	13.3%	1.6%	-
While using all these digital tools- I feel confident with the writing assessment.	53.3%	35%	10%	1.6%	-
Use of these digital tools help me cooperate with other students	56.6%	35%	6.6%	-	1.6%
Use of Polleverywhere/Mentimeter/Slido in writing class could increase my confidence, consequently I can create an interesting content which is appropriate with the topic and well-organised	41.6%	28.3%	26.6%	-	3.3%
I feel using digital tools in writing class could enhance my writing skills, consequently I can create better content rather than write conventionally on paper	63.3%	25%	11.6%	-	-

Table 4. Students' opinions regarding using digital tools in writing classes

The data indicates that most students perceive digital tools positively, particularly in enhancing creativity, motivation, and responsibility in writing tasks. Students generally feel more confident and cooperative when using digital tools, which can be crucial for collaborative and peer-reviewed writing projects. It is noteworthy to mention that some

students remain neutral about the effectiveness of tools like PollEverywhere/Mentimeter/Slido in creating organized content, suggesting a need for further exploration or more targeted use of these tools in writing classes. For instance, most students (83.2%) feel that Canva/Padlet/Blogs/Google Docs tools offer a motivating and engaging experience in writing, indicating their effectiveness in enhancing student interest. Furthermore, the majority (76.6%) experience reduced stress when receiving feedback through these platforms, which could foster a more positive learning environment. What is more, 88.3% believe that using digital tools enhances their writing skills and results in better content compared to traditional paper-based writing. Hence, considering students' opinions regarding the use of interactive tools, it could be concluded that they have a positive attitude towards it. Their writing skills have significantly increased as well as their interest in writing more.

Other questions were aimed at investigating the opportunities provided to use digital tools in writing classes. According to the gained data, the students are more familiar with using Google docs, Canva and Qr codes compared to Blogs, Mentimeter, Polleverywhere. Besides, the participants (41.7%) point out that full opportunities are provided to experience various interactive digital tools in their writing classes. The results gained indicate that the instruction process is planned in a way to meet modern teaching standards, which focuses on incorporating technology in teaching and learning process.

Moreover, the survey contained an open-ended question to explore students' writing experiences and challenges related to it. One of the participants responded that:

“Developing writing skills involves generating and organizing ideas, mastering grammar and syntax, choosing the right vocabulary and style, thinking critically, effectively editing and revising, staying motivated and disciplined, understanding and engaging the audience, and using technical tools and proper formatting. Overcoming these challenges requires practice, feedback, and continuous learning.”

Some common challenges as mentioned in this open-ended question, include *Structuring the writing*, the respondents experience difficulty in organizing and structuring a piece of writing correctly; *Applying grammar rules*, students struggle with applying known grammatical rules in practice; *Limited vocabulary*, challenges related to having a poor vocabulary; *Organizing thoughts*, difficulty in organizing thoughts and ideas coherently; *Lack of feedback*, the participants think that they get insufficient feedback from lecturers, which affects writing improvement.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight several key insights into the use of interactive digital tools in writing classes and the challenges students face in developing writing skills. The data reveals correlation between students' perceptions, the effectiveness of digital tools, and the ongoing difficulties in mastering writing. The survey results demonstrate that digital tools, such as Canva, Padlet, Google Docs, and others, which have a significant positive impact on student engagement and motivation in writing classes. The findings revealed that these tools help them generate ideas, track their writing progress, and feel more confident in their writing assessments. This suggests that the integration of digital tools into writing instruction can enhance the overall learning experience by making it more interactive, personalized, and engaging. Furthermore, the use of tools like PollEverywhere, Mentimeter, and Slido was

found to make the writing process more interesting and interactive, although there were some mixed perceptions regarding their ability to help students create well-organized content. This indicates that while these tools are effective in fostering engagement, there may be a need for more targeted instruction on how to structure writing effectively.

These results of the research are in line with study, conducted by Yundayani, Susilawati and Chairunnisa (2019), which indicated that students in the experimental group made significantly fewer writing errors than those in the control group, demonstrating the positive impact of Canva on enhancing students' writing skills. It is evident that students value the use of Canva and recognize its significant benefits in enhancing their writing performance. Similar research focused on implementing Blogs in writing classes. This research showed that students responded positively to the use of blogs as a medium in writing classes. Additionally, students expressed a preference for completing assignments on a blog rather than writing traditionally on paper (Sanjaya, Apriani & Edy, 2020). The study on exploring the impact of digital tools also confirmed that digital technologies foster student creativity and personal expression. It also promotes greater collaboration among students (Purcell, Buchanan & Friedrich, 2013).

In addition, a similar study on incorporating digital tools in writing classes identified that it creates a better learning environment in terms of giving and receiving continuous feedback (Law, 2019). This systematic review, which analyzed 16 Malaysian studies including primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels, found that digital tools enhanced students' writing skills and expanded their language knowledge, particularly in areas such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation (Ramamuthie & Aziz, 2022).

Overall, the study indicates that interactive digital tools have the potential to significantly enhance student engagement and writing skill development. By addressing the specific challenges students face, such as structuring writing, applying vocabulary, expressing ideas, teachers can create a more effective and supportive learning environment that fosters both academic and personal growth in writing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The goal of the study was to evaluate the impact of integrating digital tools on students' engagement and motivation in writing classes, assess how various digital tools influence the development of writing skills, and understand students' perceptions of these tools in the writing process. Digital tools are generally effective in boosting engagement, their use should be carefully integrated with traditional writing instruction. Teachers should continue to emphasize key aspects of writing, including structure, organization, and grammar, while using digital tools to support these areas. This could involve combining digital platforms with exercises focused on these skills. The findings of this study demonstrated a significant positive impact on students' writing abilities and overall engagement. These tools not only enhance students' skills in grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation but also foster creativity, collaboration, and personal expression.

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***The Challenge of Sounds in FL Listening and Speaking:
Perspectives From Dutch Learners of French and Their Teachers***

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Abstract

Foreign language (FL) listening comprehension and pronunciation skills appeal to the mastery of the target language's (TL) sounds and sound patterns. If learners encounter difficulties when listening to the TL, the amount of language serving as input for language learning decreases and they will also have limited opportunities to engage in oral communication. FL listening and production challenges are often explained from a cognitive (e.g. Dupoux & Peperkamp, 2002; De Jong et al., 2012) or articulatory (e.g. Colantoni & Steele, 2008) perspective. Previous studies also show that activities raising learners' awareness of TL sound patterns benefit both perception and production (e.g. Bradlow et al., 1997; Tsang, 2019). Research findings on sound pattern difficulties and phonics instruction however appear to percolate only slowly and limitedly into educational practice. This contribution brings research and classroom practice together. Taking the productive and perceptive difficulties encountered by Dutch secondary school pupils learning French as a starting point (Brand & Berns, 2023), we further complete the picture with questionnaire results tracing pupils' and teachers' perspectives. Our findings confirm the segregated nature of listening comprehension and pronunciation teaching, which seems to directly impact learners' lack of confidence when producing and listening to word chains. We further discuss the usefulness of attention for sounds and features for various learner groups, the perceived adequacy of textbook listening and speaking activities, and possibilities and limitations for the curriculum. The outcomes are based on the French language classroom, but are also considered in the light of FL learning in general.

Keywords: FL Pronunciation Skills, FL Listening Comprehension, FL Oral Production, Educational Practice

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1. Introduction

Learning the sounds and sound patterns of the target language (TL) is similar to learning other elements of the language, such as vocabulary, morphosyntax or semantics: a learner needs to be familiarised with the structures of the TL and its differences with their mother tongue (e.g. Colantoni & Steele, 2008; Tsang, 2019). This requires regular TL exposure and training, during which it is also key to focus on the development and automatization of receptive and productive oral language skills (cf. Pennington & Richards 1986, 217-218).

In the case of FL reading and writing learners may reread or rewrite a message when needed, but oral language skills are more instantaneous and volatile. In authentic communication, a learner may ask their interlocutor to repeat a message, but this cannot be done endlessly and there are numerous imaginable situations of oral communication where there is no possibility for repetition or relistening. When engaged in oral production learners have to react relatively quickly, there are no or limited opportunities to start over and mistakes transpire immediately. Receptive and productive oral skills therefore pose a particular challenge for learners that can also make them feel insecure or anxious (e.g. Horwitz, 2001; Phillips, 1991/1992).

In the course of language learning history, attention paid to the TL's sounds has varied considerably. As already transpires in its name, the grammar-translation approach (which was dominant up to the end of the 19th century) did not allocate any explicit room for pronunciation and listening skills. The main focus was put on written comprehension and production, as this allowed learners to gain access to FL literature or to write and read letters in this language (e.g. Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010). From the second half of the 19th century, the importance of paying attention to TL sounds for developing oral fluency was put on the agenda more often, for instance by the language teaching methodologists Thomas Prendergast, François Gouin and Maximilian Berlitz. Gouin (1892, 137) phrased it as follows: "the written word [is] the shadow of the spoken word". The introduction of the International Phonetic Alphabet in 1887 also contributed to an increased attention for FL phonetics in the curriculum, and supporters of the Reform Movement saw it as important for a learner to pay attention to the exact realisation of TL sounds through explicit, formal, instruction. The audiolingual method that clearly emerged from the 1940s continued to allocate a prominent position to TL sounds. By "drilling" chunks in language laboratories, both learners' productive and perceptive oral abilities were automatized. With the advent of the communicative approach in the 1970s and 1980s, the focus on TL sounds changed again. Oral skills are of clear importance both productively and receptively, but training of these skills is centered around functional intelligibility. Attention to sound thus became less explicit and less detailed, especially at the lower levels of language proficiency.

Learning the sounds and sound patterns of the target language thus involves several considerations. Both the amount of attention that should be paid to TL phonetics and phonology, and the way in which this should be done, are still subject to debate. This paper takes a closer look at the extent to which paying attention to TL sounds is perceived as useful, stimulating and motivating in a secondary school context by investigating attitudes, beliefs and experiences of Dutch learners of French and their teachers. Section 2 first looks at different strategies that learners use to decode the FL speech chain and discusses previous results regarding perceptual and productive challenges of Dutch FL learners of French. Section 3 then describes the method used for the present study, and in section 4 the results are presented – first from the learner perspective, followed by the teacher perspective. We

conclude this contribution in section 5, by synthesising our key-findings and highlighting several angles for future research.

2. Background

2.1 Strategies for Deciphering TL Speech

In current classroom practice FL teachers often implement a top-down approach to promote listening comprehension. They provide their pupils with listening strategies (e.g., using background knowledge, contextual information) as a tool for figuring out the general meaning of the acoustic signal. Little attention is paid to what the target language sounds like to FL learners or to the factors that can impede comprehension (Tsang, 2019). A bottom-up approach aims to foster the knowledge of FL sounds and sound patterns as it facilitates the segmentation and decoding of the acoustic signal. In real life listening, both top-down and bottom-up approaches are used, with more emphasis on either of them depending on the listening goal and listeners' knowledge of the language (McClelland & Elman, 1986; Norris et al., 2000). Beginning learners may not have enough knowledge of the FL to use their top-down skills (Hildyard & Olson, 1982; Cornaire, 1998) and bottom-up listening activities can then help them to fill in the gaps. Research has shown that explicit instruction, drawing attention to language-specific phonetic/phonological properties, can not only improve FL learners' listening comprehension but can also benefit their pronunciation (e.g., Bradlow et al., 1997; Felker et al., 2021; Tsang, 2019). This combined effect would make instruction on the TL sound signal even more valuable than previously thought. Timely exposure to such instruction would not only be beneficial for advanced learners, but also for beginning learners as it could help them to see through prominent difficulties from an early stage onwards.

2.2 Oral Skills and Language Anxiety

The process of language learning may come with varying degrees of insecurity or anxiety for learners. As reported by existing research (e.g. Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Horwitz, 2001), this particularly holds for oral skills, where learners are confronted with the TL's sound signal and have to be able to interpret and possibly react quite instantaneously. Any misinterpretations or productive errors in TL language use are immediately noticeable. In written language modes, on the contrary, learners may take a bit more time if they wish and they can reread a text, look up unknown words or expressions, or rewrite their text where needed.

This linguistic anxiety may be further exacerbated by the fact that learners are often learning a language as part of a pre-defined curriculum in classroom settings, so also the impact of "classroom anxiety" and "test anxiety" have to be taken into account (e.g. Lefkowitz & Hedgcock, 2002). Again, these two forms of anxiety seem to have an especially high impact on oral forms of language. If learners have to listen to audio they cannot decipher, if they have to engage in a dialogue they cannot follow, if they have to speak in front of the classroom or if they have to read-aloud to their teacher and their peers, learners (especially in their puberty) may feel very uncomfortable, and this may impact their language learning process. Lefkowitz & Hedgcock (2002) state it as follows: "[...] strong social currents in their classroom communities [...] can inhibit successful interaction and language learning" (p. 239), which means that "FL teachers should likewise attempt to discern whether unsatisfactory oral production reflects covert social dynamics (e.g., the pursuit of peer

approval), inadequate acquisition of FL speech skills, or perhaps a combination of the two” (p. 240).

2.3 Perceptive and Productive Difficulties for Dutch FL Learners of French

To determine in what respect(s) FL teachers could optimise learners’ phonetic/phonological awareness, as to improve learners’ productive and receptive skills, Brand & Berns (2023) investigated the perceptive and productive difficulties that Dutch FL learners of French encounter. Thirteen third grade secondary school pupils (mean age = 14,2 years) were asked to perform a dictation, and subsequently had to do a translation and a reading-aloud task. The dictation task aimed at tracing learners’ processing of French words in a short sentence and their phoneme-grapheme mapping, the reading-aloud task provided insight into the transposition of graphemes into sounds, and by means of the translation task we could control for lexical knowledge. We analysed learners’ performances on language-specific phonetic/phonological properties: 1) voiced vs. voiceless fricatives (e.g., *vous*, ‘you’, vs. *fou*, ‘crazy’), 2) non-transparent mapping between French pronunciation and orthography (e.g., the sound [o] can be written as *o*, *ô*, *au*, *aut*, *aux*, *eau*, *eaux*, *ot*, *os*) and 3) nasal vowels.

Results showed a dominant effect of writing in both perception and production. The perception data revealed that lexically unfamiliar words are difficult to link to a possible written form. Interestingly, lexically familiar words (as confirmed by the translation task) were often not recognized in their oral forms either. In production, realisations emerged that clearly betrayed a letter-based pronunciation. Pupils used an intermediate strategy that allows them to memorise the spelling of a word, but that does not yet steer them toward a correct pronunciation, a strategy tellingly reflected in Gouin’s (1892, 137) remark that “the first cause [...] of a false accent and pronunciation is the study of languages by means of reading”. For the production of unfamiliar words, learners tried to deduct the pronunciation by piecing together sound-letter combinations they knew (from frequently occurring items and chunks), or they relied on grapheme-phoneme correspondences in Dutch or in other languages they were familiar with, such as English and Spanish.¹

These results clearly indicate the need for bottom-up listening activities allowing learners to transgress their writing-based representations. Taking the productive and perceptive difficulties encountered by Dutch secondary school pupils learning French as a starting point, the present study further extends the picture of TL sounds in the French language classroom by exploring the attitudes and experiences among pupils and their teachers.

3. Method

116 Dutch secondary school pupils filled in a questionnaire during one of their French classes. 15 of them are enrolled at a school in Utrecht (located in the ‘Randstad’, the urban conglomeration in the west of the country), and 101 of them go to school in Hulst (a village in the province of Zeeland, bordering Flanders). They were all born and raised in the Netherlands (or in the Flemish border region in the case of some Hulst pupils), and speak

¹ E.g. the pronunciation of *continuer* and *histoire* was influenced by their English counterparts ‘to continue’ and ‘history’, and the pronunciation of *que* (‘that’) was occasionally influenced by the Spanish equivalent *que*, realised as [ke].

Dutch at home. None of the learners reported hearing problems or dyslexia. The participants come from three different grades (Table 1).²

	First grade	Third grade	Fifth grade
Level	Pre-university education (‘vwo’)	Pre-university education (‘vwo’)	Preparatory higher vocational education (‘havo’)
n	43	56	17

Table 1: Dutch FL learners of French

Next to the demographic background questions, the questionnaire contained another 27 questions (23 closed and 4 open-ended questions) asking for:

- an estimation of their performances in French reading, writing, listening and speaking (10-point Likert scale);
- an estimation of their language anxiety level during French speech perception and production (5-point Likert scale);
- two key words representing their likes and dislikes regarding the teaching of speech perception and production;
- their experiences with and wishes for the audio materials used in class and their textbook (5-point Likert scale and open-ended questions).

18 teachers (Tables 2 and 3), teaching French in seven different Dutch provinces, shared their experiences in a questionnaire. These teachers were contacted via modern foreign languages teachers’ communities on LinkedIn and via the professional networks of both authors. The participating teachers replied anonymously and filled in the questionnaires via Google Forms.

Next to several questions about the teacher’s background, this questionnaire included 26 questions (10 closed and 16 open-ended questions) about the following topics:

- the estimated time (in minutes) spent on the teaching of reading, writing, listening, speaking and pronunciation;
- possible reasons for productive and perceptive difficulties that pupils (may) encounter;
- possible ways to overcome these difficulties;
- the extent to which teachers consider it important to pay attention to pronunciation (5-point Likert scale).

Teaching experience (in years)	< 5	5-10	> 10
Teachers (n)	2	4	12

Table 2: Teaching experience of the Dutch secondary school teachers of French

	Qualified for all levels of secondary school	Qualified for lower secondary school	Teacher trainees
Teachers (n)	12	4	2

Table 3: Teachers’ level of qualification

² This research design was approved by the ethics assessment committee of the Radboud Teachers Academy in February 2022.

4. Results

4.1 Current Classroom Practice

Table 4 shows how many minutes teachers spend on average on the teaching of reading, writing, speaking, listening and pronunciation in lower and upper secondary education. Across the FL curriculum, but even more so during the final years, most of the class time is devoted to reading. This result reflects a washback effect, brought about by the fact that the Dutch nationwide final exam solely consists of reading comprehension and represents 50% of pupils' final grade. The remaining 50% consists of tests that assess various language skills (potentially also including reading) and these grades are collected at different moments throughout upper secondary school. Teachers have to divide their rather limited class time between the various skills, and in their tightly packed curriculum attention to pronunciation is indeed less embedded.

	Minutes per week	
	Lower secondary education	Upper secondary education
Reading	21,0	37,4
Writing	18,0	34,0
Speaking	18,2	30,6
Listening	17,9	27,0
Pronunciation	10,0	15,4

Table 4: Estimated average time (in minutes) spent on teaching FL skills

Although teachers do not, or cannot, pay much attention to pronunciation in the FL classroom, most teachers find this aspect important (see Figure 1).

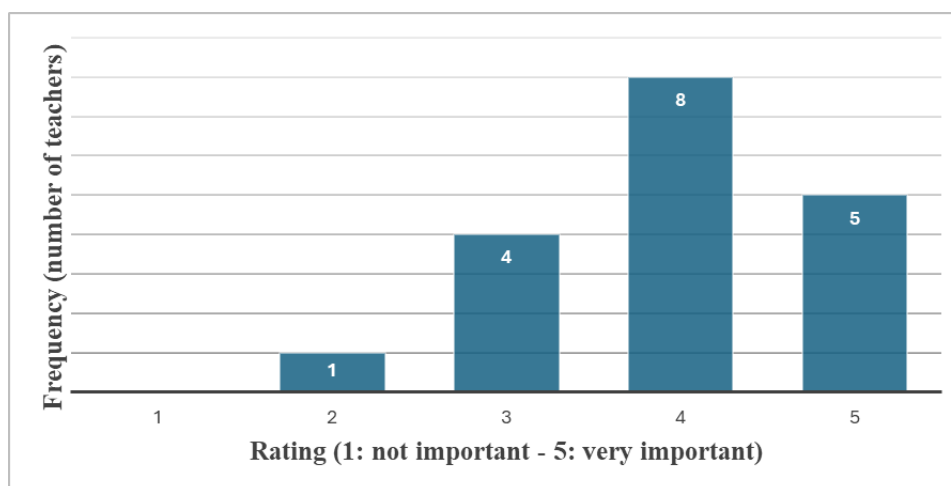


Figure1: The importance of pronunciation teaching according to FL teachers of French

4.2 Self-Reported Levels of Proficiency and Anxiety

Table 5 below summarises pupils' evaluation of their own language skills on a 10-point scale (corresponding to the grading scale used in educational settings in The Netherlands, where 10 is the highest possible grade and where 5,5 or 6,0 represents a passing grade).

	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	Pronunciation	Mean across competences
Yr1 Pre-university	5,5	5,4	4,9	5,2	5,7	5,3
Yr3 Pre-university	6,0	5,8	4,8	5,1	6,5	5,6
Yr5 Preparatory higher vocational education	6,1	5,6	5,7	5,1	6,4	5,8

Table 5: Self-reported proficiency scores

Pupils rate their French skills rather modestly, as reflected by the mean across competences that is close to the passing grade of 5,5 or just below. In both year 1 and year 3, learners rate speaking, and especially listening, as their weakest competences. Year 5 remains equally uncertain about oral production, but contrary to the two preceding groups, both writing and listening seem to be equally difficult for them. The results show a clear discrepancy in self-attributed scores between speaking, the overall lowest score across years, and pronunciation, the overall highest score across years. This seems paradoxical at first sight. Based on the answers on the open-ended questions, it becomes clear that pupils are used to repeating words or short expressions in isolation, hence the relatively high score assigned to pronunciation. Linking sounds, syllables, words and sentences to create well-connected and fluent speech in a dialogue is something they find much more challenging.

4.3 Pupils' Perspectives on Oral Production and Listening Comprehension Practice

In follow-up questions, pupils were asked to indicate (by means of one or two key words) strong and weak points related to the current practice of teaching and testing listening comprehension and oral production. Their answers were grouped into several categories, Figures 2 and 3 first of all provide an overview of the aspects the pupils appreciate most.

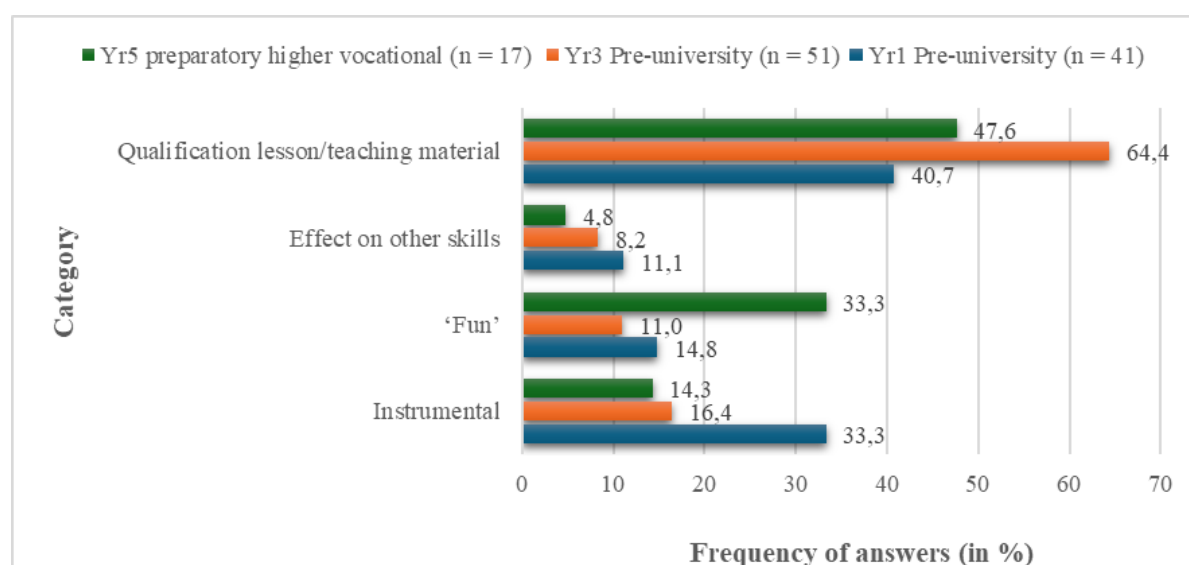


Figure 2: Strong points listening comprehension

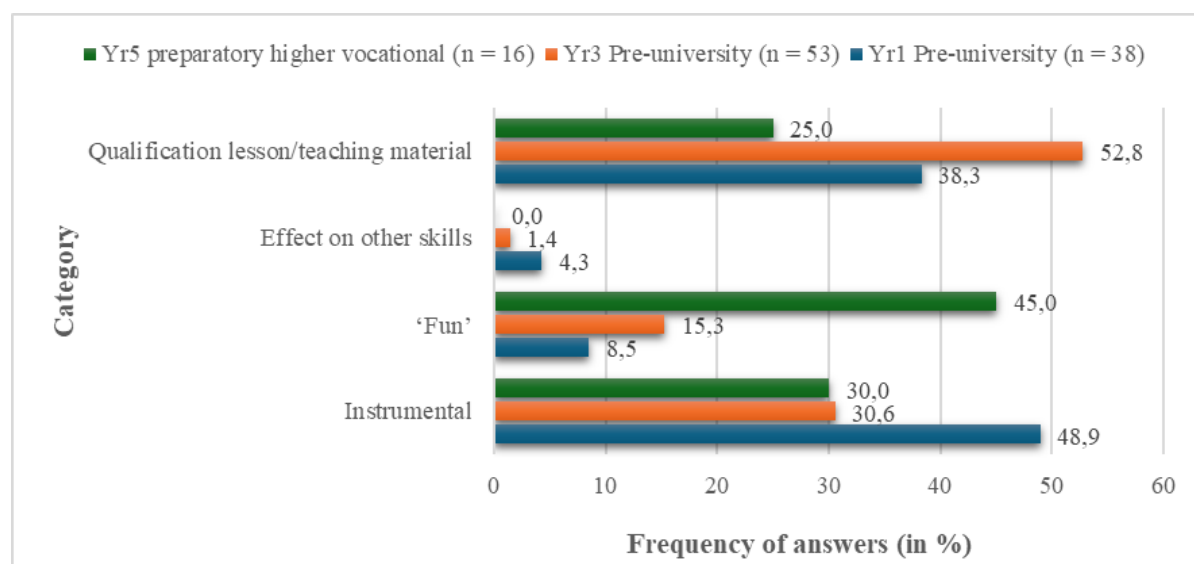


Figure 3: Strong points oral production

For Year 1 and Year 3 a similar pattern arises for the two skills. Answers that belong to the instrumental category or that provided a qualification of the lessons or the teaching materials were most frequent. Pupils see that these skills may come in handy in communicative TL contexts, they find the lessons, homework and tests not too demanding and they like collaborating with a classmate in the exercises. The answers given only rarely relate to potential effects of listening or speaking on other language skills. In case such answers were given, pupils mentioned the effect on pronunciation, on vocabulary and, interestingly, they also mentioned orthography, as they had to write down what they needed to say before actually starting to speak. In year 5, then, the effect on other skills is even less frequently mentioned as an aspect they appreciate. They rather feel that speaking tasks may be handy for real-life communication and for both skills they mention they find them quite 'fun'.

When it comes to the aspects they value least, an identical distribution of answers arises for both skills across all years, as illustrated in Figures 4 and 5.

