

Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition

Vol. 11 (2), 2025



WYDAWNICTWO
UNIwersYTETU ŚLĄSKIEGO

Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition

Vol. 11 (2), 2025

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Preface

The *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition* (TAPSLA) journal traditionally opens each issue with a Preface that outlines the journal's background and introduces the issue's contents. Established in 2015, TAPSLA is a peer-reviewed, semiannual journal published by the University of Silesia Press (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego) in Katowice, Poland. It operates on a fully open-access model, with no publication or access fees, making all issues freely available at www.tapsla.us.edu.pl. The journal showcases research on language acquisition and bi- and multilingualism from psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and cognitive perspectives, with a strong focus on contemporary theoretical frameworks and methodological developments. It also promotes analyses involving diverse language combinations, learner variables, and educational and cultural contexts. TAPSLA is committed to supporting both established scholars and early-career researchers and in doing so, fostering innovation and collaboration in the field.

Serving as a platform for the dissemination of research and the exchange of ideas among both Polish and international academics, TAPSLA has, over the course of a decade, attained global recognition, attracting submissions from across all continents and subfields within applied linguistics. Its growing academic impact is reflected in increased Open Access downloads and its indexing in Scopus since 2018, alongside other major databases. It is important to emphasize that this level of success could not have been achieved without the editorial team's commitment to academic rigor and ethical integrity.

Volume 11, Issue 2 of TAPSLA proudly introduces "The Minds Behind SLA: Insights from Leading Scholars," a new section designed to highlight the intellectual journeys of prominent Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers. While academic journals typically focus on research findings, they rarely explore the processes behind these discoveries. This section addresses this gap through interviews with influential scholars, offering valuable content

for both experienced and early-career researchers. The series begins with Jean-Marc Dewaele, whose work on emotions in language learning has significantly shaped the field. The section is curated by Eihab Abu-Rabia.


Consistent with the tradition of the past decade and the journal's mission, this volume also explores a range of thematic strands central to second language (L2) pedagogy. These include positive psychology and learner/teacher well-being, teacher beliefs and professional development, corpus analysis, as applied to learner language and teacher perceptions, language instruction for young learners, textbook evaluation, and the integration of artificial intelligence in language education. What distinguishes this collection of twelve articles is its genuinely global scope, reflecting diverse educational and cultural contexts across Latin America, the Far and Middle East, and Europe—as evidenced by articles from countries such as Poland, Brazil, and China. The breadth of empirical data and explanatory approaches presented in this issue provides valuable insights not only into the linguistic and psychological dimensions of L2 learning and teaching but also into broader issues such as national education policies, sociocultural frameworks, and ethical or religious values. Collectively, these contributions offer a contextualized and culturally nuanced perspective on second language acquisition, enriching our understanding of its complex and multidimensional nature.

We hope that this issue captures the interest of both new and returning readers of TAPSLA and extend our heartfelt thanks to all contributing authors and reviewers for their valuable work. We also take this opportunity to warmly encourage researchers from Poland and around the world to continue submitting their scholarly contributions to our journal.


Sincerely,

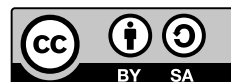
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The Minds Behind SLA: Insights from Leading Scholars—Jean-Marc Dewaele

Jean-Marc Dewaele is Professor in Applied Linguistics at the VIZJA University, Warsaw, Poland; Emeritus Professor in Applied Linguistics and Multilingualism at Birkbeck, University of London; and Honorary Professor at the Institute of Education, University College London. His interdisciplinary research spans applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, sociopragmatics, social and cultural psychology, personality psychology, positive psychology, and psychotherapy. He has published over 300 papers, book chapters, and eight books on individual differences in second language acquisition and multilingualism, with a special focus on personality, emotion, and identity. Prof. Dewaele is the former president of the European Second Language Association, the International Association of Multilingualism and the International Association for the Psychology of Language Learning. He has served as General Editor of the *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* and is the current General Editor of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. His contributions have earned prestigious awards, including the Robert C. Gardner Award for Outstanding Research in Bilingualism and the EUROSLA Distinguished Scholar Award.

Your paper “The Two Faces of Janus? Anxiety and Enjoyment in the Foreign Language Classroom” has been influential in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. Could you define the specific area of SLA that it falls under and describe what initially led you to explore this topic?