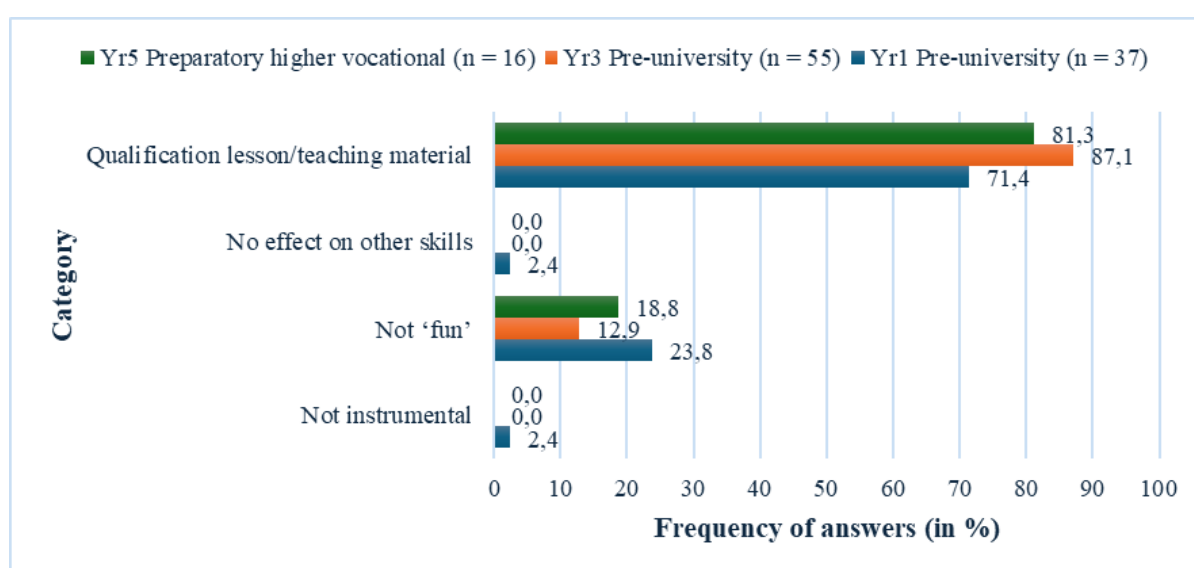


Figure 4: Weaker points of listening comprehension

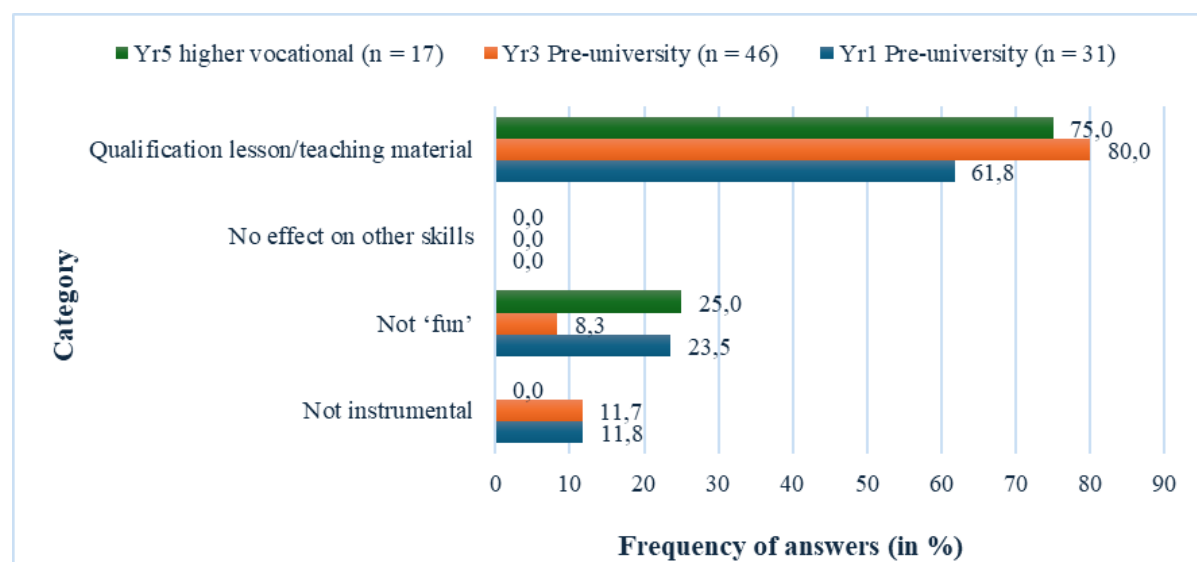


Figure 5: Weaker points of oral production

The most frequently given answers provide a qualification of the way both skills are taught. This category was also often mentioned in their answers with strong points (cf. Figures 2 and 3), but now clearly different reasons emerge. They find these skills difficult and they mainly do not like the way it is currently presented in their manual and embedded in class. They indicate that they find the tasks rather boring and uninspiring, they find the topics not very engaging, and they feel the exercises do not prepare them for communication outside the classroom. In second place come various answers saying that these two skills are “just not fun”, without further specifying why. The instrumental value of both skills is generally recognized by the various groups, as few answers were given denying the usefulness of these skills. As for the positive points, we have seen that cross-fertilization of skills was mentioned rather infrequently. In the case of the negative points, this category is again infrequently used. This could indicate that learners do see the added value of the transferability of skills, but it is not on top of their list with strong points, or it could be the case that (possible) cross-links between skills are something they are simply not that aware of.

4.4 Teachers' Perspectives on Oral Production and Listening Comprehension Practice

Teachers provide various reasons for the perceptive difficulties that their learners encounter (Table 6). Lack of lexical knowledge and of exposure to the French language are mentioned by most teachers (n = 13). Furthermore, several teachers (n = 11) refer to phonetic and phonological characteristics. Remarkably, there is only one teacher who explains difficulties in speech perception by a lack of knowledge of listening strategies, i.e. strategies characteristic of a top-down approach to perception (cf. section 2.1).

	n
poor vocabulary, lack of knowledge of verb conjugations and linking words	5
too little exposure to French, outside school (vs. English)	4
too little input of French in the classroom (target language use)	4
speech rate	4
<i>liaison, enchaînement</i>	4
opaque orthography	3
stress patterns	1
lack of knowledge of listening strategies	1
too little use of authentic material	1
<i>Total</i>	27

Table 6: Reasons for learners' perceptive difficulties mentioned by teachers

To explain difficulties in speech production, teachers again refer to their pupils' limited vocabulary (see Table 7). In addition, teachers indicate that there is often too little time to practice productive skills, and several teachers refer to language anxiety in the classroom. Table 7 also shows that pronunciation, which is a key element in a bottom-up approach, is only considered by one teacher as one of the obstacles for speech production.

	n
poor vocabulary	7
too little practice/too little time	6
uncertainty/anxiety	5
too little input outside school	2
word order	2
grammar/language system	2
pronunciation	1
lack of motivation	1
<i>Total</i>	26

Table 7: Reasons for learners' productive difficulties mentioned by teachers

To overcome perceptive difficulties, a considerable number of the participating teachers (n = 7) would like to pay more attention to the type of audio materials used in the classroom (Table 8). According to them, the materials should be more authentic and relate to pupils' experiences. These results are in line with the suggestions made by the learners (section 4.3), and the teachers thus seem to be clearly aware of their pupils' needs and wishes. Among the remaining answers, which were all mentioned only once, we see some additional solutions focusing on breaking down a lengthy speech chain into intelligible pieces, for instance by using shorter fragments, familiarising pupils with different voices and by linking perception and production more closely. One teacher suggests taking away perceptual challenges by lowering the level of tests, but this view is not shared by the other teachers in this sample.

<i>More attention should be paid to:</i>	n
modern, authentic sound materials related to the pupils' experiences	7
listening strategies	3
listening (more practicing)	2
detailed listening (instead of global listening)	2
avoidance of 'teaching to the test' (nationwide reading exam)	1
common vocabulary	1
practicing with short fragments	1
target language use in the classroom	1
listening during conversational tasks (relating 2 skills: perception and production)	1
lowering the level of tests	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>20</i>

Table 8: Ways to overcome difficulties in speech perception according to teachers

As far as the embedding of speech production activities goes, only three teachers judge the curriculum optimal as it currently stands (Table 9). Potential routes for optimization include more practice, more appealing and low-threshold assignments and paying more attention to thematically ordered words and chunks. The remaining comments are of various nature, ranging from the organisation of group work to the set-up of educational materials.

<i>More attention should be paid to:</i>	n
practicing	4
nothing (it is good as it is)	3
appealing and low-threshold assignments	3
thematically ordered words, chunks	3
more open dialogues (without scripts)	2
repetition	1
relatable topics for pupils	1
starting from an early age	1
working in small groups	1
peer feedback	1
language use in educational materials (less Dutch)	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>21</i>

Table 9: Ways to overcome difficulties in speech production according to teachers

5. Conclusions

The insights and experiences shared by Dutch FL learners of French and their teachers allowed us to shed more light on the interplay between learners' and teachers' needs and wishes on the one hand and current classroom practice on the other. While several learners clearly see that the development of their oral language skills may be instrumental or even "fun", it transpires in their results that they do not necessarily get the most out of the current curriculum. The combination of various thoughts and experiences shared by both the learners and the teachers seems to suggest that linking various oral skills could have a positive impact on learners' development. Instead of focusing on words in isolation, paying attention to the way the TL is actually pronounced in connected speech would make learners better prepared for deciphering what they hear and for producing a message themselves. This, in turn, would also contribute to reducing their language anxiety. By creating a clear link with vocabulary learning, now often presented as separate and/or written lists, perceptive and productive skills could be further strengthened. All this would then probably also lead to more cross-fertilization between skills, something of which pupils now seem to see only limited

relevance. Integrating tasks could be done relatively straightforwardly, as attention for TL pronunciation can be intertwined, subtly yet systematically, in the existing components of the curriculum without eating too much into valuable class time. Selecting relatable topics and creating engaging task types is another challenge to be taken into account, but we hope that our small scale teacher-learner exploration contributes a step towards a more interconnected view on oral language skills, preparing learners for TL use both inside and outside the classroom.

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***Language of Diaspora –
The Role of Language in Identity Preservation and Social Integration***

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Abstract

Kosovo is one of the countries that has been suffering for decades of massive migration. More than one third of the Kosovo population live abroad nowadays making it one of the countries with highest migration in the world. The main characteristic of the Kosovo Albanian diaspora living abroad is their strong tie with the homeland and their strong attachment to their identity. They face with constant struggle of identity preservation on one side and social and cultural integration in the host country on the other side. While they place a specific role and importance in the use of Albanian language in family settings and correspondence with other members of Kosovo Albanian diaspora, they make extraordinary efforts to integrate into a new living pattern which serves them in construction of new life pursuant to new circumstances of the host country. There is a constant battle between the generations' perception on identity – while the first generation does everything to retain the language of origin, the second generation embraces the language of the host country which plays a crucial role in social and cultural integration and their active involvement in the life of the host country.

Keywords: Kosovo Albanian, Language, Culture, Migration, Identity Preservation, Social Integration

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Introduction

This research is conducted through home visits and a questionnaire and as such aims to bring to light the role of the language in identity preservation and social integration of Kosovo Albanian diaspora in the Region of Rhone Alpes in France and the approach of the first and second generation to the language of origin. Discussion over the Kosovo Albanian diaspora is hampered due to the lack of exact points of reference and the lack of previous studies on the topic. Albanian ethnicity is an endless pit of wealth that the social sciences could dig infinitively. This article does not fill the gap on Kosovo Albanian people and their culture, however it does offer to the reader a piece of basic and factual information on the situation and some ideas about the culture of the Kosovo Albanian people.

Kosovo has a large diaspora in many countries of the world. The estimated number of inhabitants living abroad at the end of 2019 is over 883,986 or 49.6% of the population of Kosovo (Republic of Kosovo, 2019). *The Kosovo Albanian Diaspora has a long history and has played a very important role throughout the decades keeping the political, social and cultural life in Kosovo alive* (Institute for management and development (IMD), 2011). The term *diaspora* is used in academic and policy circles to refer to people (and often their descendants) from a specific country that are living abroad. Diasporas are composed of certain members of immigrant communities who maintain ties to the homeland with a strong sense of belonging, by actively participating in their host land's political or social spheres (Bahar, 2010). Earlier this term was less used and identified only some of the people who moved from specific groups such as Greeks, Jews, Armenians and Africans. However, this term has recently marked a far larger use and includes almost all the groups that have changed their settlements or arrived from other settlements and in academic works, as well as journalistic, nearly every migrant group is referred to as a diaspora (Bahar, 2010). One of the main characteristics of the Kosovo Albanian diaspora is its strong commitment to the homeland; this fact complicates the understanding of the contemporary mass emigration and increases the curiosity of those who dare to venture on such grounds.

To gain a full comprehension of Kosovo Albanian migration that could address several dimensions of the phenomenon would entail a challenging agenda. Indeed, for what and how a population historically attached to its territory may come to emigrate in a foreign country and to integrate into the host society? What should these factors be and what strength they had to have created such a movement? On the other hand, what could it be that the Kosovo Albanian diaspora retain their language and identity without denying a step in the integration of host society? There is a surprising dearth of research on the topic, because of its complexity. The Kosovo Albanian migration phenomenon is one that is unique and distinct from other countries, due to its indignant history (Sulemani, 2009). The migration of Kosovo Albanian people has been understudied by scholars of the field, especially the role of language as “a powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity” (Spolsky, 1999) and symbols in relation to identity preservation. Why is it necessary to focus on the language of diaspora?

There is a full consent of scholars and researchers around the world about the strong tie or connection between language and identity. The language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home (Clifford, 1994). The language is considered to present the cultural and identity basis of a nation, for Albanians even more whose key determinant to identity is language, rather than religion or something else. It is part of a long-life history with which associate the most determining identity and specification elements of a country or a nation and the

distinguishing features which are inseparable from the people who speak the respective language. To talk about language means treating aspects which go beyond the general perception of the majority of people that identify it with communication. It is necessary at least to try to define or make the comparison of the use of language of the country of origin versus the language of the host country for the mere fact that this determines or indicates significantly the degree of integration of generations into the cultural or social system of the host country and the detachment to that of the country of origin.

There is often a particularly strong link between language and a sense of belonging to a national group, a sense of national identity (Byram, 2006). Language has a very specific feature to human identity and people are categorized by other people according to the language they speak. When we hear someone speak in a different language, the language of one country or another, our mind becomes active almost immediately by making guesses about gender, education level, age, profession, and place of origin, thus bringing to us the elements of judgment we have for a specific country which the language belongs to and the approach we should have or the behavior we should make accordingly in response to the people of a specific country. Languages symbolize identities and are used to signal identities by those who speak them. There is no language which can be defined better in any kind of terms compared to other languages as all the languages share the common characteristics, and the language that the immigrant chooses to speak is not the language of his own choice, but rather a language that allows him to get through and the means that is served to him letting him no choice but to accept it for his own purposes and personal advancement.

Kosovo Albanian Diaspora in Rhone Alpes, France

One of the key determinants for choosing the Kosovo Albanian diaspora in Lyon for research is that it represents one of the most organized Kosovo Albanian diasporas comprising of around 20 thousand people in the Region of Rhone Alpes. On a survey done with the members of the first and second generation of Kosovo Albanian diaspora in Rhone Alpes in 2019, 60 people responded to the questionnaire which included questions on language use and their social status. Of them, 40 were male and 20 were female. This is for the reason that contact with men was easier. The settlement time varies from those who arrived as early as 1988 and those who have recently arrived, in 2017. The majority of those who have migrated to France at adult age have come for employment purposes and almost all of them have come with the intention to stay only temporary and someday return back to Kosovo. A number of them, mainly female have come for family reunification purposes, but a percentage of them who have arrived recently have come for study purposes with plans to come back upon the completion of their degrees. More than 90% of the respondents have claimed that in France they define themselves as “foreigners” despite their legal status and identify themselves as Albanians and the language they use in family settings is the Albanian language. Only a small percentage of them respond that they consider themselves as French citizens with equal rights to the other local people and consider themselves as both French and Albanian sharing a common feeling of belongingness without plans to come back, now that they feel integrated in France.

The Kosovo Albanian community is in constant battle between language, culture and identity preservation on the one hand and the emotional, social, economic and cultural integration into the host society on the other hand. While the traditional sources of family, homeland, ethnic belongingness, language and others are playing a significant role in their lives, their identity is being constantly challenged by the intervention of a different set of norms and values

associated with their perception of others' perception on them. There is a constant battle between the generations of diaspora groups in the use of the language and the dominance of either language of origin imposed by the first generation or the use of language of the host country by the second generation imposed by the environment and the daily use and interaction with the local people and education institutions. What the first generation wants and what the real situation is are two different things. They want to keep the substance of what makes them Albanian, to sustain this substance and protect it with fanaticism; however what is real is the fact of their existence both in the country of origin and the host country, but not the substance which undergoes an irresistible transformation. No matter how much they try to keep the matter or substance within themselves, it is the factors of time and space which determine or set new rules if we may call so, which through time achieve their goal.

Even though the first generation see the future of their children in France and most of them have already integrated into French society, it is still important for them to maintain their mother tongue and most of the people who have managed to integrate normally and have the right to go back and visit Kosovo, they do so every year especially during the summer time in order for their children to be in closer contact with the Albanian language and culture. Albanian language is spoken at home most of the time by parents and the children understand and are able to communicate in Albanian language (though they might lack the necessary vocabulary). In order to keep the Albanian language and sentiment alive, parents organized a school in Albanian language in voluntary basis which taught the Albanian children classes of Albanian language, culture and history which aimed to be the transmitter of the Albanian word between the Homeland and the Diaspora, with specific emphasis on keeping and maintaining the strong tie or connection between the two. Besides teaching Albanian to the children, consulting and supporting the Albanian-speaking community, they aimed to strengthen the cultivation of national culture and tradition in order to recreate and sustain a positive sense of 'ethnic' belonging while living abroad. The aim of these classes was to strengthen the basics of the first language and to increase the children's familiarity with Albanian culture and lifestyle. The supplementary Albanian native language and culture classes did not have any negative impact in the French language and the regular education in the French school. Since courses in Albanian language and culture have never been integrated into the regular school curriculum, they were held during the weekend.

Regardless of the efforts, the general practice shows that children in most cases communicate to each other in French. For them it is difficult to preserve all the characteristics of the Albanian language that their parents possessed back in Kosovo, for the fact that their physical presence is remote and Albanian language does not find any use outside the family setting. Although many young attribute to their parents' influence their pride in culture, and their wish to actively foster the representation of Albanian culture and language, they still find it very different to act as Albanian, they are in constant struggle to construct an identity facing all the time between the two different cultures, in one side, the Albanian culture and language at home and the other side, the French culture and language in everyday interactions at school or outside their homes. It is true that parents place explicit value on the ability to speak Albanian at a high, near-native level of competence by trying to engage their children in different activities of the Albanian community in Lyon such as celebrations organized by the associations or other diaspora groups. Children value their origin and are proud of it; however, there is still the dominance of the French culture which is influenced in school, and in the surrounding community, making them bicultural speakers. Their use of French language allows them to enter the cycle of the social field and makes them equal to their peers at school providing them with the necessary access to cultural and social relations. It

represents the mechanism which increases their chances for safer and successful social access and their future at the same time given that French language is the one that offers the grounds as the language necessary for life, communication, education and employment. From this, we can assume that the process of acquiring the language of the host country means weakening of the tie with the home language.

Talking in language terms, we should try to understand that we are talking about two different ways of development, especially in children. Those who came to the host country with a good degree of their mother language, they need to make transformation from that of the origin into that of the host country. It is a matter of degree to how much it is possible to save during the phase of transformation while acquiring and developing in a completely different manner. In making the choice of language among Kosovo Albanian diaspora, there are many factors that determine the use of French language over Albanian. The first generation's competence of language is limited because their activities involve mainly domestic and relative interactions in Albanian language which makes them become limited in the use of the French language. In this context Albanian language is more dominant because of the difficulties to acquire the new language and due to the lack of contact in their everyday life and everyday interactions outside the domestic settings. This situation is not the same for younger generations who attend schools and who are involved in any kind of activities which make their integration much easier.

Young generations adapt to the French language because it is necessary for them to interact in their daily life, but also because they believe that it is trendier or has a wider use than Albanian language. In this way they want to be in and they want to be considered a part of this society that surrounds them and where they want to develop themselves in the future. Also, there is no incentive to maintain it, partly because in public settings they can be identified as "foreigners" and may be subject to marginalization and discriminatory behavior. Although the majority of Kosovo Albanian families try to keep the breath of the Albanian language in their families, parents themselves often use French language (although it is not fluent) in the interaction with their children when trying to show a degree of belongingness in the eyes of their children who have good language skills acquired through daily interactions at school. A number of parents who do not have the opportunity to work on public sector or more prestigious jobs, working in the shadow with their rights being denied and vulnerable to discrimination, feel some sort of pressure in front of their children considering themselves as transmitting to them a poor cultural capital.

Regarding the language proficiency, most children are bilingual and can communicate Albanian that comes as a result of the parents' influence who speak and impose the Albanian language at home. Their level of proficiency depends from the family background, for example there are some families which did not develop any further in the aspect of the Albanian language and therefore the children might be more limited in their expressions in Albanian and this can be best evidenced in the interactions with them when they think in French and want to say something in Albanian and they hesitate. In this respect, they can speak the language of their parents, the language their parents spoke before arriving to France, so they remain within the framework of the past in terms of language if we consider the changes and advancements that languages undergo in time, without the enrichment of the vocabulary with new and trendy words of the country of origin.

The Selection of the Country for Migration

The selection of the country is not always an easy choice, however research suggests that when seeking out a destination country, key factors for Albanians (Kosovo Albanian as well) have been geographical, cultural, and linguistic proximity, as well as legal accessibility (Sulemani, 2009). Previous waves of migration were more oriented towards far-off countries, resulting in assimilation of most of them and with symbolic numbers of Albanians who returned due to the distance, have played a key cultural role in the determination and selection of Albanians to lean towards more nearby destinations which would allow them to come back as soon as the situation either political or social would be favorable for them.

This seems to have played an important role in the Albanian collective psychology and led to the belief that proximity to their homeland was a way efficient to keep constant contact with it. In our interactions with people who arrived earlier in Lyon, we find out that many Kosovo Albanians chose France with the belief that their absence was only for a given period and believed deeply in a return to the country of origin. They were almost without exception optimistic that they were only having a bad period in their life which would soon end and they would be happy when they return back in their country. With the time passing this thinking will evolve and take a variety of forms over time. In current circumstances and situation in Kosovo, many people leave Kosovo with the belief to remain and become integrated into the host society, giving priority to the new identity which positions them as better and as soon as possible into the host society. For many people who chose Lyon as their destination, France is a symbol of freedom and people believe that admission criteria are easier and more favorable to settle forever in France.

Social Integration of the Kosovo Albanian Diaspora

While the Kosovo Albanian immigrants in the Region of Rhone Alpes try to integrate and be absorbed into a new environment, they go through a specific form of development that in itself entails elements of distinctiveness and self-appreciation from the others in terms of remaining faithful in what they believe to be their identity. What makes the issue of integration more complex is the degree of education back in Kosovo the older generations had and the majority of them coming from rural areas where big patriarchal families are assumed to lack the necessary education. The interaction with people reveals that they have not changed much in their mentality (traditional), and despite their improved family economy, their quality of life has not changed as much. In this respect, the degree of integration is related to the degree of education. Kosovo Albanian diaspora in Lyon is positioned as not well-educated or intellectual diaspora. Due to this, there is a lack of cultural advancement associated with a failure of climbing the social ladder into a well-deserved level. In home visits we have made, the majority of Kosovo Albanian diaspora, especially men, prefer subjects that are related to their homeland, speaking about political, economic and cultural situation. Many of them show high degree of pessimism in the developments back in Kosovo for which they blame the leadership of the country.

What is very evident nowadays among the earlier generations who have come to live in the Region of Rhone Alpes, is the degree of preservation of their culture which compared to people living nowadays back in Kosovo, is more profound and for many things they are more fanatic. This gives the impression that while they have made significant steps on their way towards integration, a part of them has remained faithful to the time when they left their homeland back with strong elements of patriarchal and traditional family structure within

their families. Kosovo Albanian immigrants of young generation are in constant struggle to construct an identity in their interactions with diverse and traditional characters in the time when there is so much effort of the older generations, their parents, in preserving their own culture and identity. Albanians are striving all the time to find their place among the other people of France. The children of immigrants whose parents are low-educated tend to have low educational outcomes, for the fact that they are not able to make such judgments about the real value of education in upgrading their personal social status. In such circumstances the unfavorable outcome of children is attributed to their parents due to the lack of priority of early childhood education at critical age.

Conclusion

We can sum up that Kosovo Albanian community in Rhone Alpes live in a world of confusion and they live an ambiguous life between two fairly different cultures. While the traditional sources of family, homeland, ethnic belongingness, language and others are playing a significant role in their lives, their identity is being constantly challenged by the intervention of a different set of norms. Their movement from a country where they lived socially and culturally as a majority where they had a home, a family and a sense of belongingness, into a country where they are regarded as a social and cultural minority, treated as a second class people at the edge of the French social system often without home, family and the psychic burden of “foreigner”, has a great impact in terms of identity. During this stage of life, under such pressure, it is evident how much their individual behavior changes and the impact on their social lives and relationships in order to comply with the surrounding social obligations and norms which are quite distinct from their previous ones and which very often cannot be met. The new identity of the majority of Kosovo Albanian immigrants has been constructed and changed as a response to others’ behavior and the consequence of both internal and external pressures. As they progressed in adopting a new identity, the born identity has faded little by little over time leaving less and less Albanian sentiment in them. From what is said above, we can come to conclusion that language of origin can find its use as long as the first generation lives weakening from generation to generation thus resulting in loss of identity and embrace of the new identity which responds better to the circumstances in which they live. Language of origin is not the language which opens the doors to advancement to the second generation making its use less frequent resulting in less and less interest of the generations to transfer it to their successors.

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The Effectiveness of Self-Paced Online Language Courses With Gamification Elements in the University Setting

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Abstract

Self-paced learning is a crucial approach for fostering students' intrinsic motivation to delve deep into understanding a given subject. However, motivating students to learn through self-access online courses outside the classroom is not an easy task. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of two self-paced online language courses offered to all undergraduate students at the University of Hong Kong. The first course is designed to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to create effective digital CVs and write compelling cover letters. The second course offers an engaging approach to teach students Chinese idioms, fostering their language proficiency and cultural understanding. The online courses are designed using Open EdX as the learning platform and students enroll in the courses voluntarily. Both courses incorporate a variety of materials and online exercises to enhance the learning experience. Notably, gamification elements are strategically integrated into several exercises to enhance students' engagement and motivation. Qualitative and quantitative feedback are collected through online questionnaires and interviews to gather learners' experiences and perceptions of the gamified self-paced online courses. The response to both online courses has been overwhelmingly positive, with over 400 student enrollments in each course after the launch of the courses for eight months. The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research on effective online language learning methodologies and provide insights for future course design, particularly regarding gamification in the design and implementation of self-paced online courses.

Keywords: Self-Access Learning, Online Learning, Language Learning, Gamification, Student Engagement, Motivation

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Introduction

Self-paced learning is a crucial approach for fostering students' intrinsic motivation to delve deep into understanding a given subject. Compared to some subjects, where immediate comprehension of correctness is possible, language learning, on the other hand, necessitates prolonged practice in order to achieve enhanced language proficiency. The self-learning resources are therefore very important to enhance students' learning language outside classroom. However, motivating students to learn through self-access online courses outside the classroom is not an easy task.

The primary mission of the Chinese Language Enhancement Programme (CLEP) in the School of Chinese of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) is to offer comprehensive and practical Chinese language training to students in all faculties at HKU. Currently, CLEP offers mandatory 6-credits Practical Chinese language courses to all HKU undergraduates. To promote the importance of self-paced learning of language, two large-scale online self-access courses, namely, 'Digital CV' (CLEP01) and 'Chinese Idioms For Everyday life' (CLEP02), have been developed under my supervision, with the funding support of the HKU Teaching and Learning Development Grant (TDLEG). The two online courses have been integrated into the HKU online learning resources platform. All HKU students can enroll in these courses voluntarily using their HKU portal login credentials. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of these two self-paced online language courses offered to all undergraduate students at the University of Hong Kong during the period from September 2023 (official launch of the online courses) to April 2024.

Design of the Two Online Courses

During the course development stage and prior to their online launch, we have conducted interviews with employers, senior executives and human resources consultants across different industries to gain insight about the actual job market environment for the 'Digital CV' course. We have also conducted extensive research on various Chinese idioms dictionaries, books and website as reference to inform the content of the 'Chinese Idioms For Everyday Life' course. Subsequently, we have conducted video production, materials development and game exercise design for both online interactive self-access courseware in about 1 year.

The two online self-access courses are designed using Open EdX as the learning platform, in which all undergraduates of HKU can get access to the online courses by their university portal login voluntarily. Students can conveniently access these resources anytime, anywhere, and at their own pace.

The First Course: 'Digital CV' (CLEP01)

As the generation of digital natives, students are accustomed to immersing themselves in virtual environments for entertaining and socialization on a daily basis. The utilization of digital tools has also become an increasingly prevalent practice in the realm of job hunting. More and more companies will invite candidates to submit digital CVs to showcase their strengths and how they can contribute to the firm.

To make a quick response to the changing market environment and to better equip students to prepare for their coming job searching and interview, an online interactive learning resource

of ‘Digital CV’ (CLEP01) has been developed. Students can learn how to prepare both traditional written CVs and digital CVs for self-introduction or specific interview purposes. To cater for the diverse language needs of students, under my supervision as a CLEP member, this online course has been collaboratively developed with Centre for Applied English Studies (CAES), which offers university English courses, Chinese Language Centre (CLC), which offers university Putonghua courses, Centre of Development and Resources for Students (CEDARS), which facilitate career guidance service for university students, and Teaching and Learning Innovation Centre (TALIC) at the university.

A total of five sessions are structured in the course, with an introduction and four sessions of learning material and online interactive exercises. These exercises are meticulously crafted with varied question types and categories, with the purpose of guiding students to write compelling cover letters and CVs. What sets the course apart is the inclusion of numerous video interviews with employers, senior executives and human resources consultants in various industries. These video interviews provide students with valuable insights into the real market environment, enabling them to better prepare for job applications.

The Second Course: ‘Chinese Idioms For Everyday Life’ (CLEP02)

Chinese idioms have always been an important theme of Chinese language learning. The use of idioms is helpful for high-level language cognitive learning, improving learners' understanding of rhetoric, writing skills, and elevating overall Chinese language proficiency. In the past, students were always required by their secondary teachers to memorize the idiom dictionary verbatim, and the evaluation was often based on a rote recall or recognition response, not a practical application. Whether in language communication or writing, idioms cannot be properly used to effectively present thinking or illustrate mental constructs. In addition, secondary education has concentrated to prepare students for the public examinations, less time is allocated to discuss the use of Chinese idioms or the Chinese culture behind the idioms. Consequently, upon entering university, students often exhibit poor knowledge in this domain. Many of the existing Chinese idiom dictionaries or learning resources predominantly focus on the definition of individual idioms, allusions and meanings of the idiom. In most cases, the provided example sentences often lack relevance to real-world scenarios, making students feel that learning Chinese idioms are merely linguistic constructs and it is difficult to apply idioms in daily life.

To encourage students to learn and apply Chinese idioms in daily life, an online course ‘Chinese Idioms For Everyday Life’ (CLEP02) is developed solely by my team in CLEP. A total of six sessions are structured in the course, with an introduction and five sessions of learning material and online interactive exercises. In each session, there are videos prepared by teachers, illustrating how Chinese Idioms can be applied in everyday situations or delving the explanation of Chinese culture or allusions associated with specific Chinese idioms. The exercises are meticulously crafted with varied question types, with the purpose of evaluating students' knowledge of Chinese idioms from diverse perspectives. For example, there are exercises including tasks focusing on understanding the cultural context of Chinese idioms, correcting word usage within idiomatic expressions, and applying Chinese idioms in sentences etc.

Gamification Elements of the Two Online Courses

When developing these two online courses, we try to integrate the gamification elements into the design of the exercise to arouse students' interest and further enhance their learning experience. In our course design, the game characteristic refers to the design of exercise. In addition to conventional multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank exercises, we incorporate interactive elements like 'spot the issue game' and 'crossword puzzles' to add layers of complexity and make the 'game' (exercise) more challenging. For example, one of the 'spot the issue' exercises within the 'Digital CV' (CLEP01) course are designed as playing a game with 5 lives (Picture 1). Students need to spot the issue of a Chinese cover letter containing 15 problems. If students can spot the issue, the colour of the sentence will be changed from black to grey. If students spot the wrong answer, 1 life will be deducted. If all 5 lives are deducted, the 'game' is over. Students can retry the game (exercise) again (Picture 2). To let students have the feeling of playing games, a size-adjusting button, which is commonly found in gaming interfaces, is introduced within the 'spot the issue game', 'fill-in-the-blank' and 'crossword puzzles' exercises.

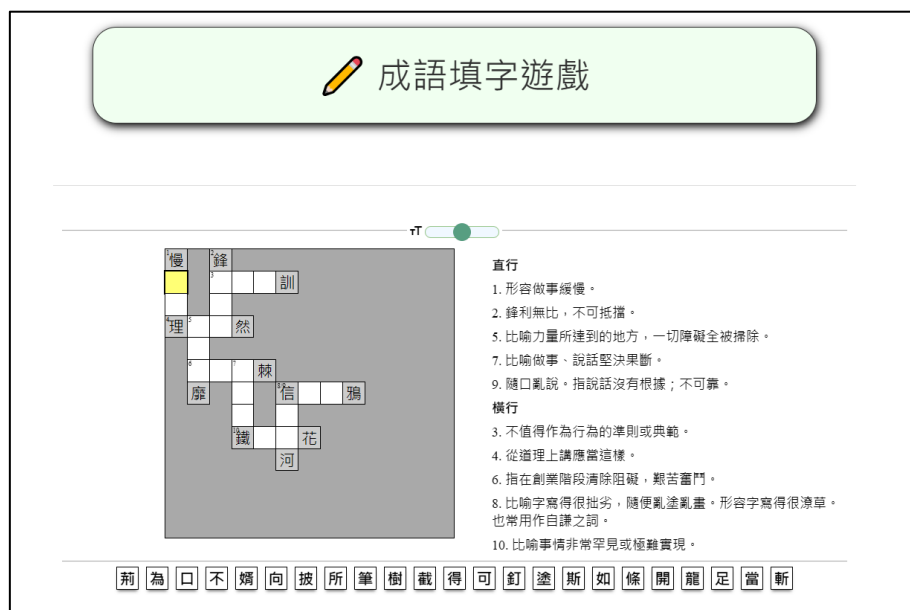


Picture 1: The number of 'life' is displayed at the top left-hand corner, while the size-adjusting button is displayed at the top right-hand corner.



Picture 2: When all 5 lives are deducted, the 'game' is over. Students can retry the game (exercise) again.

In the ‘Chinese Idioms For Everyday life’ (CLEP02) course, gamification element such as crossword puzzles is integrated into some exercises. For example, in Picture 3, students need to complete a crossword puzzle by choosing words from the bottom, aided by the hints provided on the right-hand side. If they fail, the ‘game’ will be over (Picture 4).



Picture 3: The ‘crossword puzzle game’ in the course ‘Chinese Idioms For Everyday Life’ (CLEP02). Students need to complete the crossword puzzle by choosing words from the bottom, aided by the hints provided on the right-hand side.



Picture 4: When students can't get the answer correctly, the ‘game’ is over. Students can retry the game (exercise) again.

The innovative approach, together with the integration of gamification element in these online courses design, distinguished it from standard online resources, making the learning experience more interactive and enjoyable for students.

Data Collection

Upon the initial completion of the two online courses but before their official launch, student helpers are invited to try the exercise and participate in focus group interviews to share their thoughts about the learning materials and the game exercise design, the level of difficulty of some specific questions and the smoothness of the online courseware system. Adjustments to certain questions are made based on the feedback received from the student helpers.

The online courseware was officially launched in September 2023, with enrollment open to all HKU undergraduates on a voluntary basis. Participants are encouraged to navigate to the last page of the course interface to complete an online questionnaire voluntarily after engaging with the courses, thereby fostering further feedback acquisition and refinement opportunities. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions, including both closed-end multiple-choice questions (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q6, Q8 and Q10) and open-ended questions (Q5, Q7, Q9, Q11 and Q12), enabling a comprehensive evaluation of various aspects of the online courses, including usability, content relevance, and the overall learning experience. It provides an opportunity for students to express their satisfaction levels, challenges encounter and suggestions.

Effectiveness of the Two Online Coursewares

Large Number of Enrollments

The two self-paced online courseware ‘Digital CV’ (CLEP01) and ‘Chinese Idioms For everyday life’ (CLEP02) were introduced in September 2023. Over the course of 8 months, from September 2023 to April 2024, 489 students voluntarily enrolled in the ‘Digital CV’ (CLEP01) course, while 407 students voluntarily enrolled in the ‘Chinese Idioms For Everyday Life’ (CLEP02). The large number of participants in both courses, despite their voluntary nature, serve as strong evidence that the two online courses can effectively meet students’ need for job searching preparation, as well as the enrichment of Chinese idiomatic knowledge.

Positive Feedback From Participants

Participants of the online courseware are invited to complete an online questionnaire voluntarily. Within the data collection period (from September 2023 to April 2024, 8 months), 302 and 333 online questionnaires were received for the online courses ‘Digital CV’ (CLEP01) and ‘Chinese Idioms For Everyday Life’ (CLEP02) respectively. The feedback from participants is overwhelmingly positive, offering valuable insights into the courses’ impact on job search preparation, Chinese idioms introduction, Chinese language proficiency improvement, learning flexibility and convenience, engagement through gamification, ease of navigation, and overall usefulness.

Questionnaire Result for ‘Digital CV’ (CLEP01)

302 online questionnaires were received for the online courses ‘Digital CV’ (CLEP01). Overall, the students highly praised the course for providing them with an opportunity to learn practical language knowledge in a more flexible and convenient way. Approximately 92% of participants rated the course as useful (Q8), and over 95% indicated that they would recommend it to their peers (Q10). Results also indicated that the course helped them become

more familiarized with the job market (Q1)(91.1%) and get better prepared for job searching (Q2)(87.8%), (Appendix 1).

Questionnaire Result for ‘Chinese Idioms FOR Everyday Life’ (CLEP02)

333 online questionnaires were received for the online courses ‘Chinese Idioms For Everyday Life’ (CLEP02). In general, most students agreed that the course helped them become more familiarized with the Chinese idioms (Q1)(89.5%). Around 91.3% of students rated the course as useful (Q8), and 93.4% students expressed willingness to recommend it to their peers (Q10), (Appendix 2).

The success of these two online self-access interactive courses is evidenced by the data collected. Within 8 months of their launch, the significant enrollment numbers reflect a genuine learning need among students for job search preparation and the application of Chinese idioms. Participants overwhelmingly agreed on the usefulness of the two courses, with praise that the game design is interesting, with most students would recommend the courses to their peers.

Conclusion

Digital technologies play an important role in personalizing the learning process. With the rapid development of science and technology, it is a general trend to introduce technology into teaching and learning. Effective self-access online learning materials have great potential for complementing classroom input and learner uptake. Students' mastery of new technologies has made them accustomed to learning at anytime and anywhere in a way that suits their own learning pace. Teachers from various units (or even different universities) can get together and work for better goals to enhance teaching and learning.

However, there are several challenges in designing online interactive courses. Firstly, the design of the online course on Chinese idioms need to pay attention to learner orientation and academic background, tailoring the learning materials content and activities to meet students' needs and interests.

Secondly, since students can learn the online course at their own learning pace and own learning ability, teachers need to skilfully design the learning materials and exercises of different level of difficulty and strategically organize them with the course structure. In terms of content, course design should focus on contextualization and practicality, allowing students to apply idioms in real contexts.

Finally, adequate focus on assessment and feedback mechanisms is essential to help students track their learning progress and receive effective guidance. To encourage students to enroll in courses, employing gamification element into exercise design is a good method, but this method involves whether there are enough skilled IT technicians to discuss with teacher how to align game design with course content effectively.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

In the writing process, AI tools ChatGPT3.5, ChatGPT4.0 and Grammarly are used to help polish the sentences.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Online questionnaire result for the course ‘Digital CV’ (CLEP01)

Q1. The course has helped me become more familiarized with the job market. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	125	41.39%	=91.1%
4	150	49.67%	
3	18	5.96%	
2	5	1.66%	
1 (not at all)	4	1.32%	
	302	100%	

Q2. The course has helped me get better prepared for the job searching. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	137	45.21%	=87.8%
4	129	42.57%	
3	24	7.92%	
2	9	2.97%	
1 (not at all)	4	1.32%	
	303	100%	

Q3. The course has helped me learn practical language knowledge in a more flexible and convenient way. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	121	40.06%	=87.1%
4	142	47.02%	
3	27	8.94%	
2	6	1.99%	
1 (not at all)	6	1.99%	
	302	100%	

Q4. The gamification part of the course (cover letter and resume exercise in Section 3) is interesting. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	104	34.32%	=88.8%
4	165	54.46%	
3	20	6.60%	
2	8	2.64%	
1 (not at all)	6	1.98%	
	303	100%	

Q5. If you rate 3 or below for the previous question, please explain and suggest ways for improvements.

- Use two languages in the same page please
- More specific explanation and shorter exercise could be provided
- Too hard to find 15 answers with 20 tries, would be better if you could put the not-so-good examples and the better examples on the same page and highlight the mistakes
- Too few lives, need to try from the beginning once game-over experiences, but agree this made learning more fun

Q6. Overall, I find the course system easy to navigate. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	113	37.42%	=91.7%
4	164	54.31%	
3	20	6.62%	
2	3	0.99%	
1 (not at all)	2	0.66%	
	302	100%	

Q7. If you rate 3 or below for the previous question, please explain and suggest ways for improvements.

- The system is not that easy to follow. Can provide some audios to aid
- The videos that I have finished watching do not count as watched

Q8. Overall, I would rate this course useful. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	120	39.87%	=92%
4	157	52.16%	
3	15	4.98%	
2	3	1.00%	
1 (not at all)	6	1.99%	
	301	100%	

Q9. If you rate 3 or below for the previous question, please explain and suggest ways for improvements

- A bit fragmented
- I can just come back anytime to look for details instead of watching everything

Q10. Would you recommend this course to your peers? (Yes, No)

Answer	Count	%
Yes	288	95.7%
No	13	4.3%
	301	100%

Q11. If you choose 'No' for the previous question, please explain why not.

- The course is too long to complete. Nevertheless, it do gives some important knowledge on the language needed in the workplace
- The things I looked at just now are not really hard

Q12. Any other suggestions to help us improve the course?

- The interactive exercises are fun, but the paragraphs are a bit hard to read. Larger spacing may help
- The videos can be put together as one, separating is helpful but also a long video which gather all of them in one single topic
- Some questions are very hard
- There are some parts asking us to try to figure out the mistakes which I think may need some improvements because I found that it is very inconvenient to compare the correct one with the wrong one. They are on two different pages and the explanation to the wrong sentence will only show when we click the right "wrong" sentence
- I suggest adding one more page which highlight all the wrong sentences with all explanation shown all together.
- This course is really perfect
- Perfect and nothing more to improve
- Provide link for downloading notes
- This is interesting
- More examples

Appendix 2: Online questionnaire result for the course ‘Chinese Idioms for Everyday Life’ (CLEP02)

Q1. The course has helped me become more familiarized with the Chinese Idioms. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	146	43.84%	=89.5%
4	152	45.65%	
3	25	7.51%	
2	7	2.10%	
1 (not at all)	3	0.90%	
	333	100%	

Q2. The course has enhanced my Chinese writing skill. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	91	27.33%	=74.5%
4	157	47.15%	
3	58	17.41%	
2	19	5.71%	
1 (not at all)	8	2.40%	
	333	100%	

Q3. The course has helped me learn practical Chinese language knowledge in a more flexible and convenient way. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	120	36.04%	=85.6%
4	165	49.55%	
3	36	10.81%	
2	8	2.40%	
1 (not at all)	4	1.20%	
	333	100%	

Q4. The gamification part of the course (eg crossword puzzle in Section 5) is interesting. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	136	40.84%	=90.7%
4	166	49.85%	
3	19	5.71%	
2	7	2.10%	
1 (not at all)	5	1.50%	
	333	100%	

Q5. If you rate 3 or below for the previous question, please explain and suggest ways for improvements.

- I think should have a session to let us use the idioms to write some sentences
- More hints
- Some questions are so difficult
- For words I do not understand, there are no clues to figure them out at all
- Can reduce some exercise, there is a little bit much
- Adding a delete button is recommended as students might accidentally click into the wrong button and need to refill in all the correct answers again for submission
- Can give more examples on how to apply the Chinese idioms during writing
- Perhaps it is more useful to deliver the meaning and history through videos, animation and pictures

Q6. Overall, I find the course system easy to navigate. (5 very much so; 1: not at all;)

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	120	36.15%	=91.9%
4	185	55.72%	
3	22	6.63%	
2	3	0.90%	
1 (not at all)	2	0.60%	
	332	100%	

Q7. If you rate 3 or below for the previous question, please explain and suggest ways for improvements.

- If possible, the page can add a slide about some idioms that have appeared in the questions and with their explanations and origins
- Too many tasks that require me to click "next"
- Maybe more videos and animation

Q8. Overall, I would rate this course useful.

Answer	Count	%	%
5 (very much so)	107	32.13%	=91.3%
4	197	59.16%	
3	18	5.41%	
2	7	2.10%	
1 (not at all)	4	1.20%	
	333	100%	

Q9. If you rate 3 or below for the previous question, please explain and suggest ways for improvements.

- It would be nice to explain the false MC choices as well

Q10. Would you recommend this course to your peers?

Answer	Count	%
Yes	310	93.4%
No	22	6.6%
	332	100%

Q11. If you choose 'No' for the previous question, please explain why not.

- Too many exercises question
- Too hard for me to handle

Q12. Any other suggestions to help us improve the course?

- Include more written examples
- Provide more practice
- Good
- Provide more videos for small tips in learning about Chinese Idioms, e.g. we can guess the combination of words and figure out the complete whole idioms by observing certain patterns in the Idioms
- The course can provide more videos for introducing the important of the using idioms in daily life
- More interactive games like crossword puzzle and fill in the blanks can be used to improve study motivation
- Great course to enrich my understanding of the Chinese idioms, thought can be more interesting by adding more crossword puzzles like those in exercise 4
- More interactive games
- Very good enough
- Perfect
- It is perfect
- Some teaching videos of the idioms may be included before the exercises
- Perfect
- Can add some explanation for the incorrect answers
- Questions might have hints of the correct answer after students click the wrong answer.
- Reduce the word list and focus more on the illustration of the words' history and its application.
- The contents are very good and useful

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***Developing Listening Comprehension in English Language Teaching:
Insights From a Needs Analysis Study***

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Abstract

Listening proficiency, though inherently challenging to teach due to its complexity and implicit nature, holds paramount importance in linguistic competence as it serves as a comprehensible input for enhancing both auditory comprehension and broader linguistic competence. Recognising the pivotal role of needs analysis in educational inquiry, this teacher research seeks to elucidate a cohort of 73 ELT students' needs and preferences concerning listening comprehension to suggest and implement instructional approaches. Employing introspective self-reports, the study aimed to discover students' perceptions of their self-efficacy, encountered challenges, strategies to overcome, and instructional preferences pertinent to listening comprehension. The inductive content analysis of 1732 words disclosed a nuanced depiction of students' moderately perceived self-efficacy in listening comprehension ($M = 3,15$), delineating prevalent impediments such as the inadequate listening practice ($n = 21$), recognition of spoken words ($n = 13$), and deficient lexical knowledge ($n = 11$). Proposed remedial strategies prominently featured cinematic engagement ($n = 41$), extensive auditory exposure ($n = 14$), and the utilisation of auditory media such as songs ($n = 12$) and podcasts ($n = 14$). Notably, recommendations for instructional enhancements underscored the salience of extensive listening practices ($n = 20$) and the cultivation of speech clarity ($n = 18$) in intensive listening. Systematic categorisation of identified issues and solutions facilitated a coherent synthesis, illuminating a collective inclination toward addressing bottom-up processing challenges and advocating for the augmentation of extensive listening activities. These discernments furnish valuable insights for formulating targeted pedagogical interventions to ameliorate listening proficiency within the ELT domain.

Keywords: Listening Comprehension, English Language Teaching, Needs Analysis

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Introduction

Listening comprehension in English as a foreign language context is one of the most essential skills to develop, yet the most neglected skill both for research and teaching purposes. To fill this gap, this research incorporated a needs analysis to examine students' needs for improving listening comprehension. Therefore, this paper covered the background of the study, the characteristics of the current study, findings elicited from needs analysis, discussion of these findings with the literature, and concluding two types of listening instruction.

As for the background of the study, five components served the purpose of this study: the researcher's experience as a learner and teacher, ELT students, the listening course, the listening comprehension, and needs analysis. As a lifelong learner and teacher of the English language, the researcher experienced listening skills as the second challenging skill, following speaking skills to learn and to teach due to, intuitively speaking, variety of accents, deficiency of exposure to those accents, pace of speech, phonological forms of words, and so on. Secondly, working at an ELT department of a state university in Türkiye, where English is perceived to be a foreign language rather than a second language, the researcher involved the students of this department who would be future English teachers in four years of education. As learners of English and future English teachers, their English language proficiency, especially their listening skills, deserves much attention in research. Thirdly, English language programs in Turkish universities deliver compulsory listening lessons in two terms in the first grade with two credits, which, by experience, is inadequate for developing listening skills. As a fourth component, listening skill is a complex cognitive process implicit in decoding, interpreting, and understanding the spoken discourse, which also involves actively employing both top-down and bottom-up processing skills (Rost, 2011) along with listening strategies (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). This multi-faced skill might also require some levels of instruction (Field, 2008). It can also be best improved by listening extensively outside the classrooms according to the students' interests (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Students' needs should be considered when choosing either of these instructions. Lastly, as Goh (2023) suggests, the triggering point of most investigations in listening comprehension should start with a needs analysis of students' problems in listening comprehension; to this end, this study focused on students' particular needs specific to the context of the current research.

Needs analysis could be defined as a systematic process essential for designing effective language instructions tailored to students' needs, learners' current language abilities, specific problems in language use, solutions to overcome these problems, and student's preferences in language use that could be collected through various methods such as surveys, interviews, diagnostic tests, self-reports, and observations (Brown, 1995). Supported by these five components and to meet the research objective, the current study was predicated on two targets: a deep discovery of comprehension problems and finding pedagogical solutions to those problems. Therefore, this small-scale study attempted to find answers to two research questions as follows:

1. What are ELT students' primary needs and suggestions regarding listening comprehension in the EFL context?
2. What are the possible instructional solutions to meet the needs and to follow the suggestions?

Methodology

To answer these research questions, a needs analysis was conducted in the form of introspective self-reports before the listening course in the fall semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. 73 ELT students voluntarily gave responses to four open-ended questions in two days through Google Forms in the first week of the semester. Two days were granted to them to answer these questions so that they could reflect on their listening experience. The questions are: (1) *How do you evaluate your listening skills? Choose from 1 to 5.* (2) *What problems do you face while listening to a spoken text?* (3) *How do you overcome those problems and develop your listening skills?* (4) *What do you expect to have in this course, and what are your instructional suggestions to the lecturer?* The responses consisted of around 1732 words. This data set was analysed through inductive content analysis; that is, the categories were not pre-determined; instead, they emerged out of data analysis. One of the ELT professionals also checked the codes and categories. We agreed on the codes and categories at the level of .90 to meet the inter-coder reliability. The ethical committee of the university where the larger research project of this research was administered also approved the conduct of the study on 05.06.2024 with the document no: 7062.

Findings

The findings encapsulated learners' responses to four questions in the self-reports. For the first question, as shown in Table 1, students' evaluation of their listening skills was moderate ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .67$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening level	71	1.00	5.00	3.15	.67

Table 2 illustrates the answers to the last three questions probed from learners in the form of the frequency of the mentioned codes. Regarding the problems faced by learners for listening comprehension, inadequate practice occurred 21 times, and the accent factor was mentioned eight times, all of which could be converged under the extensive listening category ($f = 29$). Deficiency of lexical competence ($f = 11$), recognition of spoken words ($f = 13$), and co-articulation effects ($f = 8$) were other most commonly occurring codes. These could be subsumed under intensive listening ($f = 32$). Regarding the solutions or strategies that learners used to overcome the problems above, watching movies ($f = 41$), extensive auditory exposure ($f = 14$), listening to songs ($f = 12$), and podcasts ($f = 14$) could be amalgamated under the extensive listening ($f = 81$). Only seven mentions of intensive listening practice (developing lexical knowledge = 4 and developing pronunciation = 3) were found as strategies used by learners. As for the last question about learners' suggestions to instructors, learners suggested more extensive practice ($f = 20$). Intensive listening ($f = 18$) was also offered by instructors by stating slow speech seven times, clear speech six times, and focusing on words five times.

Some sample quotes from learners were also added here to illustrate and confirm the codes and categories. For instance, regarding the most frequent code of *inadequate listening practice*, "not practising enough" by Participant 53 (hereafter P.) and "I have not practised before and have studied completely exam-oriented" by P. 56 were stated. As regards the role of *accents*, "some words are pronounced differently in different accents" was stated by P. 58 and "every teacher has a different accent, and this situation confuses me" was mentioned by

P.51. As for *the deficiency of lexical knowledge*, P. 5 remarked that “there may be a lack of vocabulary,” and P. 59 averred that “it is necessary to work with the pronunciation of words.” The other quotes were related to the code of *phonological aspects of words* such as “some letters come together to make different sounds (P. 68)” and “some words in English are very similar to each other, and sometimes I get the pronunciation confused (P. 49).”

Table 2. Content analysis of learners’ responses to the last three questions

Theme	Codes	f	Categories	f
Problems	Inadequate practice	21	Extensive listening	29
	Accent	8		
	Deficiency of lexical competence	11	Intensive listening	32
	Recognition of spoken lexis	13		
	Co-articulation effects	8		
	Others	26	Attention, syntax, speed, etc.	
Total		87		
Strategies	Watching movies	41	Extensive listening	81
	Extensive auditory exposure	14		
	Listening to songs	12		
	Podcasts including stories	14		
	Developing lexical knowledge	4	Intensive listening	7
	Developing pronunciation	3		
	Others	10	Applications, Tedx, etc.	
Total		99		
Instructional suggestions	Extensive listening practices	20	Extensive listening	20
	Slow speech	7	Intensive listening	18
	Clear speech	6		
	More focus on words	5		
	Others	13	Loud voice, pronunciation, etc.	
Total		51		

Discussion

These findings reflect the outcomes of some studies in the literature. Regarding the factor of inadequate listening practice, Goh (2000), Graham (2006), Gökmen (2021), and Renandya and Farrell (2011) encountered insufficient listening practice in their participants and called for more extensive practice in listening. To support the finding in this study that accent is a defining factor in listening comprehension, familiar accents can affect listening comprehension positively (Gass & Varonis, 1984), while stronger accents, including non-native accents (Major et al., 2002), can negatively affect understanding (Munro & Derwing, 1999). The lack of lexical competence found in this study can also be ascertained by Nation and Snowling (1997) and Stæhr (2009), who found a strong correlation between listening comprehension and lexical knowledge. The other factor was related to the ability to recognise the phonological forms of words, which Matthews and Cheng (2015) found to be a challenge in recognising known words in connected speech due to co-articulation effects. To

compensate for such hurdles, note-taking (Gökmen et al., 2024) and more strategic instruction (Gökmen, 2023b) could be incorporated into the listening classrooms.

Conclusion

On the grounds of needs analysis, two instruction proposals could be suggested to ELT shareholders; teacher educators, language practitioners, and learners. Intensive and extensive listening could be used in a complementary way to develop listening comprehension, which is a necessity in the deschooling ELT in the digital era (Gökmen, 2023a). As language learning commences at schools, listening lessons could cover more intensive listening instruction that focuses on the detailed understanding of lexical and structural patterns of spoken language to improve students' top-down and bottom-up processing skills along with listening strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, and compensatory strategies. Distinguishing figures imported on some of the benefits of intensive listening. First, intensive listening could provide students with the skills to comprehend specific details through note-taking, answering comprehension questions, and focusing on the meanings of individual words (Rost, 2011). Provision of listening strategies such as cognitive (inference, elaboration, summarisation, etc.) and metacognitive strategies (planning, monitoring, and evaluation) can raise more strategic listeners (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Thirdly, though graphical forms of words could be known to learners, their phonological forms may not be familiar to them; therefore, more focus on phonological aspects of language, such as supra-segmental dimensions of spoken language, could contribute to listening comprehension (Field, 2008). Lastly, intensive listening can create opportunities to delve into some explanation regarding lexical and grammatical forms through dictation (Richard, 2005). As most listening classes only have two hours of instruction, which is not enough to develop an implicit and complex skill as listening, listening practice could be geared towards outside the classroom through extensive listening practice. Extensive listening is a crucial type of practice in English Language Teaching (ELT) as it provides learners with ample exposure to the target language in a natural and engaging context by listening to a wide range of authentic sources, such as songs, podcasts, movies, and conversations to enhance listening fluency. Extensive listening can aid listening comprehension in four ways. Firstly, learners would be exposed to a variety of different accents, intonations, and speech rates (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). It will help broaden learners' competence in lexical and syntactical structures (Nation & Newton (2009). Listening fluency could be achieved through exposure to the natural pronunciation and intonation patterns (Field, 2008). Last but not least, considering the anxiety factor, extensive listening could give more enjoyable and less stressful time while listening in that students will listen to audio texts as songs and podcasts on their interests (Harmer, 2007). As an overarching dictum to conclude this paper, Rost (2011, p. 189) states that:

By engaging in intensive listening, learners hone their ability to decipher the intricate details of spoken language, which enhances their overall comprehension and linguistic accuracy. Complementing this with extensive listening exposes them to a wide range of authentic contexts, fostering fluency and a deeper cultural understanding.

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English as a Second Language (ESL) Teachers' Experiences in Incorporating Pragmatics in ESL Classrooms: A Case Study

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Abstract

It is imperative that ESL instructors understand the field of pragmatics, which is the knowledge of using the target language in social and cultural contexts through everyday social interactions, and learn how to incorporate pragmatics into lesson plans. The research on the incorporation of pragmatics is still limited; it is not sufficiently understood to what extent ESL teachers incorporate pragmatics. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore if and how ESL teachers address pragmatics when it is not part of their program curriculum. The purposefully selected sample consisted of 15 community college ESL instructors from the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, with supplementary methods including observations and document review. Utilizing inductive analysis, the results were analyzed and interpreted and grouped into three themes based on the study's conceptual framework, the Interaction Hypothesis. The research revealed that ESL teachers do not teach pragmatics explicitly; they only address errors caused by cultural differences as they arise and only if they are recognized by the instructors. Also, ESL teachers, regardless of their level of pragmatics awareness and knowledge, face a variety of challenges, such as the lack of language materials that cover pragmatics and having an overloaded curriculum. The findings of this case study support previous research by highlighting a strong need in the area of practice and recommended more emphasis in integrating pragmatic learning and teaching in ESL programs. It also highlights a number of opportunities for future research.

Keywords: ESL Teachers' Pragmatic Awareness, Incorporating Pragmatics in ESL Classrooms, EFL Teachers

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Introduction

One of the essential yet complicated aspects of learning a new language is pragmatics, which refers to the social language skills that humans utilize in everyday interactions. Second language (L2) pragmatics examines how L2 speakers use both linguistic and nonlinguistic methods to create and interpret meanings, how their usage evolves over time, and the influences affecting this development (Taguchi & Kádár, 2024). The key to effective communication does not lie in the successful expression of the speaker's intended meaning but it also lies in the recipient's interpretation, which can be affected by their home culture and social norms. A male ESL student who endeavored to compliment his teacher by saying, "You are wearing a very cute dress. It fits you" might be considered as an inappropriate compliment by a female teacher. However, as an English language learner, the student, who hears American speakers complimenting each other frequently on looks and clothes, intends to reveal his enthusiasm for employing the target language by complementing his American female teacher. ESL and EFL teachers need to understand that solely teaching syntax and forms of the target language is not adequate for learners to become competent in every aspect of the English language. However, one of the difficulties that hinders pragmatic instruction is mandatory curricula (Borer, 2018). Some ESL instructors do not cover pragmatics because it is not part of their curriculum. EFL/ESL programs do not embrace pragmatics in their curriculum. Sharif et al. (2017) stated that most language programs are currently still trying to operate on a traditional curriculum, and most EFL teachers have an overloaded curriculum to cover and are often conditioned to teach to the test rather than to the student. Therefore, it is not clear how and to what extent ESL teachers address pragmatics when it is not part of the curriculum. Focusing on a sociocultural perspective to examine how ESL teachers address pragmatics through their interactions with their students and each other, this case study utilized the Interaction Hypothesis as its conceptual framework, and the following question guided the research and addressed the study's purpose:

- How do community college ESL teachers address pragmatics when it is not an explicit part of their program curriculum?