It falls within the broad area of individual differences in SLA, and more specifically in the psychology of foreign language learning. I reached this area following a circuitous route. My interest in interdisciplinary research led me across applied linguistics to neighbouring disciplines including social psychology, cultural psychology, personality psychology, positive psychology, and psychotherapy. I realised that many variables considered in psychological research might explain individual differences in multilingual language use and foreign language acquisition. The first strand of my research has been the study of the linguistic, pragmatic, and socio-cultural challenges multilinguals face in communicating and recognising emotions in intercultural contexts (Dewaele, 2010). Foreign language learners/users need an extended period of secondary affective socialisation to judge the emotional resonance of the foreign language correctly and to use emotion-laden words appropriately (Dewaele et al., 2025). One recent development of this line of research is the effect of language choice on moral decision-making—the foreign language effect (Dewaele et al., 2024). The second strand of my research is a continuation of the former in the context of psychotherapy. Therapists around the world are often unaware of the complex relationships between language, emotion, and identity among their multilingual and multicultural clients, and how it may affect communication and well-being (Costa & Dewaele, 2019). The final strand of my research focuses on learner and teacher emotions in the classroom. We argued in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) that negative emotions had monopolized the attention of applied linguists and that a more holistic perspective was needed that included positive emotions. Peter MacIntyre and I were good friends with Elaine Horwitz who was a pioneer in the research on FL classroom anxiety. Moreover, she had been an external member of Peter's PhD committee. Having come across the concept of flow in Positive Psychology, we agreed that instead of just focusing on a single negative learner emotion, anxiety, we should also look at positive emotions. We developed the concept of foreign language learner enjoyment and a scale to measure it. The basic idea was that enjoyment required effort, and that enjoyment relied on both teacher and fellow students. We also wanted to prove that enjoyment and anxiety are not the two faces of Janus. They are not opposites on the same dimension but rather separate dimensions that are rather weakly negatively correlated. Crucially they are not in a seesaw relationship. Anxiety going down does not imply that enjoyment goes up. We investigated to what extent the sources of anxiety and enjoyment are learner-internal and/or contextual (i.e., the teaching method/teacher/classroom/school/societal context) in different parts of the world. It turned out that anxiety was much more learner-internal, namely, the learner's degree of Neuroticism or General Anxiety, whereas enjoyment was much more context-dependent, especially the ability of the teacher in creating a positive emotional atmosphere in the classroom where there is laughter, where everybody feels safe, valued and where there is an appropriate amount of challenge. This research has implications for

foreign language education, where the role of emotions in motivating learners and teachers has long been underestimated.

Could you recommend key resources—such as textbooks, papers, or other materials—that would be particularly beneficial for graduate students and scholars looking to explore and deepen their understanding of this area of interest?

Clare, A., Gregersen, T., & Mercer, S. (2025). *Positive language education. Teaching global life skills in the language classroom*. Routledge.

Derakhshan, A., & Jin, Y. (Guest Eds.) (2025). Special issue: The role of psycho-affective factors in second/foreign language learning. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 132(1).

Mercer, S., & Gregersen, T. (Guest Eds.) (2023). Special issue: Transformative positive psychology in the acquisition of additional languages. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2194869>

Pawlak, M., & Derakhshan, A. (Guest Eds.) (2024). Special issue: Examining interfaces between advances in positive psychology and L2 learning and teaching. *Porta Linguarum*, 9.

What is one prevalent misconception about second language (L2) acquisition, teaching, or assessment that you've encountered in your work?

Learning and teaching depend not just on cognition or aptitude. Emotion is the fuel that drives social interactions, learning, and teaching. A good teacher manages to elicit interest in the target language and culture, but also in the members of the group. Through playful exploration of cultural riches, through authentic interactions in the classroom, learners can slowly build the ability and the confidence to use the target language (Dewaele et al., 2025). It is akin to opening a window to an unimagined panoramic view of mountains and lakes.

How do you see the field of SLA and L2 teaching evolving in the coming years, particularly with the emergence of AI and other technological advancements?