Conceptual Framework

Interactions among teachers and students play a crucial role in any learning, particularly in language learning, since learning is boosted through socially supported inter-communications (Stinemetz, 2019). Interacting with colleagues and students help ESL/EFL teachers build their ability to notice sociocultural language differences and allow them to adjust their teaching repertoire accordingly (Moeller & Catalano, 2015; Norouzian & Eslami, 2016). Since interaction is one of the primary components of language learning and teaching, and interaction is constructed by participants as they dynamically negotiate not just meaning but also their cultural and social identities, interaction is essential to the study of pragmatic development (Norouzian & Eslami, 2016). Thus, the Interaction Hypothesis shed light on if and how ESL teachers addressed pragmatics when it was not an explicit part of their program curriculum by exploring the types of interactions that teachers engaged in to develop learners' pragmatic competence in classrooms.

Literature Review

The Intersection of Pragmatic and Communicative Competence: Developing Additional Skills

Within L2 teaching and learning, pragmatics includes speech acts, conversational construction and implicature, discourse association, and sociolinguistic features of language use. The study of pragmatics also explores the ability of language users to match utterances with contexts in which they are appropriate (Taguchi & Kadar, 2024). When someone says, "I have a lot of work to do tonight," they might be expressing their workload or subtly declining an invitation to go out or even implying that they might not want to be bothered. As Taguchi and Kadar (2024) stated these types of claims have standard implications that make sense in light of the surrounding circumstances, and the context between the speaker and the listener determines both parties' intended meanings. Thus, pragmatics delves into the ways in which meaning is influenced by context as well as the differences that exist between the speaker's intention and the listener's perception. However, the speaker's intentions or listener's perceptions are also shaped by their cultural background. Pragmatics provides insight into the target culture, and students cannot communicate effectively without having pragmatic competence (Bardovi-harlig, 2020); thus, teaching of pragmatics should aim to build learners' pragmatic competence by facilitating the learners' sense of being able to find socially appropriate language for the situations that they encounter.

To fully grasp pragmatic competence, it's essential to first understand the concept of 'competence' and the relationship between pragmatic and communicative competence. In second language acquisition, the primary goal is to develop the ability to use language effectively in communicative situations. The focus of language teaching is to help learners achieve what Hymes (1972) termed communicative competence—namely, the ability to use language accurately to meet communication objectives by applying grammatical and sociocultural knowledge in context (Taguchi, 2019). Taguchi and Li (2020) describe language competence as both the knowledge of the language and the ability to apply that knowledge to produce meaningful oral and written expressions appropriate to the situation. Since developing competence involves acquiring knowledge, and communicative competence emphasizes the application of this knowledge in specific contexts, it can be concluded that communicative competence relies on two key elements: knowledge and skill application. However, as Bardovi-Harlig (2015) pointed out, possessing linguistic knowledge and communicative competence alone does not ensure that language learners will become fully proficient in the target language, as they must also understand the target culture and apply sociocultural knowledge appropriately in social contexts. Thus, even though pragmatic competence intertwined with communicative competence, it still requires additional features for learners to fully develop. These additional features are summarized by Taguchi (2019) in three layers since pragmatic competence is complex and encompasses a diverse knowledge domains and skill sets: (1) linguistic and sociocultural understanding of appropriate forms to use in various contexts; (2) interactional skills to apply knowledge in a flexible and adaptable way to changing circumstances; and (3) agency to decide for oneself whether or not to apply knowledge in the community. Pragmatic competence is not just about knowing how language forms relate to functions and contexts. It also involves using this knowledge flexibly and adaptively in conversations. This means that the connections between language forms, functions, and contexts are not fixed. Instead, they depend on the ongoing interaction and are created together by the people involved in the conversation (Taguchi & Li, 2020).

The Importance of Teaching Pragmatics

Rather than focusing only on students' awareness and how learners acquire pragmatic awareness, it is also imperative to focus on teachers' awareness of pragmatics and understand how they integrate their professional knowledge of pragmatics into their classroom practice. Taguchi (2015) and Cohen (2016) showed that students' pragmatic awareness is correlated to ESL teachers' mindfulness and perception of pragmatics and the method of instruction that they utilize in classrooms. Taguchi (2015) reviewed 58 studies conducted over the past 30 years, focusing on the role of pragmatics in language instruction. One key finding from this comprehensive analysis was that raising awareness of pragmatics and explicitly teaching it can significantly benefit language learners. Therefore, as Cohen (2016) stated, the role of teachers cannot be undervalued since pragmatics can be demanding for learners to obtain on their own, and it is crucial to perceive and define pragmatic awareness as a vital teaching target that language teachers should be aware of and should be made aware of.

A more recent study that was conducted by Ren et., al. (2023) explored how instruction impacts second language (L2) learners' pragmatic competence and identified factors that influence the effectiveness of such instruction. A thorough literature review identified 29 primary studies involving 1,898 L2 learners, resulting in 54 effect sizes for comparisons between groups. The findings indicated that pragmatic instruction significantly improves L2 pragmatic competence and explicit instruction tends to be more effective than implicit instruction. Plonsky and Zhuang (2019) also conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of L2 pragmatics instruction, synthesizing 50 studies available up to 2016. Their findings confirm significant and sustainable effects of L2 pragmatics instruction. They observed that explicit instruction was more effective than implicit instruction; instruction that included feedback outperformed instruction without feedback; and teaching that provided opportunities for practice was more effective than teaching without such opportunities. Language is a vehicle essential for effective and meaningful interactions and leads to a better understanding of speakers' intended messages. However, how a listener perceives and interprets the messages does not only depend on how a speaker conveys his or her intended messages, but it also depends on the listener's receptive pragmatic competence. Thus, it is imperative that ESL/EFL teachers are aware of pragmatics and incorporate pragmatics in their lessons so that they help their students develop their pragmatic competence.

Research Methodology and Design

Given that the researcher was working with a phenomenon happening "within a real-life context" and addressing the question of "how" to understand and create an in-depth description and analysis of the participants' experience, a qualitative case study research method was utilized. The case study methodology aligned with the problem and research question. As it is stated by Yin (2018), it is crucial that researchers achieve methodological cohesion, which can only be accomplished when the research question aligns with the method of data collection, method of data analysis, sample size and type, the assumptions of the approach, and the results expected from the approach. To provide sufficient detail and utilize various data collection methods as a form of triangulation, data collection methods for this case study were individual semi-structured interviews, observations, and document review.

Population and Sample

This study targeted community college ESL teachers in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The institution was selected as the research site due to its abundance of ESL teachers and access to resources. The ESL program was designed as an English Language Transition Program (ELT). Hence, students took courses only twice a week and were allowed to take college courses once they completed the ESL program. The number of participants was decided based on the scope of the study, the study design, and saturation. Fifteen participants were purposefully selected, 2 male and 13 female ESL instructors, who had diverse educational backgrounds and varying years of professional experience. Eleven participants had at least 10 years of teaching experience in the field, and the educational backgrounds of the 15 participants ranged from Master of Arts degrees in mostly TESOL and TEFL to one participant who had a PhD in Linguistics.

Materials and Instrumentations

Interviews

Thirteen open-ended interview questions were used as the primary instrument for data collection for this descriptive, case study. The interview questions were developed and implemented to allow participants to give in-depth details about their in-class experiences regarding teaching pragmatics in their ESL classrooms. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted via Zoom. To ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality, the recorded sessions were saved solely as audio files. Although NVivo was used for transcription, the researcher meticulously reviewed each transcript alongside the audio recordings to ensure precise transcription. To maintain credibility and accuracy, the researcher also engaged in member checking by having participants review the initial findings.

Observations

Five synchronous session recordings of four diverse ranges of ESL classes, considering different subjects and levels, were collected from five different participants to observe if and how pragmatics occur in different subjects and levels taught by the participants, as well as to learn more about how participants address pragmatics. The four purposely selected courses were: English for Academic Purposes, an integrated, high-advanced course, a high intermediate writing course, a high intermediate reading course, and a low intermediate speaking and listening course. Because the sessions were recorded using a video conferencing platform, a transcript accompanied the recording, and the researcher checked the accuracy of the transcription. An observation checklist, which aligned with the research question, was also created and used.

Document Review

Document analysis was another instrument for this qualitative data collection technique. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2022) stated, the document review provides a substantial asset for delivering insights gained through other data gathering methods. For this study, to explore if and how the participants implemented pragmatics into their teaching, sample lesson plans were collected. Reviewing participants' lesson plans helped verify the information provided by the participants and ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the collected data.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this specific case study, the inductive analysis approach was utilized by systematically organizing files, reviewing the interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents, and creating memos. Then, to guide the researcher in analyzing the data, in alignment with the Interaction Hypothesis framework, codes were created. Emergent codes as well as descriptive and in vivo code were utilized. Because it is seldom that a research gets precise coding in the first iteration (Saldana, 2016), re-coding was conducted to refine and improve accuracy. Final codes and themes emerged and direct interpretation was employed to create assertions and generalizations. To provide transparency, reliability and trustworthiness, the data was cross examined to identify themes and links among them. A data summary table was designed and participant responses were consistently documented to accurately report and analyze the findings.

Limitations

There were two limitations of this study. First, because the participants were selected only from community colleges, it would be difficult to transfer the results into other contexts. Given the diversity of ESL programs and the varying curriculum and focus areas, ESL teachers' pragmatic awareness and instructional experience at community colleges may differ from those of ESL teachers at four-year colleges. Second, although the problem and purpose of the study were directly relevant to EFL teachers, as pragmatics is a vital aspect of teaching and learning a foreign language, the study's findings could not be generalized to EFL teachers.

Findings

Theme 1: Addressing Culture and Pragmatics. The majority of participants (14 of 15) indicated that they do not teach pragmatics explicitly; they only incorporate communication skills and address errors caused by cultural differences as they arise. Two of these same participants (2 of 15) also stated that they can identify the pragmatic miscommunications that occur in classrooms and address them properly. For instance, Chloe stated, “So, I don't explicitly focus on pragmatics. I teach pragmatics as pragmatic errors arise, so for example, when the student said, “Do I have to?” I said, “Yes in American culture when someone says that I would like you to, they are indirectly commanding you to do something” or different things like asking my age. I say to them, “I'm a lady and in the US, you can't ask me that.” And when we do that, I usually talk about it's usually a dialogue. So, we talked about what it's like in their countries and how it's the same or different. Sometimes it arises out of readings that we do, but most of the time it is student-generated errors that become teachable moments.” Rachel said, “I don't teach as a specific part of my lesson. I wouldn't say now we're going to do pragmatics or now we're going to focus on norms. I think it's... I sort of allow it to happen a little bit more naturally. It's definitely something I teach because that's something that I think is very important. And it's part of the success that I want for them is to be able to interact appropriately and know how to interact. So, I think I could build it into conversation lessons especially.”

Marry also stated that she did not teach pragmatics explicitly. She said, “I don't teach pragmatics, I mean explicitly but when I encounter miscommunications due to the differences between the cultural norms, I correct my students and explain the norms, and the following class I usually create classroom activities, such as a role play dialogue for them to practice in

class.” Donna also noted, “So, I am not teaching pragmatics explicitly. It comes up spontaneously. I don't think I label it. I think I just. I do it. It's you know, if I'm doing speaking exercises or listening exercises.”

The researcher noted that neither the lesson plans gathered from the participants nor the transcribed observations indicated that the participating instructors incorporated pragmatics explicitly. Both the lesson plans and observations helped triangulate the responses during the interview.

Theme 2: The Role of Interaction. All participants (15 of 15), during the interview, stated that through their interactions with their students, they gained knowledge about both culture and pragmatics. Eight participants also stated that their understanding of pragmatics and culture had also been greatly aided by their interactions with coworkers and former graduate classmates. For instance, Catherine, said: “You know, the community college in which I teach. It has a number of students and a number of different cultures and all come together right in this one classroom. It is a heterogeneous mix of homogeneous learning, if that makes any sense. I mean, interacting with people from all different cultures has also educated me about pragmatics, interacting with colleagues has definitely assisted me in learning more about pragmatics. I love when my students will educate me about it, about an aspect of conversation in their culture.”

Elizabeth also underlined the importance of interaction and commented: “Absolutely, interacting with my students helps me to learn about other cultures. I feel like I ask the question all the time in my class, “How do you say this in your native language?” or you know, “How is this looked upon in your country?” In reading, too, in the current textbook, there's actually a chapter about a professor who does a study between American students and Brazilian students and being late for class and getting cultural differences. I feel like I'm learning all the time and I'm eager to learn. I want to know how it's done in other countries and in other cultures and other languages. That helps me and that helps inform my teaching going forward.”

Rachel also highlighted the importance of interaction with students and stated, “The students definitely helped me learn about other cultures the most, not just because I'm interacting with them in a usual sense, but because a lot of the assignments or activities or group work I give them is about their home culture. It's about telling me where you're from. Tell me how you celebrate this.” Melissa highlighted the benefits of sharing experiences with colleagues and stated, “I think my colleagues at the community college, I met a few who have experienced living abroad or only living here, but have experienced enough with people who are from other countries where they gain. They have at least an understanding from a humanistic perspective, that we're not dealing with the same types of cultural or social norms that we have here. I learn from my colleagues by talking to them between classes or exchanging ideas during our department meetings.” However, Jamie's answer with regard to interacting with colleagues was dissimilar. He said, “I don't really interact with many of my co-workers. I teach part time. I don't spend time on campus. I usually teach and leave.”

From the transcribed observations, the researcher noted instances of interactions where teachers needed to negotiate the meaning and made clarifications of speech acts while they were interacting with their students. For instance, Marry, who was teaching a reading course, was reviewing a vocabulary section in the textbook. One of her students suddenly sneezed, and another student said “Live Healthy,” then the student who sneezed said, “Thank you.”

However, the instructor said, “Did you mean ‘God Bless You’?” And, the student said, “Sorry, I am not sure, in my country this is what we say.” Then, the instructor turned this into a teachable moment by opening a small discussion on how to respond to a sneeze in English and how these responses differ across various countries. She told her students not to rely on word-for-word translations, as this can lead to miscommunications.

Theme 3: Challenges of Integrating Pragmatics. All of the participants (15 of 15), regardless of their level of pragmatics awareness and knowledge, face a variety of challenges. One of the challenges that participating ESL instructors mentioned that they faced was lack of resources. 12 of 15 participants stated that the textbooks that they use do not cover pragmatics explicitly. For instance, Mary stated, “Textbooks and online materials do not cover pragmatics that much. However, some of the textbooks that I have been using include cultural materials. For example, some textbooks have passages related to cultural norms or holidays which allow us to talk about them as part of our pre-reading activities. For example, one of the passages that we recently read was about being punctual, so I opened a discussion on that topic because punctuality is a social concept, which varies from culture to culture.”

Rose also said, “I haven't used any sort of materials to cover pragmatics, like I said. Now I'm thinking, you know, I need to cover it more. But I mean, I try to do a lot of research when it comes to what I plan for my class. And I really haven't come across anything.” Elizabeth also confirmed Rose's thought and stated, “The textbooks to me. I don't think they cover pragmatics at all. I think for the most part, I know that they do not address that.” Emily also said, “I think most of the texts that I've worked with and online programs, I would say minimal, if any. Maybe some beginning language material more so. And what do I usually do? I usually find funny videos or things online that I use as icebreakers.”

A few participants who have been teaching speech courses stated that some of the speech textbooks cover culture and pragmatics but insufficiently. Chloe stated, “So in my experience not much at all in the current textbooks that I am using there is no pragmatic information included at all; however, I have seen speech books that do cover some pragmatics, so I know it's out there in some language materials it's just not in any of the ones that I have used in the last 10 years.” Donna, also stated, “I haven't located any materials to cover pragmatics or cultural aspects of language, but I think sometimes it's in there. It's just not labeled that way.”

Another challenge was an overloaded curriculum. Some of the participants stated that they did not teach culture and pragmatics because they had so much content and skills to cover in a semester. For instance, Catherine stated, “You know. I do see value in it, but teaching all four language skills within a course. It just seems to be heavy in one because of the way they're designed. Like you have to get through all of these things, and we only have 15 weeks. So, it gets a little overwhelming in that way as an instructor.”

Chloe and Anna also confirmed Catherine's thoughts and mentioned how difficult it is to balance trying to teach so many skills to diverse learners in one semester. Chloe said, “So obviously striking a balance in trying to teach both the formal academic language, the listening comprehension skills, the note-taking skills, and everything else that goes along with college life makes it challenging at times to incorporate pragmatics. But I do think it's important because they can cause a lot of awkward situations and miscommunications.” Anna stated, “I don't teach pragmatics explicitly because it's not part of our curriculum, but also there are so many goals to be accomplished, so many skills to cover, and I really don't have time to cover everything.”

Discussion

Current research emphasizes the importance of utilizing explicit instruction and provides evidence for the efficiency of explicit teaching (Nguyen, 2018; Sabet & Veisy, 2015); however, based on the semi-structured interviews and observations, it is evident that participating ESL instructors are not addressing pragmatics explicitly in their ESL classrooms. Most of the participants do not feel comfortable teaching pragmatics explicitly; they only address it if they can notice the errors due to cultural differences and only if they arise spontaneously while interacting with students. Though the participants do not teach pragmatics explicitly, most of the participating ESL instructors incorporate communication skills and expose language learners to conversational dialogues and make their classroom as interactive as possible. This is supported by the current research, yielding discoveries with regard to the effective methods of pragmatics instruction, and confirming that the incorporation of communication skills creates meaningful conversational dialogues, thus creating positive changes in L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge and competence. Zavalova (2017) stated that one way to teach pragmatics is through exposing language learners to conversational dialogues and employing formulaic language and encouraging learners to memorize the pragmatic formulas. Bardovi-Harlig (2015) also suggests designing meaningful formulaic sequences, known as pragmatic formulas, incorporating role plays into classrooms, and utilizing authentic resources to expose learners to the pragmatic aspects of the target language.

The Interactionist Hypothesis shed light on if and how ESL teachers address pragmatics when it is not an explicit part of their program curriculum by exploring the types of interactions that teachers engage in to develop learners' pragmatic competence in classrooms. Moeller and Catalano (2015) and Norouzian and Eslami (2016) asserted that as ESL/EFL teachers are learning to become teachers and improving their teaching through professional development or other informal experiences, interaction with their teachers, colleagues, and students helps build their ability to notice sociocultural language differences and allows them to adjust their teaching repertoire accordingly. During the interview, the majority of the participants emphasized the importance of interaction and how they learn by interacting with their students and colleagues. These responses indicate that regardless of the formal incorporation of pragmatics, instructors are aware of the benefits of interactive instructional practices and the interactions between themselves and the students. It is evident that interaction plays an important role in the way that ESL teachers notice and address cultural aspects in second language learning and pragmatics. It was also evident that although the participating instructors did not cover pragmatics explicitly, teachable moments arose and ESL teachers could have facilitated appropriate interactions in the ESL classroom, providing for spontaneous pragmatic exchanges. However, because some of the instructors did not recognize the pragmatic errors, they did not take those opportunities and address them properly. Therefore, it could be suggested that ESL teachers' understanding and awareness of pragmatics are crucial in determining how effectively they identify and address pragmatic errors in the classroom.

The challenges that participating ESL teachers face are connected to the lack of language materials that cover pragmatics and having an overloaded curriculum to cover. Most of the participating ESL teachers expressed that the textbook materials do not cover pragmatics adequately. Existing research studies support the data and have demonstrated that second language pragmatics has hardly been integrated effectively into the textbooks (Bardovi-Harlig, 2018; Tajeddin & Teimournezh, 2015; Tujuba & Davidson, 2017). Tajeddin and

Teimournezha (2015) examined what and how cultural components are offered in the dialogues and reading passages of two textbooks, one domestic and one international. The analysis exposed that learning the target culture from the two textbooks is highly unlikely due to the lack of suitable, targeted cultural components. Tujuba and Davidson (2017) analyzed the teachability of pragmatics in a communicative English skills textbook, and they affirmed that the general content and usage of pragmatic information and the authentic dialogues or real-life exercises that have been utilized in the textbook is irrelevant and insufficient.

Another challenge that participating ESL teachers faced was an overloaded curriculum. ESL programs focus only on the four main language components or they incorporate so many skills into those four components that there is not enough time to incorporate pragmatics explicitly. Bardovi-Harlig (2018) also emphasized that pragmatic competence is not typically addressed in the language classroom, probably due to the lack of curriculum and materials based on pragmatics. This finding was reflected in the study by Yesil and Demiroz (2017), who confirmed that even though the language instructor embraces the integration of the target language culture into the courses, they cannot assign adequate time to have culturally-enhanced courses due to their overloaded curriculum. This study emphasizes the link between an overloaded curriculum to cover the fundamental linguistic skills and the lack of time available to dive into pragmatics.

Recommendations and Conclusions

A lack of pragmatic competence impacts communication both in and outside of the ESL classroom (Hillard, 2017). If intercultural miscommunication ensues due to the lack of pragmatic competence, ESL students might feel discouraged, offended, and isolated. Thus, to help ESL students communicate effectively in a target language, it is crucial that ESL teachers place more emphasis on pragmatics and develop innovative approaches that promote pragmatic skills more naturally for language learners. Regardless of the participants' level of pragmatic awareness and knowledge, the majority of participants valued incorporating culture and pragmatics into their ESL classrooms and were interested in expanding their knowledge in pragmatics. However, it is evident that ESL instructors' level of awareness is limited and they are not addressing pragmatics explicitly.

Though the findings of this case study support previous research by highlighting a strong need in the area of practice and recommended more emphasis in integrating pragmatic learning and teaching in ESL programs, the study still highlights a number of opportunities for future research. Future researchers should focus on exploring the factors that affect current ESL teachers' ability to notice pragmatic errors during interactions and how to help them seize teachable moments and address pragmatics as the opportunities arise.

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Exploring Augmented Reality Instruction in the English Language Classroom

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Abstract

The ever-evolving world of technology has penetrated many aspects of our lives including the way of language teaching and learning. Learners are not easily sufficed with traditional classroom practices and there is an ongoing demand for reconstruction and enrichment of current curricula and teaching approaches. Augmented Reality (AR) is one of these technologies that has the potential to bridge virtual and real worlds while offering authentic language experiences and making learning more engaging and interactive. This paper reports the design of an educational intervention aiming at providing primary-level students with a rich learning experience that stimulates a real-life encounter for using English language. The intervention takes the form of an AR-guided tour of a famous European country during which an AR 3D model presents different aspects of the country and encourages learners to interact both with the AR application as well as with their peers. This paper provides an overview of related work employing AR in the EFL context and in the second part there is a detailed description of the actual intervention and its evaluation. The AR assets that enrich the tour along with their added educational value and the limitations of the intervention are also explored.

Keywords: Augmented Reality, Instructional Design, EFL

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Introduction

The process of learning a foreign language can be a challenging but very rewarding task for young, primary-level students. Research indicates that children, who speak more than one language, seem to be more flexible with respect to thinking critically and creatively, they increase their prospects of future employability (Ford, 2014) and enhance their cultural awareness (Gimatdinova, 2018). However, foreign language teaching is often associated with activities ranging from ‘fill-in-the-gaps’ tasks, to stale reading comprehension activities and learning long word lists by heart. Also, in many educational environments, there is a lack of opportunities for authentic language practice that further inhibits and aggravates foreign language improvement (Buendgens-Kosten, 2013). Today learners, who have been frequently described as ‘Digital Natives’ are known for their affinity for rapid information processing, nonlinear thinking, multitasking, and learning through social interactions, behaviours cultivated through early and frequent use of digital technologies such as computer games and online videos (Prensky, 2001; Thompson, 2015). Their interest and engagement are hard to maintain by using simple and conventional methods. Currently, many language teachers seem to be looking for solutions in immersive technologies as they promote rich learning experiences and provide a wide range of opportunities for enhanced student motivation, engagement, satisfaction, accelerated learning, and material memorization (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2017). Digital immersive technologies include virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR), which are all summarized under the term extended reality or cross-reality (XR) (Rauschnabel et al., 2022). Research on immersive learning offers insight into the way learning occurs when students are mentally involved in activities that fade their consciousness of the physical environment (Nilsson et al., 2016). This notion is verified in a meta-review by Beck et al. (2023), who mainly posit the need to focus research not only on the learning outcomes, but on the educational practices and strategies in the current immersive learning environments. In this context, AR enriches the real world with additional information in the form of digital elements like images, texts or videos, 3D items, or audio extracts by superimposing them upon real objects (Azuma, 1997). In other words, the users interact both with the real world and the AR experience simultaneously. AR can be an asset in a language teacher’s teaching repertoire as it offers access to a variety of learning contexts that would otherwise be inaccessible, enriched with versatile audiovisual stimuli. Also, AR has increased its popularity among educators primarily because it provides unique opportunities for interactivity and improved visualizations that other technologies fail to do so (Avila-Garzon et al., 2021) and secondly because of the rapid development and affordability of mobile phones and sophisticated equipment that support it (Valero-Franco & Berns, 2024). Although AR has great potential for language teaching and learning, there is a noticeable lack on the design of AR-based language learning experiences (Parmaxi et al., 2024). For this reason, this article presents the design, development, and evaluation of an educational intervention aiming at providing primary-level students with a rich learning experience in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The intervention takes the form of an AR-guided tour of Italy during which an Artificial Intelligence (AI) empowered 3D character presents different aspects of the country and encourages learners to interact both with the AR application as well as with their peers.

Related Work

AR has already been introduced in a variety of educational fields ranging from physics (Fidan & Tuncel, 2019) and STEM (Sırakaya & Alsancak Sırakaya, 2022) to geography (Turan et al., 2018) and biology (Yapici & Karakoyun, 2021) and it has grown in popularity

among educators mainly due to the unique opportunities for interaction and enhanced visualizations that it offers and secondly because educators can have access to Smartphones, tablets, AR headsets, and AR glasses at a reasonable cost (Billinghurst & Duenser, 2012; Solar Bezmalinovic et al., 2022). Additionally, smartphones' high technology cameras and sensors, which support the bulk of AR applications, contribute significantly to AR becoming one of the most influential and indispensable technologies of the years to come in education (Alakärppä et al., 2017). AR can have applications to all levels of education from early childhood and primary education (Castellanos & Pérez, 2017) to secondary and higher education (Burkhard & Schmitt, 2009). Weerasinghe et al. (2019) reported that among 30 studies surveyed, the majority of them have been conducted at primary level followed by secondary level and only a small percentage was run with undergraduate students. A similar review was made by Muñoz (2017) whereas Bacca Acosta et al. (2014) in a survey of 32 studies revealed that the biggest percentage of AR applications was targeting university students. Although there is an inconsistency in results due to the different aspects of AR surveys, we can conclude that AR may be used for all education levels and age groups. Moreover, further research in a variety of educational settings has highlighted the positive impact of AR on content retention, better memorization, increased learning motivation and content understanding, improved academic results (Di Serio et al., 2013; Wei et al., 2015), improved physical task performance, collaboration, enhanced learning achievement and optimal conditions for personalized learning that can accommodate different learning styles (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2017; Chen et al., 2017; Radu, 2014). Furthermore, additional meta-studies emphasize the value of AR in education (Hantono et al., 2018; Karakus et al., 2019; Khoshnevisan & Le, 2018; Petrovich et al., 2018; Sommerauer & Müller, 2018; Wen & Looi, 2019).

In terms of language learning and AR there have been attempts to provide an insight into the affordances of this ground-breaking technology into the pedagogy of teaching languages. Although relevant research is still at an early age, some recurrently cited affordances of AR focus on students' increased motivation and engagement (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2017; Binhomran & Altalhab, 2021; Tsai, 2020; Wen, 2021; Valero & Berns, 2024). In a similar vein, AR provides authenticity and opportunities for meaningful communication (Parmaxi & Demetriou, 2020; Punar et al., 2022, Panagiotidis, 2021) and improved cultural awareness (Boboc et al., 2022, Papanastasiou et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2023). Additionally, there have been several studies that noted increased levels of learner confidence and reduced levels of anxiety (Panagiotidis, 2021; Pegrum, 2021; Lin & Yu, 2023). Likewise, there has been reported improved learning performance in a variety of language competencies and components (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2017; Tobar-Muñoz et al., 2017; Rozi et al., 2021; Wedyan et al., 2022; Liao et al., 2023) as well as increased learner achievement (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2017; Parmaxi & Demetriou, 2020; Panagiotidis, 2021; Punar Özçelik et al., 2022). There have also been a few studies that have successfully investigated the extent to which AR supports embodied and active learning (Pegrum, 2021) as well as the influence of AR and its impact on the development of 21st century skills (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2017). It is also crucial to mention that although there are encouraging results about the appropriateness and the effectiveness of AR as a pedagogical tool, there is still room for more studies that necessarily need to include educators in the design and the implementation phase of AR application interventions (Prieto et al., 2014). In that view, there was an attempt to design, develop and evaluate an AR-supported language learning experience so as to capture the participants' perceptions about it. In particular, the study focused on answering the following research question:

RQ: What are the participants' perceptions about the AR-supported language learning experience?

Materials and Methods

Design of the AR Language Learning Experience

An AR-supported language learning experience entitled 'A Tour AROUND Europe: Next destination... Italy' was designed. The main purpose of this AR-supported language learning experience was to offer A2 CEFR primary-school students additional language practice of receptive and productive skills with a focus on pre-taught vocabulary and an opportunity to explore, describe, and present features of Italy. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework under which the educational intervention was designed. This framework provides a structured approach to understanding the components and relationships involved in the design of the learning experience. Initially, we defined clear learning objectives, in this case to understand and use basic English phrases and vocabulary related to touring Italy.

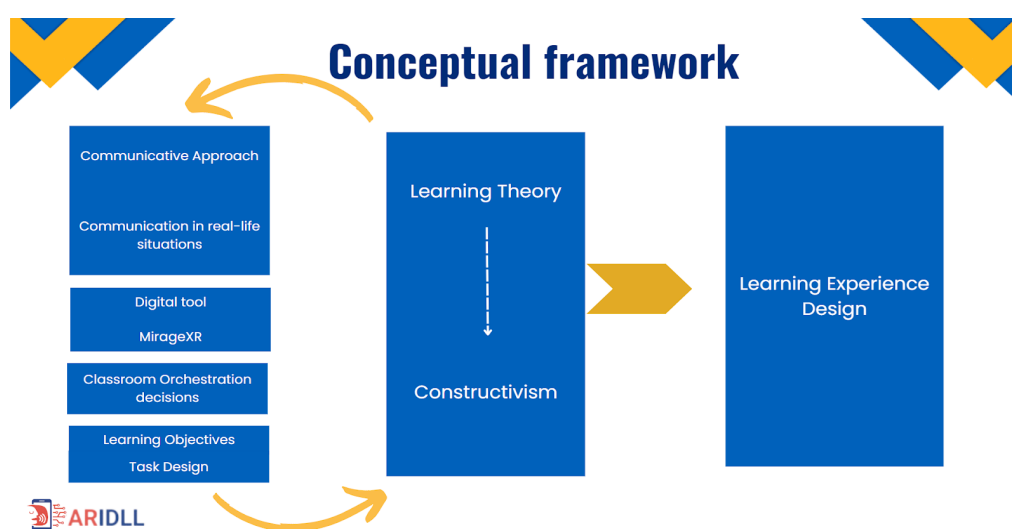


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Our objectives were aligned with the current curricula of CEFR A2 students. The communicative approach can be found at the heart of this framework as it emphasizes the importance of interaction and communication in the learning process. In the case of the AR-supported learning experience learners were engaged in meaningful communication as they adopted the role of a tourist following a virtual tour of Italy. Informed by our learning objectives, the instructor designed specific AR-supported tasks with the use of MirageXR, an application that allows teachers to use AR authoring tools. The tasks aimed at being interactive, purposeful, and contextually relevant. The AR-supported activity enabled learners to virtually visit Italy and interact with an AI-empowered 3D character. Our approach to task design is deeply rooted in constructivism which posits that learners construct knowledge through experiences and interactions. Orchestration of classroom activities was also considered. This includes making decisions about how to manage resources, and student interaction strategies for facilitating group work, guiding discussions, and providing feedback. In this case, a rotation model was considered as only one AR device was available. Students worked in pairs or in small groups and could work in the first station with the AR-supported activity and then complete tasks that were informed by their AR-supported experience. Moreover, adjustments had to be made to the classroom setting, which included

rearranging the seating and grouping to provide learners with adequate space to move around while interacting with the AR. The culmination of these elements leads to our learning experience design. This holistic design integrates the communicative approach, clear learning objectives, thoughtfully crafted tasks, and constructivist principles to create engaging and effective learning experiences. The goal is to provide learners with opportunities to actively engage, reflect, and construct knowledge in meaningful ways using AR.

Description of the AR-Supported Language Learning Activity

‘Tour ARound Europe: Next Destination...Italy’ is an AR language learning activity designed to last approximately 60 minutes with the students working in pairs or in small groups to immerse themselves into the culturally rich landscape of Italy and to explore various aspects of the country, while using the MirageXR app. In this immersive experience, learners interact with an AI-empowered 3D character called Francesca, who serves as their tour guide. They can ask Francesca questions and receive answers, enhancing their engagement and understanding. The experience also includes 3D objects such as the famous Italian ice cream (gelato), the Mona Lisa’s painting, and a map of Europe for learners to have an overview of where Italy is located. Additionally, pictures of an Italian couple, famous Italian monuments, and the Italian flag are used to enrich the visual context (see Figure 2). Audio messages provide instructions to learners for task completion, ensuring a seamless and interactive learning journey. This AR activity is divided into three stages.

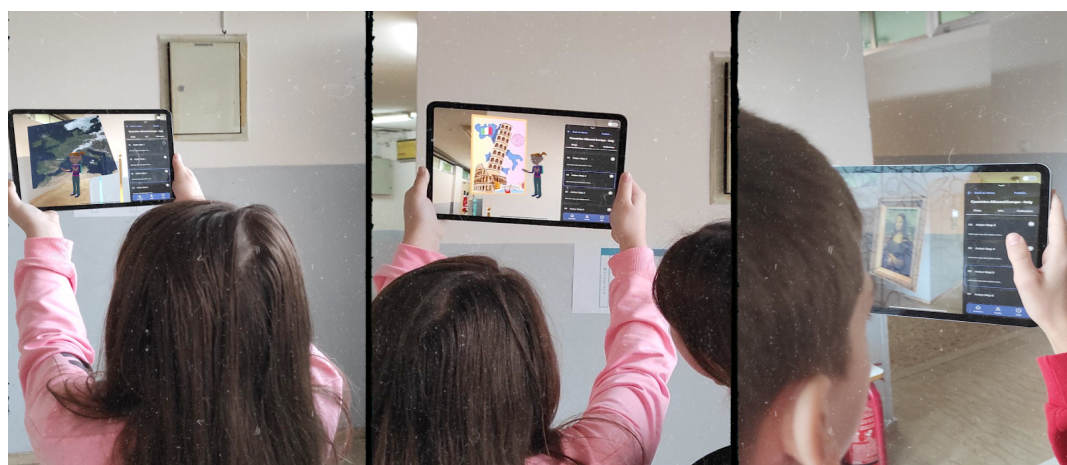


Figure 2: Students navigating through some steps of the AR activity

a) Before the AR activity, learners worked in pairs or small groups and noted down what they already knew about Italy. Next, learners were introduced to the worksheet they would use during the AR activity and took time to familiarize themselves with it. They also learned about the concept of the tour guide, who will be guiding them through the experience. Finally, learners worked together to form questions about the things they would have liked to ask the tour guide about Italy and assigned each other different roles for the activity completion.

b) During the AR activity, learners navigated themselves through a seven-step process while using the Mirage XR app and their worksheet. First, they meet their tour guide, a 3D AI-empowered character, called Francesca. She introduces herself and encourages learners to ask her questions. In the second step, learners explore basic information about Italy with the help of a 3D map of Europe and the tour guide. They can ask Francesca about the capital city, the language, the terrain of Italy, and the colours of the flag. Step 3 focuses on famous

landmarks, where a picture depicting three of the most iconic Italian landmarks as well as the tour guide help learners enrich their knowledge about them. In the fourth step, learners explore Italian food inspired by a 3D ice cream model and the tour guide. In Step 5, learners engage with augmentations that include a 3D painting of the Mona Lisa, an audio message and the tour guide. They listen to the audio message related to Leonardo Da Vinci and have the opportunity to pose questions to the tour guide about him and his famous painting, while observing it from a close distance. In Step 6, learners receive some information about Italians through an audio message, a picture of an Italian couple, and the tour guide, who is ready to answer any questions related to the picture. Finally, in Step 7, learners reflect on what they liked most about Italy and anything else they would like to learn about the country with the help of the 3D AI-empowered character.

c) After the AR activity, learners were engaged in various follow up tasks depending on their interests and abilities. For instance, some of them made presentations whereas others wrote an email to a friend, describing their experiences during the virtual guided tour of Italy.

Challenges

During the implementation of the AR activity, there were some practical challenges which were creatively resolved. Initially, there was a need to find sufficient compatible devices for the learners to work on. Unfortunately, only one device at school premises could support MirageXR and its features. Thus, a rotation model was considered. Another challenge was the lack of a strong Wi-Fi network, which hindered the smooth operation of the activity but was addressed through alternative connectivity solutions. Finally, adjustments had to be made to the classroom setting, which included rearranging the seating and grouping to provide learners with adequate space to move around.

Methods

For this study, a qualitative research approach was employed to explore school students' perceptions on the effectiveness of an AR-supported language learning experience. A convenience sample was used consisting of 18 ten-year-old primary school learners with a varied mix in terms of gender, and academic achievement. Data collection involved two tools; a questionnaire and notes taken by the teacher during the activity. The questionnaire was designed to collect information from the participants in relation to different aspects of the educational experience, including its importance, value and influence, on their learning. It included both open and close-ended questions giving students the freedom to provide feedback. In addition to the questionnaire, the teacher, who was also a member of the research team, kept field notes about students' participation, engagement and reactions, while the educational activity was being carried out. These insights and observations contributed to the collection of additional contextual information and supplemented the questionnaire results thus allowing the researchers to shed light on students' perspectives. In other words, both explicit responses and implicit behaviours were captured and contributed to the exploration of students' perceptions regarding the AR language learning experience.

Analysis

A thematic analysis was performed on the qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic analysis is a flexible yet efficient method of finding, evaluating, and summarizing patterns or themes in the data. By using this approach, the research team was

able to classify and take into consideration the diverse and rich viewpoints of the participants, which resulted in a thorough understanding of their perceptions regarding the use of AR-supported language learning experience.

For this study, manual data analysis was carried out, which involved carefully examining the qualitative data gathered from the open-ended questionnaire and the researcher's field notes. Inductively, themes were derived from the data based on the research question.

Results

This section presents the findings with major themes and topics that emerged. For transparency, themes presented in the findings below appear in italics. The findings of this study revealed that the majority of the participants gave favourable responses and considered the AR-supported language learning experience *motivating, fun and pleasant*. As soon as the lesson began an 'air of excitement and anticipation' (Instructor's field notes) was evident throughout the classroom as documented by the teacher. The students eagerly got into their groups, received their device and waited for the teacher to let them begin the long-awaited AR activity. One participant, referred to as Student A, expressed enjoyment and engagement by stating 'I had lots of fun'. Similarly, Students B and C shared feelings of *curiosity, surprise and satisfaction* by reporting 'I didn't expect it would be so pleasant' and 'It was a pleasant activity! I had a great time'. The teacher's field notes confirm these positive perceptions, noting that 'the students' faces lit up with excitement' (Instructors' field notes) as they launched MirageXR and interacted with the AR elements and the AI character. Throughout the session the learners participated actively and even the most reluctant students were motivated. The teacher also noticed and reported that 'The classroom is filled with laughter and chatter' and a pleasant learning environment was created, while the students immersed themselves in this AR tour of Italy.

Additionally, the students and the teacher equally reported that this AR activity had an impact on the participants' English language performance and vocabulary acquisition. The students stated that this AR-supported language learning experience helped them improve their English and offered opportunities to practice vocabulary in an engaging way. More specifically, Student E and C stated respectively 'I learned more English' and 'I learned lots of new things' therefore indicating a feeling of confidence and *self-improvement*. Similarly, Student A admitted having boosted his/her vocabulary by saying 'I had fun and improved my vocabulary'. These statements were also verified by the teacher's observations reporting that students were immersed in a positive and productive learning environment, where they practiced English while interacting eagerly with each other and with the AR app and by sharing their newly acquired knowledge about Italian culture in English.

Further comments by the students revealed that they greatly appreciated the *playfulness, audiovisual and AI empowered elements* in the activity. As the teacher moved around in the classroom, she noticed that the 3D objects captured students' attention and sparked their curiosity. They willingly interacted with them, closely observed them so as to better understand vocabulary and concepts. The teacher noted that the combination of audio and visual stimuli, such as the 3D painting of the Mona Lisa and the gelato helped students to stay concentrated and engaged throughout the activity.

Moreover, there were comments that highlight the added value of the activity in enhancing the learners' *cultural awareness*. The students indicated that this AR-supported learning

experience provided them with information about Italy and glimpses into Italian culture and heritage highlighting the educational impact of the activity as well as a sense of discovery and engagement. Teacher's observations also verified these statements as she spotted students sharing their impressions and commenting enthusiastically on the facts they had learned about Italy during the activity and the follow-up sessions.

Finally, *joint effort* was another theme that emerged. As noted earlier, only one device was available and a rotation-model was employed that allowed students to work in pairs or in small groups. It was highlighted that students helped each other and even assigned roles to each other. One student was keeping the notes, another one was holding the device. Learning from each other and cultivating a sense of peer-learning community is an aspect that entails the potential for a more dynamic experience. However, it has to be stated that there are several issues that need improvement. Some students expressed concerns about the *weak Wi-Fi connection* that caused lagging and affected the smooth running of the activity. This technical issue cannot be ignored as it can ultimately affect the overall AR language learning experience, if not dealt immediately. As the teacher reported she opted for alternative connectivity resources by using the Interactive Board as a hotspot and finally resolving the issue. Additionally, a few participants complained that the *fast-talking pace of the virtual tour guide* was not suitable for their level of proficiency and that it occasionally hindered their understanding. Finally, some students asked for easier and less complicated access to the AR app, which highlights the need for more user-friendly applications that can easily be introduced and integrated into the language learning context. As AR continues to evolve, it will be crucial to address all usability concerns so as to effectively enhance AR-based instruction in the EFL classrooms.

Despite these challenges, the findings of this study reveal that the students appreciated their AR language learning experience and that they are willing to participate again in more AR activities.

Discussion and Conclusions

The present study strives to capture the 18 young English language learners' perspectives on an AR language learning experience. The findings of the study have provided noticeable insights into the potential of this AR-supported language learning experience. Learners' responses and the teachers' field notes on participants' active engagement have highlighted the pedagogical possibilities deriving from this educational AR-based intervention. The components of the AR language learning activity succeeded in creating a fun and engaging learning atmosphere. This outcome is quite important as it has already been shown that active involvement and positive attitudes contribute significantly to successful language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013).

The students' enthusiastic response and active participation emphasise the pedagogical possibilities of AR-based language instruction. The AR activity succeeded in creating a fun and naturally stimulating learning atmosphere. Intrinsic motivation and self-driven engagement resulted in students eagerly completing the task and appreciating the educational outcomes. This finding is in alignment with similar studies related to enhanced learner motivation and engagement combined with AR in language teaching (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2017; Binhomran & Altalhab, 2021; Tsai, 2020; Wen, 2021; Valero & Berns, 2024).

Additionally, this study's findings indicated that the AR-supported language learning activity had an impact on the participants' perceived vocabulary acquisition and English language proficiency. According to the participants, the AR task gave them plenty of opportunities to practice the language in an interesting, motivating, fun and satisfactory way. These results were supported by the teacher's field notes, which showed that the students were fully engaged in the task and they eagerly responded to the virtual tour guide's cues while refining their vocabulary and conversational skills. This is consistent with earlier studies that have shown how AR can help learners practice situated language and increase their communicative ability (Akçayır & Akçayır, 2017; Tobar-Muñoz et al., 2017; Hsu, 2017; Rozi et al., 2021; Wedyan et al., 2022; Liao et al., 2023).

Furthermore, cultural awareness was also raised through the activity. This is also in agreement with similar studies conducted with regard to the effect of AR in improving cultural awareness (Boboc et al., 2022, Papanastasiou et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2023). Finally, joint effort was also noted, building a sense of a supportive peer community. This is also in line with Perry's (2021) study who emphasized the importance of students engaging with one another in the learning process especially in environments that encourage interaction and cooperation.

However, the survey highlighted certain shortcomings including the virtual tour guide's talking pace and technical problems with unstable Wi-Fi connections. These results reveal how crucial it is to have reliable technology features that can be customized to meet the demands of innovative and technology enhanced lessons. Furthermore, several students asked for easier and simpler access to the AR app, underlining the need for user-friendly interfaces and clear instructions which enable the smooth incorporation of AR technology into language learning contexts of all levels.

Despite these difficulties, the students' desire to take part in more AR activities for language learning demonstrates that the advantages of this technology outweigh its current limitations. The more educators continue to explore the application of emerging technologies in the classroom the more findings and results will occur to supplement our knowledge on how AR can improve language learning outcomes and create a stimulating, immersive, and culturally rich learning environment.

This study involved a small sample size, and therefore cannot be used to make broad claims for all contexts or situations. This study can be enriched and extended with several future work recommendations, which can potentially include the design and development of more AR tours in different European cities, expanding the "Tour ARround Europe " to destinations like Spain and the UK to name but a few. Also, the interaction with the AI agent can be further enhanced by developing role-playing scenarios where the AI agent takes on different roles, such as a shopkeeper or museum guide, requiring students to use their language skills to interact in a specific context. Additional customisation can also take place by adjusting the prompts given to the AI character or by providing additional scaffolding, for instance by having key notes on vocabulary as pre-AR activity, to learners with lower proficiency levels. Additionally, the study could be expanded to include a larger sample of students from different educational levels and sectors. Moreover, the experience can also be enriched by incorporating gamification elements, such as achievement badges to motivate students and track their progress, or AR scavenger hunts during which students follow clues and solve language-based puzzles. Finally, interactive storytelling experiences can also be developed, where students make choices that affect the outcome of the story, practicing language skills

in context. Also, there can be stories that immerse students in a country's culture and provide a richer learning experience, such as participating in historical events, festivals, or simple daily life scenarios.

Looking ahead, the integration of AR into language courses has the potential to revolutionize ELT as a whole. AR may immerse learners into real-world situations, support situated practice, and offer tailored feedback. Most importantly, AR can create a sense of curiosity and enthusiasm that is crucial for successful language learning.

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A Bag of Lexis: Lexical Approach in Blended Learning

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Abstract

There is always a need to put a spin on the traditional course book-led lessons for English as a foreign language. Moreover, the constant demand for adapting to the students' pace and needs as well as keeping them entertained and motivated can be challenging at best. Our project is basically a guide to travelling around the British Isles, visiting a variety of cities and places, covering everyday topics and experiences in an engaging and fun way. Being uploaded on an online platform, this can all be done without leaving the classroom. The two-year project has been developed by considering students aged between 15 and 20 years old enrolled in a vocational school for healthcare and social work and the topics required by the curriculum. Even though the research is still at an experimental stage, the outcome has been positive. This system allows the freedom to scale and add more destinations as well as to adapt to the required level of English, in our case ranging from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate levels, and of course to apply it to any subject or field. The theory behind this idea is based on Lewis' Lexical Approach and Levine's Global Simulation, since both theories stress the idea that context makes language more meaningful. Our project gives students a context, as close to everyday situations as possible, as well as the necessary patterns of language and chunks. Don't say 'turn to page 25', do say 'Let's check the train timetable to Edinburgh'.

Keywords: Learning Environments, Blended Learning, Global Simulation, Lexical Approach, TBL

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Introduction

The evolution of course books to meet the current needs in classrooms has mainly been focusing on online versions with the addition of videos and self-studying workbooks, it was therefore time for something more dynamic and less restricted. The use of platforms has also been boosted since the outburst of the Covid pandemic but mainly as a tool for uploading material produced in a more traditional way. The idea behind the project ‘A Bag of Lexis’ was then to make the most of what was already available.

It would be wrong though, to see this project merely as a re-arrangement of school material. In this paper I will present the theories that are at the base of all the materials prepared for this project, but most importantly, how the whole project should work in the classroom.

A Bag of Lexis: How It Started

Teaching languages can be challenging in terms of motivation. L2 students are not always willing to learn a foreign language and for a growing number of people the language, or indeed languages spoken at home are not necessarily the official language. In Switzerland, as in the case of this study, students are required to study another national language along with English, which means they are learning at least three languages. Depending on the linguistic region, that number might even be higher. In such an environment, the status of the language and its advantages for the job market are essential components in the learning motivation.

The use of new technologies by the younger generations – and not necessarily including artificial intelligence (AI) at this point – has changed and will continue to change dramatically the skills considered important in learning a language. Teachers who are required to follow a syllabus and in the case of teachers of L2, a course book, often emphasise skills that are going to lose importance such as writing and reading. I am not claiming that these skills are not an essential part of learning and using a language, but rather that AI, apps and other devices provide their users with a finished product that requires little effort on their part. Students can easily produce a formal letter of a fairly good standard by typing in just a few details on a website or translate a long text in their native language simply by scanning the page on their mobile phone. It is no longer essential to master such skills in order to communicate with other people and teachers first, and by extension school boards and councils later, should start to acknowledge that the new reality. Speaking and listening on the other hand, are currently much more important for students. It is also possible to find apps translating simultaneously, but I believe that the social element of being able to communicate freely and independently is still a strong motivator and highly valued.

The Theories Behind the Project

The project ‘A Bag of Lexis’ is based on two main theories, Lewis’ Lexical Approach and Levine’s Global Simulation which are several decades old now but are still compellingly modern. I won’t be explaining the theories in detail as most teachers would already be familiar with them, but rather highlight the main points relevant to the project.

Michael Lewis’ idea of “prefabricated lexical sequences” or “chunks” as a way to gain fluency (Lewis, 1993) is the key element in creating the activities for the project. It is indeed useless to provide lists of vocabulary without context, even if they are related to the same topic (e.g. ‘the environment’ or ‘sports’). To use a metaphor, it would be like providing a list

of ingredients without the recipe and without mentioning who is the recipe for. In an article by Scott Thornbury, Lewis' theory is divided in the following principles: firstly, fluency is both item- (chunk-) based and rule-based, so it is not a question of forgetting the rules, but basically grammar and vocabulary cannot be separated; the result being the so-called "grammaticalized lexis". However, the acquisition of syntax is fundamental; what the article suggests is that students might profit from learning a variety of fixed expressions and prefabricated language, but in order to become more proficient they need to extrapolate the rules. Secondly, language acquisition and fluency originate from usage, i.e. from real life language exposure. Thirdly, raising awareness allows the students to make predictions about the language and to memorise lexis with a better chance of making it stick and of sounding less foreign (Thornbury, 2019).

The other guidelines are inspired by the tenets of Global Simulation. The concept of Global Simulation is captivating, but at the same time quite difficult to achieve within the normal restrictions of a state school. However, it is always possible to put the students in a real-life situation with the necessary set of lexical resources, even without leaving the classroom. This is what Levine calls the "reality of function", i.e. the students immerse themselves into the situation and, with more or less guidance on the part of the teacher, they proceed from one step to the next using their background experience. The main skill involved here is verbal interaction, that implies negotiation. It is worth remembering that the "characteristic of language class simulation is that it must be fundamentally task based. Task-based instruction is important for the communicative language classroom, for it keeps the focus away from rote or mechanical practice and on meaningful interaction" (Levine, 2004).

The Bag of Lexis Corpus

The result of combining the aforementioned theories is the 'Bag of Lexis' corpus, which will be now presented in detail. In its current form this corpus is made up of nearly 60 lessons and activities designed to be used in class. However, it is important to stress the fact that the content of the lessons is less relevant to this paper than the whole structure and context in which they will be used.

The use of an online platform was inevitable, and the Swiss Cantonal Department of Education has been using Moodle for several years. Of course, any other online platform could be used instead, and Moodle can have its flaws especially when it comes to the size of files that can be uploaded. It does not offer a lot of flexibility to personalize fonts and style which can seem quite basic (see Fig. 2) and teachers do not have the possibility to create a group by themselves and must always rely on the support of the cantonal IT department.

The main frame of the project corpus is based around the British Isles and subdivided in the four nations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland (see Fig 1). London is the arbitrary starting point of the virtual trip. The capital is an excellent reference since most students have some knowledge about the city or have already visited it. Choosing the British Isles as the framework was important for including the cultural aspect of the language as well. However, as a possible expansion of the project tailored to the needs of the senior years other destinations are going to be used, for example the US, New Zealand, Australia or South Africa.

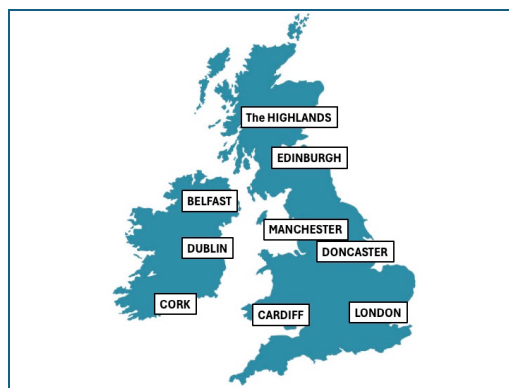


Fig. 1: Screenshot of the destinations

Each nation has a similar introductory part, which includes reading or listening/viewing comprehensions on local characteristics and traditions and a reference to the national holiday. There is also a chat section, but this is only accessible to fellow teachers who are involved in the project; it is meant for sharing thoughts and ideas and we realised it has become a useful device for collecting opinions and critical input. Following from these starting locations, there are the different cities to choose for the course activities, with background information and references to the course books. Figure 2 shows the section on Wales. In this case Cardiff was the only city to be included, but it can help to demonstrate the way each part of the course has been structured.



Fig. 2: Screenshot of the section on Wales

The course activity related to the city of Cardiff is mainly focused on its attractions with a special section on giving directions. As with other sections, this unit includes a PowerPoint, which can also serve as a guideline for the teacher, and all the other files used for this activity with reading and listening comprehensions. Of course, all exercises are based on the principles of the Lexical Approach which include chunks, grammaticalized lexis and fixed expressions. To complete the Cardiff section there are references in the course books used by the students.

Needless to say, that because of the way this unit is constructed it is easily scalable both in level and content. The school involved in this project currently has two levels, B1 and B2 and some lessons are presented accordingly.

How to Use the Bag of Lexis Corpus

At this point it is fair to ask how this project actually works. The concept is really about travelling through the British Isles. At the beginning of the school year the students have their virtual starting point in London. After having done some activities in the city, it is time to choose the next destination. Either the choice can be left to the students, who can decide for themselves where to go next, or it is up to the teacher to decide on the destination according to the mood of the class, and without the restriction of needing to follow a course book. The open-ended approach is always very practical, so if Edinburgh is the next port of call, the class must first plan the trip. Questions like: how to travel, where to sleep and even setting a budget should all be answered and clear. This can be done by the whole class, in small groups or even individually. Once the journey has been sorted, it is possible to choose an activity; for example, in the case of Edinburgh it could 'Rugby at Murrayfield' (see Fig. 3). After Edinburgh, it could be Dublin or Manchester on the wish list and the class must again plan the journey to the new destination, using all the terms and expressions introduced before. This trip description could well take several periods in school.

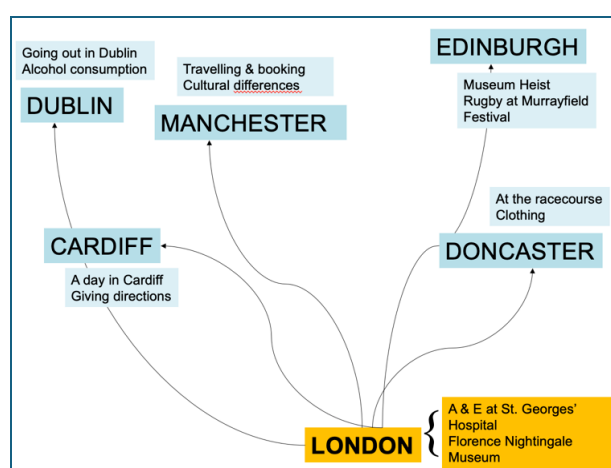


Fig. 3: Slide showing how to use the corpus

To make the experience feel as realistic as possible, an element of unpredictability was required. So, on top of the set of lessons related to each city and nation there are also 'bad cards' that can be used at any time to put a different spin on the trip. Each 'bad card' has a separate section with additional material and can be drawn by students at any moment throughout the language course (see Fig. 4). Some, like 'Not Feeling Well' can include a lot of activities, whereas 'Calling the Helpline' is a much simpler affair.



Fig. 4: The 'bad cards' depicting the six unpredictable situations

One final comment about the structure: This system is extremely adaptable and, because it is based on an online platform, even students who cannot be in class for various reasons can easily access the lesson and take part without fear of missing out important information.

Discussion

The project was started in the school year 2022/2023 and continued the following year. The first year was devoted to creating the material and trying it out in different classes to gauge student response. In the second year, the project was piloted in 11 classes with students aged between 15 and 19 years old, corresponding to year 11 to year 13 in the UK school system (see Table 1). The size of such classes can vary between 16 and 24 students, which often makes it difficult to give each student the time and attention needed to boost their level of English. It is still too early in the pilot stage to assess a clear improvement in student language skills over the two years of development. However, it has been noted by teachers how well the students have responded to the new system and the variety of lessons, and vice-versa how stimulated teachers have been not having to follow the plodding pace of a course book.

Class		Number of Students	Teacher
MS 2B	<i>Year 12</i>	22	Mr. Abbondio
MS 3B	<i>Year 13</i>	24	Mr. Abbondio
OSS 1B	<i>Year 12</i>	18	Mr. Abbondio
OSS 2A	<i>Year 13</i>	23	Mr. Abbondio
OSA 1B	<i>Year 12</i>	23	Ms. Martignoni Webster
OSA 1C	<i>Year 12</i>	16	Ms. Martignoni Webster
OSS 1A	<i>Year 12</i>	20	Ms. Gianinazzi Aliverti
MS 2C	<i>Year 12</i>	19	Ms. Gianinazzi Aliverti
OSS 1C	<i>Year 12</i>	19	Ms. Koley
OSS 1D	<i>Year 12</i>	18	Ms. Koley
OSS abE	<i>Year 11</i>	21	Ms. Formica Castiglioni
11 classes		223 students	

Table 1: Numbers of classes and teachers involved in the project for the school year 2023/2024.

In order to understand Table 1, it is necessary to explain the acronyms. In this vocational school for healthcare and social work care, students can choose between three main curricula:

- *MS (Maturità Specializzata)* where students attend school full-time, training to become physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses or working for social services and immigration centres. (3 periods of English per week)
- *OSS (Operatore Socio-Sanitario)* where students are training to become nurses and carers combining periods at school and time on placement. (3 periods of English per week in year 12)
- *OSA (Operatore Socio-Assistenziale)* where students are training to work with children or people with mental or physical disabilities, combining periods at school and time on placement. (3 periods of English per week in year 12)

Table 1 also includes the classes of two fellow teachers, Ms. Koley and Ms. Formica Castiglioni who have kindly agreed to incorporate the material of this project in their teaching.

Conclusion

The initial impression from the pilot project is that the approach is popular with students and teachers. The project facilitates a lively atmosphere and generates enthusiasm by engaging students in a fun and constructive way that draws on their own experiences and interests in the context of the English language. “In this concept, students and teachers set the pace, decide where to go, what to do and, most importantly, when to do it. [...] By using situations that are real, students are motivated and learn skills that will serve them well in life” (Abbondio et al., 2024, p. 43).

Further research and evaluation are needed and indeed necessary in order to understand the positive effects this project has had on students. The next stage of the project will be focused on collecting data and of course continue to refine the material and add new activities to the corpus. The outcome has been positive generally, and it will certainly provide some interesting results in the years to come. This project was not meant, though, simply to boost school grades. The idea was that by creating a stimulating environment students would be more inclined to engage and use English and, more importantly, participate actively and naturally in a spoken discussion in class. After all communication, or rather successful communication has always been at the heart of language teaching.

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Effects of Critical Thinking Strategy Training on Reading Comprehension and Self-Efficacy of Vietnamese EFL Learners

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Abstract

The study aims to help EFL students improve their reading comprehension and raise their self-efficacy in learning to read in the EFL context at a public university in the Mekong Delta. Therefore, the present study investigates how training in critical thinking strategies supports EFL student readers' reading comprehension, improving the quality of readings and the relationship between reading comprehension and self-efficacy. Participants included 54 second-year Vietnamese EFL students majoring in English Studies. Four types of critical thinking strategies in training, including identifying a causal chain, making inferences, identifying advantages and disadvantages, and using a Venn diagram, were examined on two variables of reading comprehension and self-efficacy. A pretest-posttest design with four types of critical thinking strategies was tested on two experimental groups in an 8-week course. The results of the tests indicated that both groups enhanced reading comprehension through critical thinking strategy training using four types of critical reading strategies. Data from the questionnaires also revealed that EFL student readers had higher reading self-efficacy after the intervention. The findings of the present study offer a more insightful view of critical thinking strategies that can stimulate EFL student readers to learn to read. Furthermore, the contribution of the research might serve language educators as a literature reference for designing teaching and learning reading activities in class effectively for their students.

Keywords: Critical Thinking Strategies, Critical Thinking Strategy Training, EFL Learner Readers, Reading Comprehension, Self-Efficacy

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Introduction

Reading plays a pivotal role in developing learners' mindsets about what they read and in enhancing their comprehension. The functions and benefits of reading allow learners to expand their repertoire of words and structures found in texts. Moreover, reading provides learners with continuous exposure to new input. In the 21st century, integrating critical thinking with reading achievement is extensively acknowledged as an essential competency for learners. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2023), critical thinking is a vital skill for addressing the complex issues of today's world. The outcome of reading achievement is reading comprehension, which has a bi-directional relationship with developing cognitive competencies and academic performance.

Additionally, relevant studies have demonstrated the joint relationship between reading comprehension and critical thinking (Sparks et al., 2013; Peng & Kievit, 2020). Insights from educational and cognitive science perspectives may encourage the reciprocal integration of critical thinking and reading comprehension in learning to read. In other words, critical thinking is a robust predictor of reading comprehension (reading achievement). In the present study, the research hypotheses emphasize the role of critical thinking strategy training on two dependent variables involving reading comprehension and self-efficacy, among 54 second-year Vietnamese EFL students majoring in English Studies at a public university in the Mekong Delta. The purpose of this empirical study is to support English-majored students in improving their reading comprehension and increasing their self-efficacy in learning to read through the training of critical thinking strategies.

Literature Review

Critical Thinking Strategy Training

The framework of Critical Thinking Strategy Training is based on the coursebook entitled *Q skills for success Level 3-reading and writing*, the third edition published by Oxford University Press (Ward & Gramer, 2019).

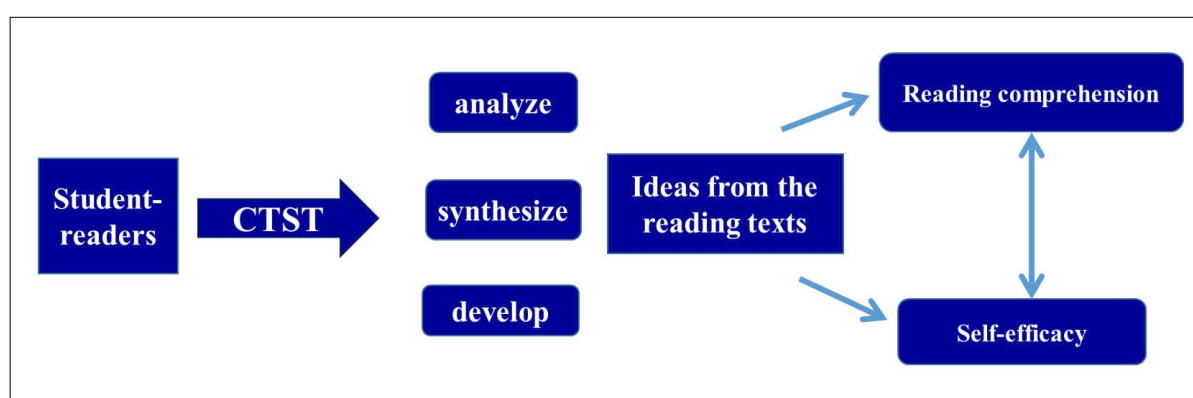


Figure 1. The diagram of Critical Thinking Strategy Training (CTST) compiled by the author

The framework of CTST is adapted from Ward and Gramer (2019) for EFL student readers in a higher educational institution in the Mekong Delta. The implementation of CTST took six weeks. Each reading unit lasted three weeks. Four critical thinking strategies-identifying a causal chain, making inferences, identifying advantages and disadvantages, and using a Venn diagram-were selected and applied in the intervention of the present study. The intervention

in each reading lesson was designed to help student readers analyze, synthesize, and develop ideas from the reading texts. Following the intervention, two dependent variables including reading comprehension and self-efficacy were measured. In other words, the present study aimed to evaluate learners' improvement in reading comprehension. Additionally, the second dependent variable, self-efficacy, was examined to determine whether critical thinking strategies can help learners raise their self-efficacy in learning to read, especially expository texts. The joint relationship between reading comprehension and self-efficacy was also analyzed from these results.

Due to time constraints, each group was instructed on two critical thinking strategies for two reading units. In the first week, learners attended an orientation session to inform the study's purpose and signed the consent form. After that, they took a pre-reading comprehension test and completed a pre-questionnaire. In the final week, learners participated in a session to complete a post-reading comprehension test and a post-questionnaire. Therefore, the experimental course lasted for eight weeks.

Four Critical Thinking Strategies

Four critical thinking strategies from the coursebook entitled *Q skills for success Level 3-reading and writing*, the third edition published by Oxford University Press, were selected for the intervention of two experimental groups. Each critical thinking strategy will be described in detail.

Identifying a Causal Chain. A causal chain is a series of causes and effects. The purpose of this critical thinking strategy is to help learners organize ideas into a sequence in which one event connects to another, and then to another. This graphic organizer supports learners in understanding the relationships between events.

F. IDENTIFY Read paragraph 3 of Reading 1 and complete this graphic organizer. Identify the causal chain in the paragraph. Write the correct answer in the boxes.



- a. We find common interests.
- ~~b. We begin a conversation with a stranger.~~
- c. A new friendship starts.
- d. We discuss more interesting topics.
- e. We use small talk.

Figure 2. This is a task illustration of the reading text using critical thinking strategy [Identifying a causal chain] from the coursebook entitled *Q skills for success Level 3-reading and writing*, the third edition published by Oxford University Press. [Page 9]

Making Inferences. In this critical thinking strategy, learners must activate their background knowledge to think beyond the ideas the writer conveys in the reading texts. Making inferences involves analyzing the information provided in a reading text to uncover additional information not explicitly given. In other words, learners discover ideas that the writer suggests but does not directly state.

F. IDENTIFY Answer the questions. Then compare your answers with a partner.

1. Medium tasters have about 10,000 taste buds. How many taste buds do supertasters have?

2. Can people decide to be a supertaster? Why or why not?

3. Supertasters do not enjoy bitter foods or foods high in fat. They also dislike sweet foods. What kinds of foods do you think supertasters like to eat?

4. Nontasters like spicy foods and high-fat foods. What kinds of health risks do you think nontasters have because of their diet?

Figure 3. This is a task illustration of the reading text using critical thinking strategy [Making inferences] from the coursebook entitled *Q skills for success Level 3-reading and writing*, the third edition published by Oxford University Press. [Page 35]

Identifying Advantages and Disadvantages. As learners read, it is essential to clarify the advantages and disadvantages of a topic. A T-chart is provided to help learners organize their ideas into these categories. This T-chart will assist learners in comparing and evaluating the pros and cons comprehensively when writing, enabling them to form more informed opinions about the topic.

G. CATEGORIZE Complete the graphic organizer using your own words. Identify the advantages and disadvantages of driverless cars. Write the paragraph number where the answer is found.

Advantages of driverless cars	Disadvantages of driverless cars
<i>They can help people stay safe.</i> Paragraph: <u>4</u>	<i>They can't anticipate unexpected things like people can.</i> Paragraph: <u>5</u>
_____ Paragraph: ____	_____ Paragraph: ____
_____ Paragraph: ____	_____ Paragraph: ____
_____ Paragraph: ____	_____ Paragraph: ____

Figure 4. This is a task illustration of the reading text using critical thinking strategy [Identifying advantages and disadvantages] from the coursebook entitled *Q skills for success Level 3-reading and writing*, the third edition published by Oxford University Press. [Page 61]

Using a Venn Diagram. This critical thinking strategy is used to assist learners compare items. A Venn diagram can help learners see the similarities and differences between things. For example, in Unit 4: Marketing, the second expository reading text, “In Defense of Advertising,” provides a demonstration. After reading and completing tasks related to this text, learners have the opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills by completing the diagram using ideas associated with the content of the text. Additionally, learners provide explanations for their answer selections.

C. ANALYZE Look at the Venn diagram. Complete the diagram using the ideas from the box. Explain your answer choices.

can change channels during ads
 pop up when you don't expect it
 targeted ads are just what you want to see
 tell stories that you can relate to
 create interest in a product without invading privacy
 are small; don't take up the whole screen

can be annoying
 interrupt what you're watching
 interrupt what you're reading
 can be fun to watch
 can click them off
can be fun

Ads on television

Online ads

Figure 5. This is a task illustration of the reading text using critical thinking strategy [Using a Venn diagram] from the coursebook entitled *Q skills for success Level 3-reading and writing*, the third edition published by Oxford University Press. [Page 93]

The Process and Implementation of Reading Strategy Training

Table 1. The framework of Self-Regulated Development (Harris and Graham, 1999)

Self-Regulated Strategy Development	
Stage of Training	Training Description
Develop background knowledge	Learners are taught background knowledge needed to apply the strategy effectively.
Discuss it	The purposes and advantages of the strategy are mentioned and discussed.
Model it	The instructor models how to use and apply the strategy and introduces the definition of self-instruction.
Memorize it	The learners memorize the stages of the strategy.
Support it	The teacher supports and scaffolds learners to comprehend the strategy.
Independent use	Learners use and apply the strategy with little or no supports.

Table 1 presents the stages of training for Self-Regulated Strategy Development by Harris and Graham (1999). In this research, the reading activities in each lesson were designed to align with the stages of this framework. The primary purpose of self-regulated strategy development is to assist learners in independently using and applying critical thinking strategies with little or no support from their instructors in dealing with reading tasks for their reading practice.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a process that requires significant effort and energy from a reader. Researchers underscore that reading comprehension is an essential skill for students to become effective readers. According to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), reading comprehension involves interacting and connecting with written language to elicit and make meaning. Similarly, McNamara and Magliano (2009) stated that reading comprehension encompasses aspects of reading and text within a specific social context. Duke (2003) also

emphasized that reading comprehension is an interactional process between readers and text, combining readers' knowledge and experience, the content of the text, and readers' perspectives related to the text. Additionally, Kintsch (1998) defined reading comprehension as the process of making meaning from a text, aiming to obtain a message from the text rather than simply understanding individual words or sentences.

Reading Self-Efficacy

Reading self-efficacy is a crucial component in reading comprehension (reading achievement). Bandura (1995) and Okyar (2021) elucidated that self-efficacy affects how people think, feel, motivate, and perform when completing tasks. In learning to read, reading self-efficacy is clearly expressed through learners' attitudes towards completing various reading tasks (Li & Wang, 2010). Notably, students with high self-efficacy are willing to read despite difficulties. This means they believe they can handle challenges in learning to read. At this stage, they are aware of how to utilize strategies, techniques, time, and energy for successful reading comprehension.

Conversely, Okyar (2021) stated that students with low self-efficacy lack confidence and are fearful of challenges in learning to read. They believe they cannot deal with challenging tasks when reading texts. Additionally, Li and Wang (2010) provided empirical evidence about self-efficacy in reading. Students with high self-efficacy reported significantly more utilization of reading strategies than those with low self-efficacy.

Previous Research Works of Critical Thinking Strategy Training on Reading Comprehension and Self-Efficacy

In the Context of the Foreign Countries

This present research identified five relevant empirical studies from different parts of the world concerning the effectiveness of critical thinking strategies on reading achievement and learners' perceptions of learning to read.

Firstly, Fahim and Sa'ee pour (2011) conducted an empirical study on the impact of teaching critical thinking skills on the reading comprehension of 60 Iranian EFL learners. These learners were divided into two groups including a control group and an experimental group. Four research instruments were used to address the research questions consisting of homogeneity tests, reading comprehension tests, critical thinking tests, and materials for debate. Surprisingly, the results showed that teaching critical thinking skills in an EFL context improved language learning but did not enhance learners' reading comprehension. Similarly, Ardhan et al. (2020) researched the use of critical thinking techniques to improve reading skills among elementary school students. This study involved two groups of 40 fourth-grade students. The results indicated that the interaction between reading and critical thinking techniques did not influence reading comprehension skills.

Conversely, in the context of EFL in Iran, Karimi and Veisi (2016) carried out an empirical study to investigate the impact of teaching critical thinking skills on the reading comprehension of 80 intermediate EFL learners. The study utilized the Preliminary English Test for Homogenization (PET & ESOL) and Reading Comprehension Tests (IELTS reading parallel tests as pretest and posttest) to measure learners' reading comprehension levels. This study demonstrated a notable divergence from the findings of Fahim and Sa'ee pour (2011)

and Ardhian et al. (2020). Specifically, it found that teaching critical thinking skills positively affects learners' reading comprehension. However, the study indicated that the interaction between gender and the teaching of critical thinking was not significant. Furthermore, Correia (2006) provided a deeper perspective on critical reading to enhance students' engagement.

In recent years, Moghadam et al. (2023) implemented a critical thinking intervention program targeting three dependent variables including critical thinking, reading comprehension, and classroom climate. The participants were 40 BA students majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT). The study used three research instruments: Honey's (2004) Critical Thinking Questionnaire, a Classroom Climate Questionnaire (Fraser et al., 1986), and reading comprehension tests adapted from the British Council website at an intermediate level. The results showed positive changes in the experimental group students' critical thinking, reading comprehension, and attitudes towards the classroom climate following the intervention.

Paige et al. (2024) conducted a large-scale study to examine the role of critical thinking in reading comprehension. The study involved 360 seventh-grade English language learners across three schools. It utilized three research instruments: the Test of Academic Word Knowledge (TAWK) with a 50-item assessment, Reading Fluency (Read Aloud), and the Cornell Critical Thinking Test (5th ed., Revised, Level X) with a 76-item assessment. The results provided empirical evidence supporting the significant role of critical thinking in reading comprehension.

In the Context of Vietnam

A review of the literature on previous studies conducted worldwide indicates that utilizing critical thinking strategies in reading lessons can significantly enhance learners' reading abilities and their perceptions of learning to read. However, there is a notable lack of empirical studies in Vietnam focusing on the design of critical thinking strategy training programs for reading comprehension and learners' self-efficacy. A schematic list of previous studies within the Vietnamese context reveals that these studies predominantly investigate the effects of critical thinking on general language learning or specific language areas such as writing and translation.

Nhat et al. (2018) discussed policies and practices for developing critical thinking in Vietnamese schools. Nguyen (2022) explored the conceptualization of critical thinking within a Vietnamese tertiary EFL context. Similarly, Van Anh and Tam (2020) descriptively investigated Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of critical thinking in the language classroom. In terms of materials development, Ha and Hang (2021) studied the application of critical thinking in English teaching and learning through the textbook *Life at Pre-Intermediate Level*, published by National Geographic.

In the realm of language skills, Nguyen and Nguyen (2020) examined the relationship between Vietnamese students' critical thinking and argumentative writing. Do (2023) explored how critical thinking could be integrated into video-translation tasks for Vietnamese EFL students. Recent studies have further clarified the effects of critical thinking on reading skills. Thuong (2023) investigated the development of critical thinking and debating competencies in relation to reading comprehension of literary texts in the Northern provinces of Vietnam. In 2024, Le et al. analyzed critical reading thinking strategies and challenges faced by English majors.

These aforementioned studies highlight the impact of critical thinking on learners' reading performance in higher education, including improvements in reading comprehension (Karimi & Veisi, 2016; Moghadam et al., 2023; Paige et al., 2024; Le et al., 2024) and positive attitudes towards the benefits of critical thinking in reading (Moghadam et al., 2023). Building on this foundation, the present study aims to provide a broader perspective on the effects of critical thinking strategy training on reading comprehension and self-efficacy among Vietnamese EFL learners. To this end, an intervention study with two experimental groups, consisting of 54 learners majoring in English Studies at a public university in the Mekong Delta, was conducted to assess improvements in reading comprehension and increases in self-efficacy in learning to read.

Method

Aims of the Present Study

The study explores the effects of critical thinking strategy training on reading comprehension and self-efficacy among Vietnamese EFL learners in the context of a higher education institution in the Mekong Delta. The reading modules for English Studies was redesigned in 2022 to address reading needs of EFL learners by incorporating real-world activities such as presentations, group or pair work, critical thinking development, and background knowledge enhancement.

This study posed two main research aims. Firstly, it seeks to investigate improvements in EFL learners' reading comprehension before and after the intervention of critical thinking strategy training. Secondly, it examines the level of EFL learners' self-efficacy towards learning to read. In line with these aims, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the effects of critical reading strategy training on reading comprehension of Vietnamese EFL learners?

RQ2: To what extent are there any possible changes in Vietnamese EFL learners' self-efficacy after applying critical thinking strategies to learning to read?

Research Design

The study design employed an experimental approach with two groups, each receiving an intervention involving two critical thinking strategies. The conceptual framework for the study is based on the coursebook entitled *Q skills for success Level 3-reading and writing*, the third edition, published by Oxford University Press (Ward & Gramer, 2019).

The total duration of the reading training was eight weeks, with the intervention lasting six weeks. In the first week, before the intervention began, both groups were informed of the study's purpose and signed consent forms to participate. Subsequently, they completed a questionnaire and took a 75-minute reading comprehension test. In the final week, learners completed the questionnaire for the second time and took another 75-minute reading comprehension test.

Data were collected using a quantitative approach. For the first research question, two reading comprehension tests were designed to measure reading comprehension of learners before and after the intervention. For the second research question, a 30-item questionnaire was used to examine learners' self-efficacy in learning to read before and after the intervention of critical thinking strategy training.

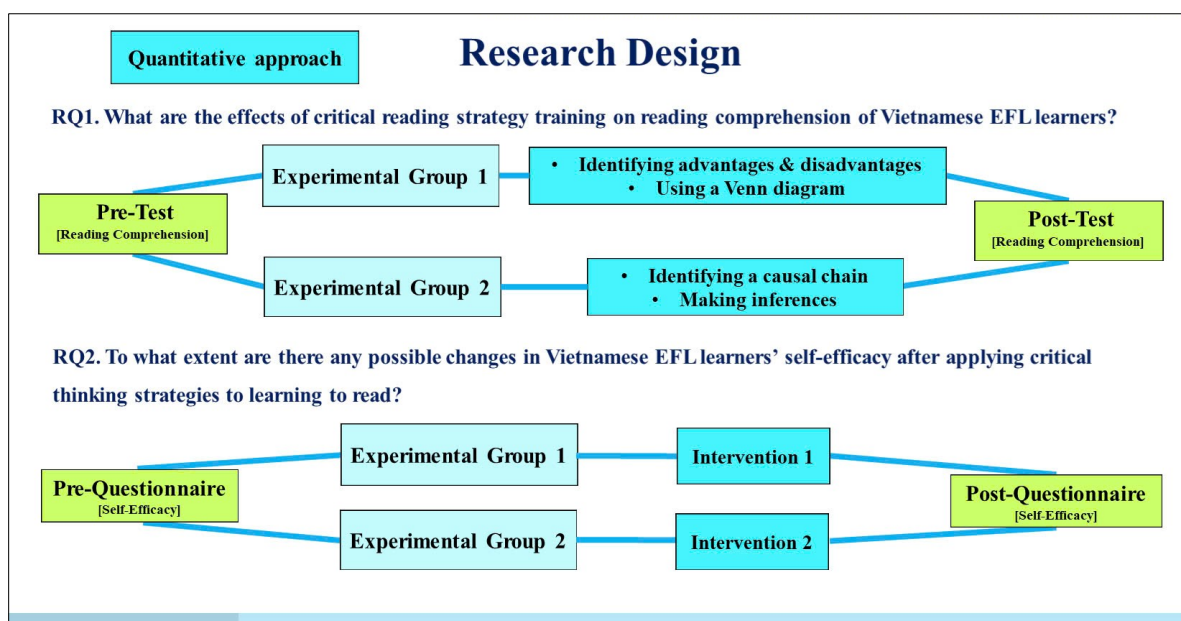


Figure 6. Research design compiled by the author

Research Instruments

Two dependent variables of the study were collected through two reading comprehension tests and a questionnaire at two moments.

Reading Comprehension Tests. Two reading comprehension tests were designed based on the coursebook entitled *Q skills for success Level 3-reading and writing*, the second edition published by Oxford University Press (Ward & Gramer, 2014). Each reading comprehension test consists of two parts. The first and second parts of the test comprise two reading texts with 40 items. The scores of the reading comprehension tests range from 0 to 10. Each correct item from these reading comprehension tests achieves 0.25 points.

Questionnaire of Self-Efficacy in Learning to Read. A 30-item questionnaire was mainly adapted from the OECD rubric on critical thinking (domain-general, comprehensive, and class-friendly) of Vincent-Lancrin (2023). However, the criteria of each item were adjusted to probe the reading context of the study on the effects of critical thinking strategy training on reading achievement and self-reliance of EFL learners in learning to read. Some items in the questionnaire show the relationship between critical reading strategies and reading comprehension. The scale of items from the questionnaire ranges from 1 to 10. The reliability of the questionnaire at the pre-and post-test moments reached Cronbach's Alpha $\alpha = .86$ and $.90$, respectively.

Learners

Participants included 54 second-year learners majoring in English Studies from two Developmental Reading 1 courses in the School of Foreign Languages at a public university in the Mekong Delta. Their reading comprehension (achievement) level was intermediate, as determined by their enrollment in the third reading course in the six courses of reading skills in the Program at this public university (equivalent to Level B1 of the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages). Their ages ranged from 20 to 22 years old. They were randomly divided into two groups. The first experimental group, consisting of 30

learners ($n=30$), received the first two critical thinking strategies during the intervention. The second experimental group, consisting of 24 learners ($n=24$), treated the two remaining critical thinking strategies.

The total duration of the reading training course was eight weeks, with the intervention lasting six weeks. In the first week, before the intervention began, both groups were informed of the study's purpose and signed consent forms to participate. Subsequently, they completed a questionnaire and took a 75-minute reading comprehension test. In the final week, learners completed the questionnaire for the second time and took another 75-minute reading comprehension test.

The Course Instructor

According to Decision 721/QĐ-ĐHTV dated February 7, 2022, of the Orientation of the New Curriculum of English Studies in School, all modules of reading skills were redesigned and launched in 2022 in order to help learners improve and develop their reading competence. There are six reading modules of the program, including Foundation to Reading 1 (02 credits), Foundation to Reading 2 (02 credits), Developmental Reading 1 (02 credits), Developmental Reading 2 (02 credits), Critical Reading 1 (02 credits), and Critical Reading 2 (02 credits). These reading courses are distributed and taught to students from the first to third year. All students have to complete these compulsory subjects in their program.

In this training, the course instructor holds a Master of Arts in TESOL. He is in charge of teaching second-language reading and writing courses. His research interests lie in the development of high-interest materials and in the teaching of reading. The course instructor took responsibility for teaching two modules of Developmental Reading 1 for two EFL reading classes for English majors at the university. The core purpose of this training was to examine whether critical thinking strategies might improve the quality of readings of learners.

Results

Effects on Reading Comprehension

The mean score of the first experimental group's reading comprehension was 6.12, and the second was 6.50 (as illustrated in Figure 7). There was no significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups at the pre-reading comprehension test moment ($t(52)=3.99, p=.15$). After the six-week intervention, the mean score of the first experimental group was 7.50, and the mean score of the second one was 7.40. The similarity was reported as significant ($t(52)=2.11, p=.18$). In terms of the improvement pattern from pre- to post-tests, both groups showed a significant improvement: the first experimental group increased from 6.12 at the pre-test to 7.50 at the post-test ($t(29)=-4.00, p=.000$), and the second experimental group increased from 6.50 at the pre-test to 7.40 at the post-test ($t(23)=-3.99, p=.001$).

It is apparent that there was no significant difference in reading comprehension performance of the two groups before and after the intervention. However, concerning the effects of critical thinking strategies, learners in the first experimental group, utilizing two critical thinking strategies, including identifying advantages and disadvantages and using a Venn diagram, respectively, gained significantly better understanding after the intervention.

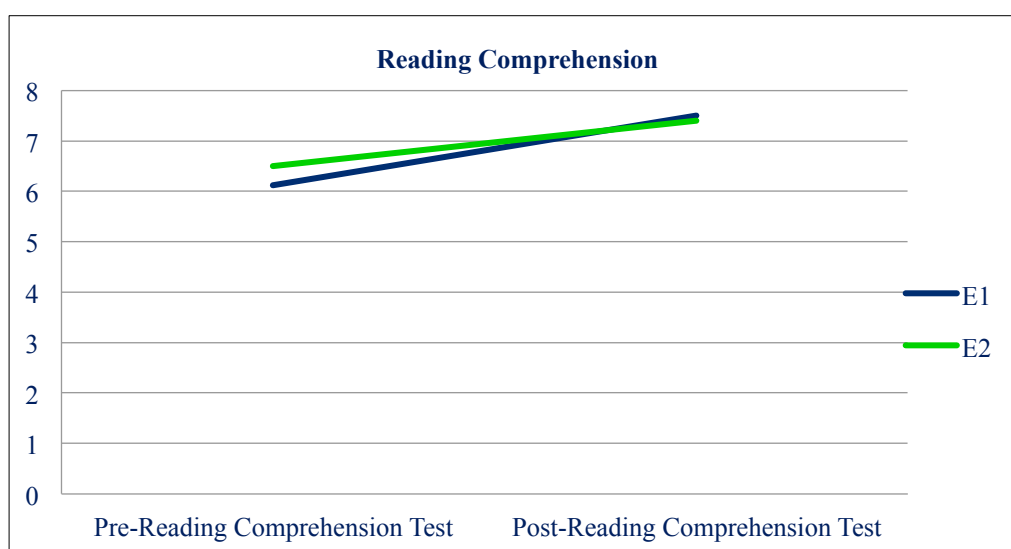


Figure 7. Learners' reading comprehension performance with the mean scores of the pre-and post-reading comprehension tests

Effects on Self-Efficacy in Learning to Read

Figure 8 shows the mean scores of the questionnaire on learners' self-efficacy in learning to read at the pre-test for both the first and second experimental groups, which were 6.20 and 6.30, respectively. There was no significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups at the pre-test stage. After the intervention, the mean score of the post-test for the first experimental group was 7.50, and the mean score for the second group was 7.15, indicating no significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups at the post-test stage.

It is evident that there was no significant difference in self-efficacy in learning to read between the two groups before and after the training. However, regarding the development pattern from pre-test to post-test, both the first and second experimental groups showed significant improvement. Notably, self-efficacy in learning to read for the first experimental group was significantly higher than that of the second group.

In conclusion, while there was no significant difference in self-efficacy in learning to read between the two groups before and after the intervention, both groups showed significant improvement in self-efficacy following the training. This indicates that both experimental groups developed more positive self-efficacy in their critical reading comprehension and reading practice. Particularly, learners in the first experimental group demonstrated more transparent and positive thinking about learning to read.

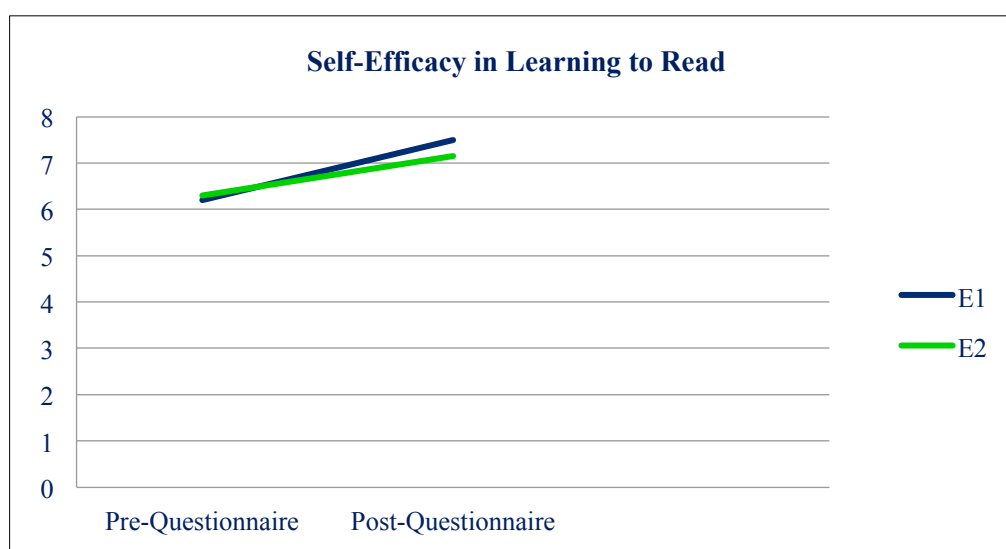


Figure 8. Learners' self-efficacy in learning to read (range 1-10) with the mean scores of the pre-and post-questionnaires

Discussion

For the First Research Question. Data from the reading comprehension tests of both experimental groups show that learners significantly improved their reading comprehension through the scores of these tests. This indicates that the quality of readings was predominantly improved after the training intervention with selected critical thinking strategies. The result aligns with the findings of the previous studies (Fahim & Sa'ee pour, 2011; Karimi & Veisi, 2016; Ardhan et al., 2020). The present study further contributes to understanding the effects of utilizing critical thinking strategies in developing critical reading skills in the EFL context. From this, instructors might consider using critical thinking strategies in their reading classes.

For the Second Research Question. Initial data from the questionnaire on learners' self-efficacy in learning to read suggest that integrating critical thinking strategies into reading lessons plays an overriding role in improving their reading abilities and appreciation for reading activities in EFL classes. This result might be analogous to previous research on the positive attitudes towards the benefits of critical thinking in reading (Moghadam et al., 2023). Additionally, the result from the second research question contributes to understanding learner-readers' perceptions and mindsets towards critical thinking strategies in learning to read. Importantly, learners build self-reliance in learning to read for their reading comprehension.

Conclusion

Research Question 1: What Are the Effects of Critical Reading Strategy Training on Reading Comprehension of Vietnamese EFL Learners?

Data analysis results indicated that the mean scores of the first indicator-reading comprehension at the pre-test were similar for both groups. Similarly, the mean scores for reading comprehension performance at the post-test did not show a significant difference. Both experimental groups demonstrated a substantial improvement in reading comprehension performance. However, learners in the first experimental group, who were taught using the

first two critical thinking strategies (identifying advantages and disadvantages and using a Venn diagram), achieved higher scores than those in the second experimental group, who were taught using the latter two critical thinking strategies (identifying a causal chain and making inferences).

Research Question 2: To What Extent Are There Any Possible Changes in Vietnamese EFL Learners' Self-Efficacy After Applying Critical Thinking Strategies to Learning to Read?

Learners' self-efficacy in the pre-test and post-test across the two groups showed no significant difference. However, there was a notable improvement in self-efficacy within both experimental groups between the pre-test and post-test periods. In conclusion, learners in both groups developed a more positive self-efficacy regarding their reading skills and a greater appreciation for reading. They expressed greater satisfaction with the sequence of reading activities in their lessons and felt more effective during the various stages of reading. In this vein, EFL learners believe that if they had a high self-efficacy in learning to read with critical thinking strategies, they would improve their reading comprehension.

Limitations and Recommendations

Firstly, the limitation of the study was the time required to conduct the intervention, which was limited to six weeks. Thus, if time allows for an extension, further research should apply the four mentioned critical thinking strategies to both experimental groups. Specifically, the first two critical thinking strategies, identifying advantages and disadvantages and using a Venn diagram, should be utilized for the first experimental group during the initial intervention period. In the second intervention period, this group would receive the remaining two critical thinking strategies, which involve identifying a causal chain and making inferences. Similarly, a research design with switching replications of the four critical thinking strategies should be applied to the second experimental group. This approach would reduce bias in the research results.

Secondly, the scope and the language area should be broadened in further studies. The increase in the number of participants could provide a broader generalization about the effectiveness of critical thinking strategy training on learners' language skills. With respect to the language area, further research could consider integrating critical thinking strategies with other language skills, such as speaking or writing. This would help learners develop critical thinking skills and improve their productive language abilities.

Acknowledgements

As a young lecturer in the School of Foreign Languages, the author would like to extend his gratitude to the Administrative Board for facilitating the Developmental Reading 1 courses during his first year of teaching. He appreciates this opportunity, which has provided him with a broader perspective on English majors' approaches to learning to read. He would also like to thank the participants for their invaluable assistance in completing this empirical study. Ultimately, the author thanks Chị Minh Thùy and Thảo Nguyễn for stimulating discussions and helpful suggestions.

Appendix

A detailed reading lesson

This is a demonstration of the reading lesson (from pages 89 to 94) designed based on the coursebook *Q skills for success Level 3-reading and writing*, the third edition published by Oxford University Press (Ward & Gramer, 2019).

The title of the reading text is “In Defense of Advertising.”

Level: Intermediate

The objective of the reading lesson: Learners will read an article based on a Canadian radio show. It gives them a less common opinion of advertising. Use the article to gather information and ideas for learners’ reading tasks.

Procedure:

Preview the reading

Activity 1: Ask learners to read the title and first sentence of each paragraph. Ask them the question “Do you think the writer finds advertising to be positive or negative?”

Activity 2: Ask learners to write for 5 to 10 minutes about an advertisement that provided useful information about something important to them.

Activity 3: (Pair work)

Provide a list of nine words in the reading. Ask learners to circle clues in the text to help them understand the meaning of each word.

Note. Learners can use a dictionary to define any unknown words.

In this activity, learners go online to listen and practice their pronunciation.

Work with the reading

Activity 1: The core purpose of this activity is to investigate information.

Ask learners to read the article and gather information about whether advertising helps or harms them.

Activity 2: This activity aims to check vocabulary. In this activity, there are nine sentences. Each sentence consists of a bold word.

Learners have to read nine sentences containing a bold word in each sentence and then match them with the appropriate definition.

Note. If the time allows an extension, students go online for more practice with the vocabulary.

An introduction to critical thinking strategy (Using a Venn diagram)

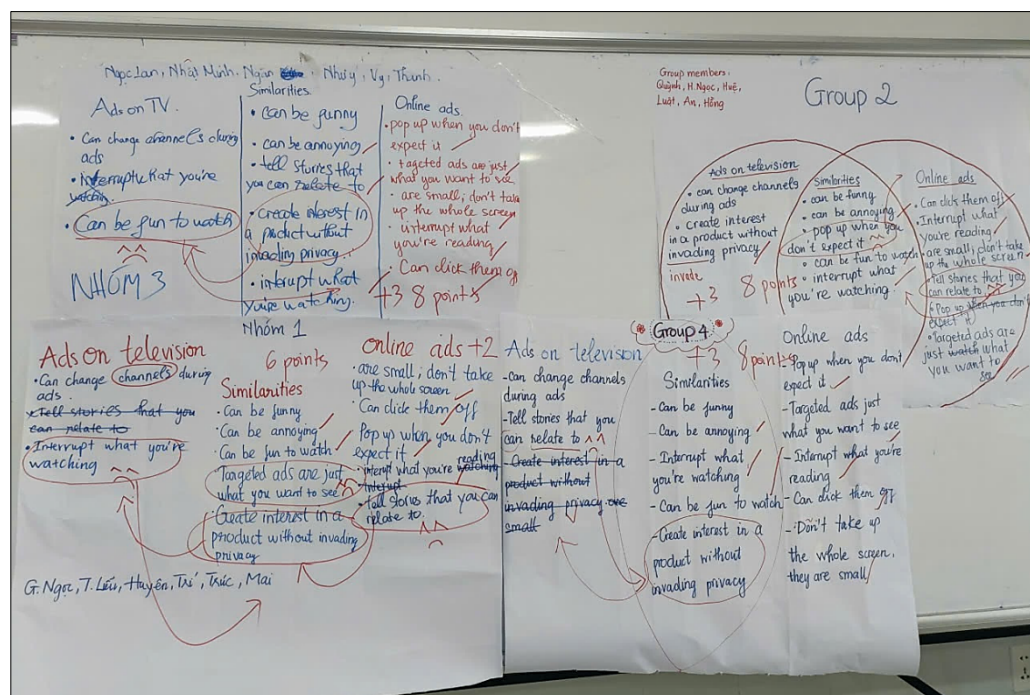
- Giving the definition of this critical thinking strategy
- Providing a sample for this type of critical thinking strategy

Practice

Ask students to look at the Venn diagram and then complete the diagram using the ideas from the prompt. After that, ask them to explain their choices.

This is the final work of four groups when finishing a reading unit using a Venn diagram in the first experimental group of 30 EFL learners at an intermediate level.

To foster an increase in motivation among EFL learners in learning to read, each group selects a representative to present their final work and explain their choices at the board. The remaining groups then listen and give feedback.



The photo was taken of one reading activity on November 07, 2023, in the reading class.

Descriptions of two experimental groups

The first experimental group consists of 30 EFL learners in Class A. This class starts every Wednesday afternoon. Each meeting begins at 1:00 p.m. and finishes at 4:40 p.m. Each reading lesson lasted four periods, which was typical for Vietnamese students, with a 20-minute break in between.

The second experimental group consists of 24 EFL learners in Class B. This class starts every Thursday afternoon. Each meeting begins at 1:00 p.m. and finishes at 4:40 p.m. Each reading lesson lasted four periods, which was typical for Vietnamese students, with a 20-minute break in between. Basically, the two experimental groups have similar conditions for the reading courses in terms of the course instructor, coursebook, syllables, and assessment. However, the intervention of critical thinking strategies will be different.

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Navigating Online Identities: Language Learners' Narratives in Online Spaces

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Abstract

This research investigates the construction of Saudi university English language learners' identities in online spaces, such as discussion boards and social media, analyzing how these digital environments influence their learning processes and identity formation. The primary objective is to understand the relationship between online interaction and language learning, focusing on the negotiation of identity through online spaces. The theoretical framework is anchored in sociocultural theories that underscore the profound impact of social interaction on learning and identity development. This perspective suggests that online spaces provide a unique space for identity construction and performance, playing a pivotal role in language learning. This understanding sets the stage for analyzing learners' narratives. Adopting a qualitative approach, it analyzes data collected from online discussion boards and social media posts to investigate the language learning narratives of Saudi university English learners. Through content and thematic analysis, the data is examined comprehensively to facilitate an in-depth exploration of language learning narratives within these online platforms. The findings highlight learners' motivations, such as cultural exchange and global communication, and reveal strategies for identity construction aligned with their learning goals. These narratives also reflect themes of authenticity and community engagement, which are pivotal in shaping learners' online personas. The analysis suggests that online discussion boards significantly support language learning by offering platforms for authentic interaction and identity exploration. The study contributes to educational practices by providing insights into leveraging online discussion boards to enhance language learning and suggests further research on their dynamic role in educational technology.

Keywords: Identity Construction, Online Spaces, Language Learning, Discussion Boards, Collaborative Learning

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Introduction

The pervasive increase in online activity has significantly impacted various aspects of daily life, including education. According to a 2023 survey by Statista, users now spend an average of 6 hours and 35 minutes online daily. As a result, language learners are dedicating extensive hours to online interaction through personal devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and laptops. Thus, it is imperative to explore how online platforms can enrich English language learners' (ELLs) practice and supplement classroom instruction. Additionally, it is crucial to investigate the dynamics of online communication in English among ELLs and how it differs from traditional classroom interactions. Therefore, this study is informed by the following questions:

1. How do language learners engage with social media platforms for language learning?
2. How does participation in online spaces influence their identity negotiation?
3. How do learners construct their language learning narratives online?
4. What roles do peer feedback, collaborative learning, and community support play in online language learning?

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural Theory

Language learning extends beyond acquiring linguistic skills to include communication within cultural contexts, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) view of language as a tool for constructing social meaning and identity. Learners' identities are shaped by their cultural and linguistic contexts, which influence their participation in online spaces. For instance, discussing thoughts, opinions, and worldviews exemplifies how identity is shaped by and also shapes social contexts in which they exist. It allows people to connect, share ideas, and build a community. In the case of ELLs' online use of English in online spaces, their learning is situated within those contexts, and their identities are shaped by their participation in these online spaces.

In addition, there is a significant connection between language learning and the learner's identity, as "the desire to acquire new skills and knowledge is inextricably linked to who we want to be as people" (Hull & Katz, 2006, p. 43). Learners use the target language to convey personal meanings and cultural identities, thereby making language learning an investment in their social, cultural, and academic identities (Darvin & Norton, 2023; Norton-Pierce, 1995). The sharing of cultural practices and personal narratives in language-learning environments serves as a means of identity expression. Through the use of the target language, learners actively shape their identities and invest in building their cultural and social capital.

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice are groups of individuals that are brought together with a shared goal or purpose (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These communities are characterized by three main elements: a shared domain of interest, a community of individuals who interact and learn together, and a shared practice. Through interactions within these communities, language and cultural practices are collectively shared and learned, influencing language acquisition and identity formation. In the context of this study, online discussion boards serve as platforms for creating communities of practice, joined by the goal of language learning in which members can negotiate and renegotiate meaning and co-construct knowledge.

The co-construction of knowledge within communities of practice is a dynamic process wherein members collaboratively create, share, and refine knowledge through their interactions and shared experiences. The role of identity in this process is crucial. As members engage in group activities, they negotiate their identities within the group, influencing their participation and the knowledge they bring. The interplay between individual and collective identity shapes the community's learning practices and helps knowledge evolve according to the diverse perspectives of members of the community.

Funds of Knowledge

Language learners' funds of knowledge refer to the rich and diverse cultural, social, familial, and personal knowledge and experiences that students bring to the educational setting (Moll et al., 1992). Incorporating students' funds of knowledge in the educational setting can enhance their learning, as it connects academic and personal experiences. Amanti (2006) states that "Local knowledge has a legitimate place in our educational institutions for both our students and our pedagogical knowledge as teachers" (p. 132). This approach validates the learners' backgrounds and promotes an inclusive learning environment that acknowledges the value of diverse cultural perspectives.

In the language learning context, specifically, integrating learners' funds of knowledge into the environment enriches the learning experience. Language is a tool for creating meaning, and when learners draw on their own knowledge and experiences while acquiring a new language, it becomes more meaningful. Supporting multiple literacies, it creates a "range of literacy practices in which ELLs engage across contexts in different languages and various modalities" (Heneda, 2006, p. 337). This approach enables learners to express their identities through language, contributing not only to language acquisition but also to a deeper connection between the learner and what they are learning. Thus creating a more responsive educational environment that supports the holistic development of language learners.

Methodology

Research Context and Design

The study was conducted at a public university in Saudi Arabia, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). First-year students undergo an intensive English course before transitioning to studying various subjects in English-mediated instruction (EMI) within their majors. This research utilizes a qualitative design, incorporating personal narratives, reflections, and firsthand experiences shared by participants online. The data were collected from students' posts on class Blackboard discussion boards and Padlet.

Participants

In this study, participants comprised a homogeneous group of 32 adult female EFL learners attending an Intermediate English class at a university in Saudi Arabia during the first year of their bachelor's program in the Business School. All the participants were native Arabic speakers with varying levels of English proficiency. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21, with an average age of 19. They were selected as part of a class that was taking the course together, and consent was obtained to use their contributions in this study. Data from four class members for whom consent was not obtained was excluded from the analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study were collected from participants' personal narratives, reflections, and first-hand experiences that were shared online on the class Blackboard discussion board and Padlet in response to specific prompts. These prompts were posted weekly and served as extensions of classroom discussions and activities related to the themes and topics covered in classroom lessons.

The data was analyzed using line-by-line coding, thematic analysis, and content analysis. Line-by-line coding was employed to maintain an open approach to the data and uncover its narrative (Charmaz, 2006). Thematic analysis facilitated the exploration of rich, detailed, and complex accounts of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006), while content analysis allowed for the systematic analysis of large volumes of data and the identification of underlying patterns (Krippendorff, 2013).

Findings

Evolving Language Learner Identities

In the initial posts on the Blackboard discussion board, students were prompted to describe their relationship with the English language and the reasons they were learning it. Participants had consistent narratives, beginning with a lack of interest in learning English and evolving into an understanding of its significance in various aspects of life. In the following example, R.J. shared her evolving English language learning journey:

The idea of learning the English was not important and I didn't care because I thought I wouldn't benefit, but over time, I understood that it was an important thing, whether in education or in life, so I started watching anything I love in English.

The participants collectively realized that English is important not only for their studies but also for communication, travel, meeting new people, and ordering food at restaurants and cafes. Furthermore, Towards the end of the course, many of the participants started showing a deeper connection to the English language. R.A., who is one of the strongest ELLs in the class, stated, "Initially, I believed that learning English was mainly for communication purposes. Yet, upon delving deeper into the language, I discovered its ability to forge a deep connection between myself and the vast knowledge of the world."

Notably, the most common theme found was that they saw speaking English as essential for their future job or profession. In other words, English is seen as an integral part of their professional identities. For instance, R.G. discussed the importance of English in reaching her business objectives, emphasizing that "The language will help me achieve my goals because it makes me communicate with others and thus I will gain knowledge and clients." Similarly, J.G. explained, "Looking ahead, I appreciate the importance of English in achieving my future goals. Whether it's pursuing higher education, advancing in my job, or simply touring the world, knowing English gives up unlimited options."

These examples demonstrate how learners align their language learning journeys with professional goals. This alignment shows how language is closely related to their identities: who they are and who they want to be. In other words, it shows how language learner

identities intersect with their professional identities (Cho et al., 2022), as learners see language acquisition as a tool to unlock these future opportunities.

Social Positioning

Participants in this study showed high levels of self-awareness. They used the second language (L2) to position themselves and identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as the kinds of professions that would be most suitable for them. For example, R.G. shared her outlook on group work saying, “I’m a kind of a leading personality, but at the same time I like to work alone, I’m alone wolf, but if I have to work collectively, I do it to the fullest.” R.G. recognizes her preferences but also realizes that she must overcome her discomfort to accomplish her goals.

Similarly, participants were highly ambitious and used the English language to position themselves in relation to their future selves and future imagined communities (Anderson, 2020). They situate themselves in a position of importance and as having an impact on their future imagined communities. For Example, J.R. posted:

In the future, I aspire to become a successful businesswoman and jewelry designer. My ambition is to create stunning and unique pieces that captivate people's hearts and minds. I envision myself running my own business, where I can unleash my creativity and passion for crafting beautiful jewelry.

Indeed, learning a language represents a substantial investment in learners’ future social capital and how they imagine using it (e.g., Al-Samiri, 2024). Nevertheless, participants also occasionally used the online platforms to voice some challenges they were facing in making future decisions. In a post reflecting on her aspirations, G.Y. wrote:

To be honest I have so many ambitions for the future. One of my many personalities want to have a cute little family but my other personality doesn’t want that. I want to be an independent woman, living my dreams on my own, living in my dream house, just enjoying the calm life.

In this excerpt, G.Y. acknowledges her multiple identities by expressing different plans for the future. This is a good illustration of how identity negotiation is a constant struggle as it is an inherent part of it.

Global Citizens

In addition to their understanding of the importance of English for their professional goals, learners also recognize its importance as an international language and its essential role in global communication. Their online interactions reflect a strong sense of global citizenship as they actively endeavor to foster intercultural communication. For instance, B.D. expressed her love for learning English because “it makes [her] communicate with people, and most of the world speaks this language.” Similarly, A.M. states, “I think learning English is fun because I love learning new things, and learning English helps me communicate better with people all over the world.” Their statements reflect their understanding that language is integral to being a global citizen.

In this study, it was found that English does not conflict with local culture and traditions (Elyas, 2008). Rather than being perceived as a threat, it is viewed as a tool for achieving goals and promoting cross-cultural communication and enrichment. For example, D.N. highlighted its role in connecting with people worldwide and enhancing professional opportunities in the following written post:

I believe that the English language will benefit me very greatly in the future when I own my own companies and make deals with companies from all over the world. The language will benefit me greatly in this and many other things, such as introducing my country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, when I talk to visitors to the Kingdom and inform them about what our customs, traditions, and foods are.

Not only are learners eager to share their culture with the world, but they also recognize that English allows them access to diverse cultures and perspectives, shaping their multicultural identities. S.L. noted that “English opens doors to travel, global trends, culture, and understanding diverse perspectives.” This sentiment is further echoed in a post by J.K.:

There are some things that makes me enjoy learning English that not only will it make traveling easier, but English will also allow you to know more about global trends and culture. It will give you a deeper understanding of people’s different perspectives on life and communicate with people who do not speak your language.

In addition, participants agreed on the impact of English media on their cultural exposure and personal development. For example, A.F. expressed how watching English media, such as TV shows and movies, deepened her interest in the language, enhancing her cultural exposure and personal growth. D.G. also explained how watching English media helped her to “understand different dialects and cultural differences in the English language, and learn to use common English phrases and expressions correctly.”

Peer Connections and Support

Students in this study built strong and meaningful connections within their online community of practice. They used the online platform to share personal stories from their past and hopes and dreams for the future. The participants utilized the L2 to express different aspects of their identities that they did not get the chance to in class. One of the participants expressed this sentiment in her post:

My opinion on using the Blackboard discussion board is that it is very useful for expressing ourselves and writing what we want on the discussion board. It also helped me to get to know my classmates more by reading their writings on the board.

One of the most interesting findings is that the participants supported their peers more than expected. They encouraged each other to pursue their goals and aspirations, expressed their faith in their abilities, validated their experiences, and gave practical advice and suggestions. This is evident in a reply that said, "It's great to hear about your ambition, [A.T.]! I also enjoy fashion and think that having a business in this field sounds exciting. Have you thought about combining your management skills with your passion for fashion?" This observation raises the question of whether this supportive behavior is gender-specific, as previous research has highlighted similar instances of female solidarity over a metaphorical sisterhood (Al-Samiri, 2020).

The participants recognized the difficulty of learning a foreign language and supported each other in their language-learning goals. They encouraged many classmates who were struggling with English. In a reply to a classmate's comment about having difficulties learning English, S.M. expressed, "Learning the English language is like a challenge for us at this age. It is very nice that you want and are trying to learn the English language. I wish you success." This response emphasizes the collective challenge and mutual support in the learning process.

Furthermore, learners demonstrated empathy in their online interactions by offering each other comfort, reassurance, understanding, and encouragement. For instance, when a student posted that she was sad that she was not accepted into medical school, another student replied, "Don't worry everything happens for a reason, Maybe you are not a doctor but I believe that u will be a good business woman." This example illustrates how learners provided each other comfort and expressed their encouragement and support.

Conclusion

Online platforms provide a hybrid 'third space' (Kramsch & Uryu, 2020) for the development and expression of identity in language learning. The advantage of online platforms in this regard is their ability to lessen the burden on less proficient learners by providing additional tools that are not readily available in classroom settings, such as online dictionaries, as well as translation and paraphrasing tools. It also allows learners additional time to consider and formulate their written responses, thus alleviating the challenges faced by language learners who are less proficient in language but are skilled users of technology.

In this study, it has become apparent that learning does not only occur through content but also through context, which supports a sociocultural perspective on language learning. English proficiency within a social context is linked to students' identities, influencing personal growth, social goals, and professional development (Palfreyman, 2006). In addition, learners' collective identities demonstrate that language learning is not just about acquiring a set of skills but is deeply intertwined with personal, social, and professional objectives. The findings demonstrate that learning the English language was not found to be in contest with local culture and traditions (Elyas, 2008); rather, it was perceived as a tool to achieve goals without posing a threat.

The implications of this study indicate the importance of language instructors creating collaborative learning environments, whether online or in person (Al-Samiri, 2021). It is suggested that language instructors incorporate online discussion boards and social media platforms where feasible. Additionally, instructors should facilitate opportunities for learners to express themselves through the L2 and empower them to exercise their agency, utilizing their existing funds of knowledge. This approach will contribute to a more dynamic and inclusive learning experience.

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Empowering University Students in Hong Kong to “Read as a Writer” Rather Than to Merely “Read as a Reader”

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Abstract

Many English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners at the tertiary level face difficulties in academic writing and are eager to make improvements in this area, which is crucial to their academic survival in the university. Yet, in most cases, they tend to have overlooked or even neglected the intricate relationship between reading and writing in a sense that one effective way to improve writing performance is in fact to read extensively and strategically. Also, when reading a text, it is common for students to focus mainly on the content (i.e., identification of information and / or understanding of concepts) rather than the writing style and language use, meaning that they are more like “reading as a reader” than “reading as a writer”. In this regard, the reading process is likely to have limited positive impacts on the enrichment of their writing quality. In this paper which focuses on experience sharing, the strong bonding between reading and writing as well as the specific differences between “reading as a reader” and “reading as a writer” will first be introduced. Subsequently, there will be an illustration of how a group of students majoring in Cultural and Religious Studies in a university in Hong Kong was empowered to read as a writer in a training workshop, together with their post-workshop feedback. Some practical suggestions on how to offer effective training to students (on the enhancement of academic writing competence through academic reading training) will be shared at the end.

Keywords: Reading and Writing, Reading as a Writer, Reading Process

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Introduction

Substantial research has shown the intricate and reciprocal relationship between academic reading and academic writing in tertiary education among English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) undergraduates (e.g., Graham et al., 2018; Phakiti & Li, 2011; Prihandoko, 2024; Spack, 1997). In order to achieve academic success in university education, students need to demonstrate a reasonably high level of academic literacy, as indicated in their reading and writing competence in particular (Braine, 2002). Undoubtedly, university students are required to complete a variety of writing tasks, mostly evidence-based or research-based, such as discussion papers, critical reflections, research proposals and research reports (or theses). Sometimes, they even have to work on highly discipline-specific genres, such as lab reports, technical specifications and business case analyses. At the same time, they need to read a considerable number of scholarly references, mainly textbooks and journal articles, to prepare for lectures, tutorials and assessments. To many ESL and EFL students, academic writing and academic reading in English are challenging since both tasks require the mastery of discipline-specific knowledge and linguistic knowledge, as well as the awareness of genre features (Phyo, 2024). The situation is particularly thorny to these students since English is not their first language.

When it comes to ESL and EFL students' acquisition and enhancement of academic writing skills in higher education, a common view is that this is a complicated issue (Carless, 2006, as cited in Schillings et al., 2023). It is because there has been a heated debate on whether academic writing skills can be taught in a general manner without focusing much on subject content (Etherington, 2008 & Wingate, 2012, as cited in Schillings et al., 2023). Besides, some students and even teachers have overlooked that an effective way to improve academic writing performance is to read extensively and strategically, with the former concentrating on the amount and range of reading to be completed while the latter concentrating on the focuses of the reading process.

The main purpose of this paper is to share how “reading as a writer”, with a strong emphasis on language use in the reading process, was introduced in a training workshop to a group of undergraduate students from the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies in a university in Hong Kong. It is also hoped that through this paper, some concrete suggestions on how to sharpen students' academic writing skills through academic reading training can be made.

“Reading as a Reader” vs “Reading as a Writer”

Common challenges faced by ESL and EFL learners in academic reading include the extraction and synthesis of information from different sources as well as the recognition and acquisition of academic vocabulary (Manjet, 2017, as cited in Singh, 2019). Due to the situation that in university education, writing tasks assigned to students mainly serve as platforms for them to showcase their level of reading comprehension (based on the information obtained from the assigned readings provided by the teachers or the references searched by the students themselves to complete evidence-based assignments) (Spack, 1997), it is common to treat the grasp of content or information as the main objective in the reading process. This is in fact the essence of “reading as a reader”, which is fundamentally different from “reading as a writer”.

Reading as a Reader

When one “reads as a reader”, one of the main goals is to figure out what the text means (Peha, n.d.). In this regard, readers tend to base on certain prompts (e.g., specific guiding questions provided by the teachers) and / or needs (e.g., the need to search the definition of a term or some arguments in favour of a certain stance of the discussion topic when writing an essay) to find out necessary information. In order to make good sense of or better understand the meaning of the reading material, when “reading as a reader”, some strategies may be employed throughout the reading process, such as asking questions, making predictions, drawing inferences, connecting various ideas or connecting ideas with theories, as well as evaluating the content.

Reading as a Writer

Unlike “reading as a reader”, when one “reads as a writer”, there will be a dissection of a piece of writing (Glatch, 2023), with an analysis of its structure and other elements that give the text an impact, such as the writer’s voice, presentation style and language use. This approach originated in literary analysis but is now applicable to the reading of a variety of texts. Instead of merely focusing on understanding the content and locating specific information (i.e., what the writer wrote) in the reading journey, much more emphasis will be placed on the craft elements involved in the text (i.e., how the writer wrote it). In other words, there is a more in-depth analysis of different facets of a reading material, and the reader is playing multiple roles in the process, namely the reader, critic and reflector, having more personal engagement with the material.

It is not suggested that “reading as a writer” is superior to “reading as a reader”, or vice versa. At the end of the day, meaning making and information search are still very important goals to be achieved in the reading process. Nevertheless, if a reader pays attention to not only “what the text is about” but also “how the text was written”, then there will be a more comprehensive analysis and appreciation of a reading material. At the same time, with the focus placed on language use and presentation style when “reading as a writer”, with some thoughts about “if I were the writer, I would ...”, it is believed that there will be a direct impact on the way the reader writes his or her own texts in future.

Training Workshop for the Target Students as Part of the English Across the Curriculum Project

Background

The training workshop in question, which focused on “Reading as a Writer”, was part of the English Across the Curriculum (EAC) project (a large-scale, university-funded project launched in 2016) implemented in the target university in Hong Kong. This project emphasizes 1) the proactive collaboration between language teachers (from the English Language Teaching Unit of the university) and content teachers (from various academic departments / programs of the university), 2) the establishment of Community of Practice (CoP) projects between the two parties, and 3) the enhancement of students’ disciplinary literacy, which refers to the “specialized knowledge and abilities possessed by those who create, communicate, and use knowledge within each of the disciplines” (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012, p. 7). Since the launch of the EAC project, nearly 40 CoP projects have been

established, involving over 70 content teachers from all the eight faculties across the university.

Regarding my role in this EAC project, I am serving as one of the Co-supervisors (overseeing collaborations with the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education) and one of the Frontline Supporters (offering training workshops and providing individual feedback to students from the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies (CURE) and the Department of Sports Science and Physical Education (SSPE) respectively). In this paper, the focus is placed on my frontline support to a small group of ESL second-year Religious Studies majors ($n = 15$) from the CURE Department taking a course entitled “Intermediate Seminar”. Since these students were not freshmen, academic reading and academic writing were not entirely new to them when taking this course. Also, many of these students had taken a foundation English course offered by the English Language Teaching Unit of the university in their first year of study before taking this “Intermediate Seminar” course. Nevertheless, since the target university adopts a bilingual language policy, with both Chinese and English being the official languages in an academic setting, some teachers (including those from the CURE Department, but not the one teaching the “Intermediate Seminar” course) do allow students to complete their assignments in Chinese instead of in English, limiting the chances of some students to engage in English writing in their academic study.

The “Intermediate Seminar” course, offered by the CURE Department, is designed to facilitate sophomore Religious Studies majors’ development of academic writing skills in English and research strategies in the discipline, through the support from other class members and the instructor. Since the course is delivered in the form of a seminar, students are given ample opportunities to verbally present their thoughts (based on the assigned readings and their research topics) and respond to peers’ presentations. Key assessments in this course include an oral presentation (group-based), a preliminary paper (individual-based) and a final paper (individual-based), with the use of a process writing approach. The preliminary paper is actually an introduction or a preview of the final paper, and both papers require students to demonstrate the abilities to collect reliable information, exercise critical judgment, as well as present clear and organized arguments in the context of religious studies.

Focuses of the Target Workshop

After prior discussion with the content teacher concerned (i.e., instructor of the “Intermediate Seminar” course), it was agreed that various forms of support would be provided by the EAC project team (with me being the frontline supporter of this collaboration), namely two 45-minute workshops (one on academic reading, i.e., the target workshop presented in this paper, and the other on common language mistakes based on former students’ writing performance), as well as individual feedback to students’ preliminary papers (i.e., one of the assessments in this course as introduced above). Since both reading and writing play an important role in this course and are interrelated, consensus was reached that the EAC project team would provide guidance and support to students in these two key areas.

Regarding the target workshop on academic reading, the flow or rundown is presented as follows:

Table 1. Flow of the Target Academic Reading Workshop

Part 1	Brainstorming with students about the connections between reading and writing in their university study, as well as their understanding of the differences between “reading as a reader” and “reading as a writer”
Part 2	Explaining the close relationships between reading and writing, especially the role of reading in reinforcing writing
Part 3	Explaining the differences between “reading as a reader” and “reading as a writer” (see Table 2) as well as the focuses of the reading process when “reading as a writer” (see Table 3)
Part 4	Demonstrating how to “read as a writer” with an excerpt of a published journal article in the field of religious studies (see Figure 1)
Part 5	Asking students to try the “reading as a writer” strategy with an excerpt of another published journal article in the field of religious studies

Table 2. Differences between “Reading as a Reader” and “Reading as a Writer”

Reading as a Reader	Reading as a Writer
Purpose: - To find out / locate important information - To understand the text	Purpose: - To improve writing skills through reading
Focus: - Key words - Necessary content	Focus: - Language use (e.g., grammar, vocabulary & sentence structure)
What is your usual practice???	

Table 3. Focuses of the Reading Process When “Reading as a Writer”

1. Idea	What the writer is talking about (main idea)
2. Organization	How the writer connects ideas (cohesion & coherence)
3. Voice	The writer’s attitude and / or emotion (tone)
4. Word choice	The writer’s selection of words and phrases (accuracy & variety)
5. Sentence structure	The writer’s sentence constructions (accuracy & variety)
6. Conventions	How the writer makes the writing consistent and easy to read (spelling, grammar, citation style, ...)

Pink: Nice expressions / sentence structures (What can I learn from a linguistic perspective?)

Blue: Changes that I will make (What would I change / do differently if I were the writer?)

Green: Special observations (What should I further explore in terms of formality / tone?)

The relationship between religion and morality has long been **hotly debated** (→ a heated debate). Does religion make **us** more moral? Is it necessary for morality? Do moral inclinations emerge independently of religious intuitions? These debates, **which nowadays rumble on in scientific journals as well as in public life, (INDEPENDENT RELATIVE CLAUSE)** have frequently been **marred** (→ **ruined**) by a series of conceptual confusions and limitations. Many scientific investigations have failed to **decompose** (→ **dissect**) “religion” and “morality” into **theoretically grounded** elements; have **adopted** parochial conceptions of key concepts — **in particular, (→ especially)** sanitized conceptions of “prosocial” behavior; and have neglected to consider the **complex interplay** between cognition and culture. **We** argue that to make progress, the categories “religion” and “morality” must be fractionated into a set of biologically and psychologically cogent traits, revealing the cognitive foundations that shape and constrain relevant cultural variants. **We adopt** (→ **employ**) this fractionating strategy, setting out an encompassing evolutionary framework within which to **situate** and **evaluate** relevant **evidence (COLLOCATION)**. **Our** goals are **twofold**: to produce a detailed picture of the current state of the field, and to provide a road map for future research on the relationship between religion and morality.

Figure 1. Demonstration of How to “Read as a Writer”

Though the duration of the workshop was quite short (with only 45 minutes), it was hoped that the student participants could grasp something solid though brainstorming, the instructor’s demonstration, as well as some hands-on practice. In the demonstration part, it was reiterated that when “reading as a writer”, it is very natural that different readers have different focuses. For instance, some readers may put more stress on the accurate and diversified use of verbs, while others may put more emphasis on sentence variety, academic register and ways of documenting sources. In this connection, in most instances, there is no “right or wrong responses” and it is nice to share observations with their peers to maximize the gains of the reading process in a collective manner. When sharing the alternative use of words or expressions, which concerns the use of synonyms, the importance of collocation

was highlighted and some corresponding independent learning resources (e.g., collocation dictionaries) were introduced.

Students' Responses During and After the Target Workshop

It is noteworthy that when being asked the linkage between reading and writing at the beginning of the workshop, most of the students agreed that the two were closely related but could not explicitly explain how they were connected. As for the differences between “reading as a reader” and “reading as a writer”, nearly all the students found this discussion question a bit abstract and philosophical, and admitted that they rarely thought about it in the past.

After listening to my explanation of the differences in purposes and focuses when “reading as a reader” and “reading as a writer” respectively (i.e., the content covered in Table 2 and Table 3 as shown above), the majority of the students reflected that “reading as a reader” was their usual practice. In other words, when reading academic texts in their major courses, they tended to regard overall comprehension and information identification as the main goals, rather than analysing or appreciating the language use of the writer(s).

In the demonstration part, before sharing my analysis of the given academic text (extracted from an academic journal article) using the “reading as a writer” approach, the student participants were given a few minutes to have a quick look at the given text and share their responses, especially what they had learned from the text from a linguistic perspective. To those students who were invited to verbally share their responses in front of the whole class, they tended to pinpoint some words that they had never seen or used, such as “parochial” and “cogent”. It is evident that they mainly focused on lexis rather than other aspects such as syntax and register.

At the end of the workshop, the participating students were required to complete a post-workshop survey. Concerning the quantitative part of the survey, questions were raised about different facets of the workshop, including the overall design, the instructor’s enthusiasm, clarity of explanation and teaching effectiveness, as well as the overall satisfaction. Students were expected to share their responses to these questions on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 6 = Strongly Agree), and it was found that the general feedback was positive, with six out of seven of the items receiving a rating of 5 or above (see Table 4).

Table 4. Students' Quantitative Feedback on the Target Academic Reading Workshop

Post-workshop Survey Questions	Mean Scores (1 = Strongly Disagree; 6 = Strongly Agree)
1. This workshop was well designed.	5.00
2. The teacher was enthusiastic about conducting the workshop.	5.10
3. The teacher's explanation of materials was clear.	5.00
4. The teaching approach was effective.	5.18
5. This workshop effectively improved/enhanced my language skills and awareness.	4.81
6. Overall, I am satisfied with this workshop.	5.00
7. I will recommend this workshop to my fellow students.	5.10

As for the qualitative part of the survey, the student participants were asked to share their open-ended responses on what they had specifically learned from the workshop, what they liked the most about the workshop, as well as their suggestions for improvement. The majority of them appreciated the practicality and usefulness of the workshop, especially what they should or could focus on when “reading as a writer”. In terms of suggestions, some mentioned that due to the short duration of the workshop, it was not possible for them to have ample practice opportunities. Some also suggested that more academic reading training be offered earlier (preferably in their first year of study), including strategies to read academic texts more efficiently. It is evident that the student participants as a whole would like to have more academic reading support to facilitate their learning.

Suggestions on the Ways to Enhance Students’ Academic Writing Performance Through Academic Reading Training

Based on my experience in conducting the target workshop and teaching academic or research writing courses also focusing on “reading as a writer”, some pedagogical suggestions have been accumulated and are shared below:

Keep Emphasizing the Strong Linkage Between Reading and Writing

It is important for teachers, including both language teachers and content teachers, to reiterate the intimate relationship between reading and writing, especially the fact that paying attention to or being aware of others’ writing style, language use and presentation approach is conducive to the improvement of students’ own writing performance. If students make effort in analysing, appreciating and applying what they have learned in the reading process, such as syntactic structures and lexical use, it is likely that the level of accuracy and diversity in their writing will be enhanced. For instance, there may be more variations in sentence patterns, vocabulary choices and ways of completing academic referencing in their own writing when students are more aware of or conscious about these elements when they read the texts from other writers. Yet, it is crucial to keep reminding students of the connections between reading and writing; otherwise, it is easy for students to revert to the usual practice of reading merely for identifying or locating information.

Help Students Develop “Reading as a Writer” as a Regular Practice

In connection with the previous suggestion, which has to do with students’ mindset and awareness, a step forward is to help them develop the habit or regular practice of “reading as a writer”. To empower and incentivize students to do so, teachers have to do concrete demonstrations in the first place, preferably using discipline-specific materials to contextualize the training, so that students know specifically what they are expected to do when answering “Question 1: What can I learn from this academic text in terms of language use?”, “Question 2: What are some areas for the writer(s) to improve?” and “Question 3: What would I do differently if I were the writer?”. At the same time, it will be desirable if students are provided with opportunities to share their experiences in applying the “reading as a writer” approach. Sometimes, they may also have concerns and worries about whether their suggested areas for improvement (in relation to Question 2) are valid and whether their alternative ways of presenting the same idea(s) (in relation to Question 3) are proper, especially when they are not very confident in their English competence. In this regard, platforms for students to share their experiences and observations as well as receive guidance from their teachers are essential. With more practice opportunities, sharing platforms and

ample support from teachers, it is believed that students will feel more confident and comfortable to “read as a writer” on a more regular basis. In fact, students do not need to do so when reading every single text or when reading every single part of a text, but if they embrace the essence of this approach and are willing to adopt it (in whatever scale) from time to time, it is believed that they will make gradual improvements in both their reading and writing abilities.

Have a Basic Understanding of the Academic Writing Conventions in the Target Discipline

When “reading as a writer”, some key areas to pay attention to include the writers’ voice and presentation style, which are, to a large extent, connected to the academic writing conventions in the discipline. In order to provide proper guidance to the students, language teachers should try to familiarize themselves with the academic writing features of the target discipline. Taking the field of humanities (including Cultural and Religious Studies) as an example, some typical academic writing conventions, such as minimizing the use of first-person pronouns and phrasal verbs, may not be applicable. If language teachers do not have a basic understanding of the discipline-specific writing features, they may have misjudgements (e.g., treating the presentation of those academic texts as too casual or not objective enough) and even misguide the students, causing unnecessary confusion. To tackle this potential problem, language teachers should analyse an ample number of academic publications in the target discipline to generate some patterns about formality, register and presentation style. If they are still in doubt, they are advised to consult the content teachers for clarification or confirmation.

Conclusion

Based on my experience in preparing and delivering an academic reading workshop promoting “reading as a writer” to the target students from the CURE Department, it was found that though they did not have much prior knowledge about “reading as a reader” and “reading as a writer” (and also their major differences), they appreciated the input provided in the workshop and found “reading as a writer” useful and practical to their university study, under the conditions that concrete demonstrations with contextualized materials, sufficient practice opportunities and ample guidance or feedback from teachers are provided.

Though it may be a bit time-consuming, language teachers may consider encouraging their students to keep a log of their observations after each “reading as a writer” experience, including what they have identified or learned from the reading material and what they have applied (e.g., a reporting verb, a transitional expression, a sentence pattern and a way of documenting sources) from the material to their own writing. As time goes by, it will be interesting and meaningful to explore the differences in their own writing performance (especially mastery of language and writing style, such as the accuracy and diversity of expressions and sentence patterns) at various stages of the “reading as a writer” process.

In my present study with students from the “Intermediate Seminar” course, since my corresponding input was quite minimal (only with a one-off 45-minute academic reading workshop), it was difficult to thoroughly investigate the short-term and long-term impact brought by the “reading as a writer” approach to students’ academic writing quality. If ongoing input can be provided and students are given more opportunities to employ this approach and share their experiences (including challenges and rewards), it is believed that more systematic research on the impacts brought to the students (in terms of both their

mindset about reading and writing as well as their actual writing performance) can be conducted.

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Teaching Persuasive Writing for Arabic-Speaking Students

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Abstract

Studies reveal that English-speaking countries are facing problems in teaching the country's language to emigrants coming from different cultural backgrounds. These problems get worse in non-English speaking countries for students are not exposed to this language in their daily life. This issue has become ubiquitous notably in the Arab world, turning into hate in some college students who do not realize that their weakness in English is due to the lack of or wrong exposure to this language in childhood and early adolescence. Teaching writing is the most difficult skill that instructors face in classrooms for different reasons including the demotivation of students, Arabic-influenced sentence structure, and general knowledge. There have been many theories revolving around teaching writing; but instructors struggle to make students write with logic flow, and students strive to satisfy instructors who deduct grades from the supporting details part without a precise clarification for pupils. It is worth noting that students are aware of the various parts of a paragraph without having the ability to apply them. Low grades, in turn, demotivate students and push them to surrender. Therefore, there should be precise criteria of assessment along with clear guidelines that enable students to write functionally. This paper displays practical techniques that might enable Arab instructors to root the concept of persuasion, and Arab students to write a persuasive body paragraph. The strategies would help instructors orient and regulate student's way of thinking and sentence structure, respectively. Moreover, it suggests a rubric to assess a persuasive paragraph.

Keywords: Persuasive Paragraph, Logos, English as a Foreign Language, Assessment

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Introduction

English is the first lingua franca worldwide. It has got the status of global language for its flexibility and adaptability. It is not only used by scientists, businesses, diplomacy, mass entertainment, and international telecommunications but also in education for being an essential tool for students who wish to work in a foreign language or in a multi-national company, to pursue higher education, or to do research (Giridharan & Robson, 2011). 85% of scientific journals are written in English. The increased use on English is triggered by cultural, educational and economic globalization. Therefore, English as a foreign language (EFL) has become a necessity to keep up with a rapidly changing world.

To learn EFL, four skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking- must be covered. The most difficult one for students is writing (Nunan, 1999). Writing is a critical skill that students need to succeed academically and professionally. Writing is not limited to language arts classes. It is essential to help students develop their critical thinking and communication skills. Studies have shown that students who are strong writers tend to perform better in school and have more success in their careers (Rashid & Hui, 2021).

Therefore, university instructors face a challenge when teaching writing notably persuasion as they have to convey the concept of persuasion and fix the accumulation of weak sentence structures (Rashid & Hui, 2021) and illogical flow of ideas (Fareed et al., 2016) resulting from several factors including but not limited to:

- The phase of Covid-19: students have dropped out of school for a period of time despite the attempts of finding alternatives like online learning that has proven inefficiency in some countries like Lebanon for not having the needed infrastructure including electricity, stable connection, appropriate space, etc...
- The lack of teaching methods: instructors don't consider creating or adapting new methodological styles that facilitate writing for students. Instructors adopt general concepts that remain too vague for students who cannot easily apply the explanation (Rashid & Hui, 2021).
- The students' poor language: students reach university with a poor language that hampers writing. Students lack the fundamental language including vocabulary, grammar, and spelling (Heaton, 1988).
- The holistic answers by students: most instructors are satisfied with the holistic answers that include technical terms (like topic sentence, supporting details, etc...) without pinpointing the ideas of every student, leading to flaws in structures and concepts (Rashid & Hui, 2021).
- The challenges of teaching writing: There are several challenges that instructors may face when teaching writing. These include limited instructional time, lack of resources, and the need to differentiate instruction for students with diverse learning needs.

In summary, teaching writing is a complex process that requires effective teaching strategies, and a focus on providing feedback. It is essential to teach writing skills across the curriculum and to be aware of the challenges and opportunities presented by diverse student populations. Therefore, instructors should find out not only ways to root the logical flow required by persuasion, but also ways to rectify the simple sentence structure at least to be able to build on it in the advanced levels (Rashid & Hui, 2021). Therefore, the researcher proposes a new strategy- WH-Logos based strategy- to teach a persuasive paragraph in addition to an assessment pattern.

Literature Review

Teaching writing is a complex process that involves multiple factors, including the development of writing skills, and the use of effective teaching strategies. The following is a brief literature review of some approaches and strategies to teaching writing, and strategies to teaching persuasion.

Approaches to Teaching Writing

Hereunder are the various approaches to teaching writing, according to Raimes (1983):

- The controlled-to-free approach: it was adopted in the 1950s and early 1960s. it stresses the audio-lingual approach to learn a second language. Speech came first and writing served to reinforce speech with mastery of grammar and syntactic forms.
- The free-writing approach: it stresses quantity rather than quality. Assessment is based on minimal errors compared to a vast amount of free writing. In this approach, students jot down content and fluency first on paper then grammatical accuracy, organization, and the rest gradually follow.
- The paragraph-pattern approach: organization is highly stressed in this approach. Accuracy of grammar and content are secondary.
- The grammar-syntax-organization approach: writing encompasses organization as well as grammar and syntax.
- The communicative approach: it is based on the purpose and audience of a piece of writing.
- The process approach: this approach requires several drafts. Students acquire new vocabulary, new sentences, new ideas with an appropriate feedback every time they submit a draft. It makes the writing process a process of discovery for students (Kroll, 2001; Raimes, 1983).

Studies reveal that all the approaches overlap because they all have an intersection point. They all depart from the assumption that writing means connected sentences with a specific purpose (Raimes, 1983). Therefore, the eclectic approach comes on top because there is no one way to enhance students' writing competence in EFL classes (Rashid & Hui, 2021).

Challenges Students Face When Writing Persuasion

Writing is considered a complex activity for students if they cannot meet the grammar, content, vocabulary, mechanic, and organization writing (Nurtjahyo, Drajiati & Sumardi, 2019). According to Raimes (1983), students face many challenges during the process of writing including the teaching style, the lack of motivation, the influence of the mother tongue language, the ill-structured sentences, and the limited vocabulary. The difficulty is not limited to finding the correct expressions and words but also to finding ideas and expressing them in a new language.

Strategies to Teaching Writing

Instructors play a vital role in facilitating the writing process for students through the following strategies:

1. Modelling: It is about the steps followed in the writing process including planning, drafting, revising and editing (Rashid & Hui, 2021).
2. Peer Review: Students check each other's work and give tips to peers.

3. Writing Workshops: Students revise and edit work together. This technique allows students to learn from each other.
4. Mini-lessons: Instructors give grammar, sentence structure or organization skills.
5. Writing Conferences: They are one-on-one meetings where instructors address individual writing needs.
6. Revision Activities: They include self-evaluation, peer review, or instructor feedback (Raimes, 1983).

Methodology

This study found a strategy that reduces pressure on students when writing particularly a persuasive paragraph. Students can create their own writing by following the Wh-Logos based strategy. It incorporates the Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Cognitive-Process approach. It can make students express their ideas to write easily through posing a set of wh-questions. This strategy permits students to demonstrate understanding with some options in the outputs. Besides, it also allows them to write coherent, contextual, and acceptable sentences.

Discussion

The instructor departs from a hypothesis like: Food leftovers cause climate change. The hypothesis forms the topic sentence of a paragraph. The topic sentence should contain two variables, which are usually the topic given in the prompt and the sub-topic about which the student has gathered information. In the given hypothesis, there are two variables: food leftovers and climate change. The instructor motivates students to put the two variables in a complete sentence, which is somehow ready in this case. And the instructor should stress that variable 1 (which is more important than the second) is better to be at the beginning of the sentence while variable 2 should be at the end of the sentence. And the two variables must be linked with a verb that reflects the correlation between both variables. In such a hypothesis, the correlation between the two variables is a cause-effect relationship, so the verb must be a word that means “lead to”.

Here, the instructor integrates the culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching involves incorporating students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences into the teaching process. This can be particularly important when teaching writing as students’ cultural backgrounds can influence their writing styles and preferences (Rashid & Hui, 2021).

The culturally responsive teaching is applied through linking the hypothesis given to a situation students are witnessing. Since the targeted audience is Lebanese students, the instructor proposes to add the phrase “in Lebanon” to the topic sentence. The final topic sentence becomes: Food leftovers cause climate change in Lebanon.

Now, the instructor applies the cognitive-process approach for it allows students overcome the problem of expressing themselves (Rashid & Hui, 2021). This approach stimulates students to express ideas and be guided in their writing process (Nurtjahyo, Drajiati & Sumardi, 2019).

This approach is applied through posing a set of questions:

- Are there recycling plants in Lebanon? Students answer: no, there aren’t.

- What do families and restaurants do with food leftovers? Students answer: they throw them (this is what usually happens).
- Where do they throw leftovers? Students reply: in trash baskets.
- What happens here? Students reply: trash trucks collect leftovers and other wastes, and transport them to landfills.
- What happens to leftovers thrown in landfills? Students answer: they get fermented.
- What happens during fermentation? Students reply: the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide, whereby the anaerobic bacteria start to proliferate and produce methane (Berytech, 2020).
- What do Carbon dioxide and methane cause? Students answer: they cause climate change.

The instructor moves to the second part, which is combining the sequence of information next to each other in a paragraph. The instructor mentions that the first supporting detail should start with variable 1 and the last supporting detail should end with variable 2 to guarantee a logical flow of ideas.

Now, the instructor tells students to move to the second step which is combining the information discussed in a paragraph. One expected paragraph is:

Food leftovers trigger climate change in Lebanon. Food leftovers are thrown. They are thrown in trash baskets. Leftovers and other wastes are collected by Trash trucks, and transported to landfills. In landfills, leftovers get fermented. During fermentation, the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide and methane. Carbon dioxide and methane cause climate change.

Here the instructor interferes to boost the sentence structures through giving tips related to:

- Avoiding repetition through relative clauses
- Avoiding the passive voice to meet the academic writing
- Selecting the appropriate word choice according to the topic and audience

Based on the instructions given, the paragraph becomes as follows:

Food leftovers trigger climate change in Lebanon. Lebanese households and restaurants throw food leftovers in trash baskets. Trash trucks collect leftovers and other wastes, and transport them to landfills where leftovers get fermented. During fermentation, the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide and methane, which cause climate change.

At this phase, the instructor pinpoints the fact that the concluding statement is missing. S/He tells students that the concluding statement should start with a transitional word that reflects consequence (consequently, hence, thus, etc...) followed by a comma and then they have to paraphrase the topic sentence by finding synonyms to words and expressions. So the paragraph becomes as follows:

Food leftovers trigger climate change in Lebanon. Lebanese households and restaurants throw food leftovers in trash baskets. Trash trucks collect leftovers and other wastes, and transport them to landfills where leftovers get fermented. During fermentation, the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide and methane, which cause climate change. Thus, food remnants are a reason for global warming.

Now that the paragraph is written, it is time to apply ethos through finding references for the facts mentioned in the paragraph particularly the scientific ones. According to Junior Skill Builders (2008), the argument must be solid and reasonable by stating facts, giving logical reasons, using examples, and quoting experts. The in-text citation can be introduced for students. So the paragraph becomes as follows:

Food leftovers trigger climate change in Lebanon. Lebanese households and restaurants throw food leftovers in trash baskets (Nudge Lebanon, 2019). Trash trucks collect leftovers and other wastes, and transport them to landfills where leftovers get fermented. During fermentation, the oxygen is rapidly converted to carbon dioxide and methane, which cause climate change (Berytech. 2020). Thus, food remnants are a reason for global warming.

Students can apply the steps given at their own pace (Rashid & Hui, 2021). The steps start with organizing facts and ideas first, then comes grammar to construct sentences (Rashid & Hui, 2021).

Assessment

Assessment enables students to evaluate their work (Iter, 2017). Using rubrics in evaluation provide students a clear idea about their performances. Rubrics are designed according to the assigned task (Nurtjahyo, Drajati & Sumardi, 2019). A teacher can adapt a rubric according to the given task and desired results (Wiggins & Mctighe, 2005).

Since instructors are given the freedom of determining the goal, standards and criteria (Nurtjahyo, Drajati & Sumardi, 2019), they should use authentic assessments and performance tasks to make students interact in the courses (Nurtjahyo, Drajati & Sumardi, 2019). Rubrics should cover the content and skill task. They should cover good understanding and successful performance (Wiggins & Mctighe, 2005) taking into consideration that teachers create performance tasks for the students as an opportunity for them to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in relation to a given concept or skill (Nurtjahyo, Drajati & Sumardi, 2019).

One rubric that can be adopted to the Wh-Logos based strategy is as follows:

Table 1: Tentative Rubric (Based on topic).../20 points	
Topic sentence	3 points
Concluding statement	2 points
Supporting details	The mark depends on the length of the paragraph, but usually it is the total of the topic sentence and concluding statement, so 5 marks would be fine in this case
Transitional words & language	10 marks. Since English is a foreign language, and instructors need to stress the necessity of using the patterns taught during the explanation.

Being done with the paragraph, students should do a self-assessment based on the given rubric:

- If they have a topic sentence composed of 2 variables with a verb that means “lead to”, they take a full mark.
- If the supporting details are logical and every single step is clarified, they should take a full mark.
- If there is a concluding statement that starts with an appropriate transitional word, they should take a full mark.
- If the paragraph has various sentence structures with no mistakes, they should take a full mark.

Validity

The Wh-Logos Based approach is valid given that it departs from the logical flow based on facts required for persuasion by using reasons and logical pieces, and it is efficient for EFL students who show progress in writing when instructed according to the above-mentioned methodology and assessment.

Conclusion

To learn a language, there are four skills that should be acquired. EFL students consider writing a complex skill for their weak language and poor reasoning as information should be accurate, and the whole process is based on thinking that requires systematic instructions unlike speaking (Raimes, 1983). So, instructors should adapt the writing strategies to enable these students write with logical flow and minimal mistakes. To guarantee minimal mistakes, instructors should teach specific patterns, upon which students build on, which makes the sentence level of paramount importance when teaching writing in EFL as writers have to deal with a bunch of tips to produce a piece of writing including syntax, content, grammar, organization, mechanics, word choice, audience, etc... (Raimes, 1983). Moreover, instructors should work on providing feedback for its significance in teaching writing. Feedback help students evaluate their progress provided being straightforward, actionable and objective-based.

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