I hope we will see more intervention studies on learner emotions. It is crucial to translate the findings into pedagogical practices. I hope that the teaching profession can find inspiration and support in our work. A good teacher can inspire learners in a way that no AI-bot can. Of course, AI will permeate all aspects of our lives and make it much harder to decide whether the work submitted is that of a human, whether the reviews obtained for papers submitted to journals are from the reviewer or from some AI software. It will be crucial to teach students how to use AI appropriately. It cannot do the critical and creative thinking for you.

How do you typically develop a research idea?

I let research ideas grow gradually until they can be put on the bench and shaped into testable research questions and hypotheses. The spark of the idea

emerges while working on other things. I need a lot of walking in nature to let my ideas mature. Of course, it helps to discuss the ideas with colleagues and students. They can add a missing piece of the puzzle or suggest an alternative approach. I love collaborative work.

Could you share a transformative moment in your academic journey?

The transformative moment was my doctoral defence at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel on December 17, 1993. It gave me the confidence that I could do research independently. I later compared it to obtaining one's driver's licence. Once you have your licence you can drive anywhere without supervision. You realise that you still have a lot to learn but you also know that you have the potential to do some good work. Once you see your name in print on a paper you've spent so much time writing and polishing, you get a huge boost and extra self-confidence. It becomes quite addictive in fact. I never expected to become the third most influential linguist in the world according to the Stanford rankings in 2023 and 2024. The ranking includes linguists with a c-score that puts them in a percentile rank of 2% or above in Scopus.

What is the most important key trait you have noticed in successful scholars, and why?

There are several which are interconnected: resilience, optimism, creativity, humour, collegiality, knowledge and skill, risk-taking, humility. Less successful scholars may lack some of the above. They may also underestimate to what degree nobody works in a social vacuum. Academic work does not appear *ex nihilo*. It builds on the work of teachers and predecessors. It co-emerges with other work and enters a dialogue with fellow researchers. It is the dialogue that journal editors are interested in. A study that may be interesting in itself but that is not connected to any current debate is less likely to be cited. It is crucial for researchers to feel the pulse of their discipline and organise their research so that it can contribute to "hot" topics in the field. A key trait of the successful scholar is thus the ability to sniff out where the field is heading next.

What advice would you give to early-career researchers looking to make a meaningful impact in the field of SLA?

Don't worry about "meaningful impact." Get your first paper(s) published in good journals, attend conferences and make lots of friends, find co-authors with complementary research skills, review papers for journals, and establish a reputation of being honest, friendly, and reliable.

Is there anything important you would like to add that our previous questions did not address?

Becoming a successful researcher has very little to do with luck. It's about creating the circumstances that help "luck" through future connections and development. Never stay in your room polishing your PowerPoint the day before your conference presentation. Go out, attend the conference dinner, and meet

people: preferably the PhD students (and postdocs) of famous researchers that you admire.

Quick-fire preferences:

Teaching or research? Both, they feed off each other.

Long-term projects or short-term studies? Again, a combination of both.

Methodology-driven research or theory-driven research? Depends on the mood.

Writing or data analysis? Both are rewarding.

Writing in silence or with background voices? I love some classical music in the background.

Reading digital or printed books? Printed books. I spend enough time in front of screens already.

Small or big conference? Small (but good quality) gives it a nice family atmosphere.

Early bird or night owl? In between.

Summer or winter? Both have their charms.

City or countryside? Same here, but more countryside to relax and think.

Coffee or tea? Both.

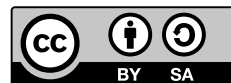
March 13, 2025

Note: This interview was conducted via email. The responses are presented in Jean-Marc Dewaele's natural manner of expression, with minor stylistic edits for clarity and flow.

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Fostering Positive Language Education Practices: Exploring the Synergy of Institutional Practices and Learner Characteristics

Abstract

The following quantitative study investigates the impact of institutional practices at the State University of Applied Sciences in Przemyśl on the language education of Generation Z students. By examining their educational preferences and characteristics, the research explores how these practices foster positive language learning experiences. A questionnaire was used to assess key aspects, including student motivation, learning environments and alignment of study programs with personal and career goals. Findings indicate that supportive institutional practices, personalised teaching methods and an appreciation for diversity enhance the effectiveness of English language classes. The study also highlights significant differences in satisfaction levels between undergraduate and graduate students. The research offers insights into the interplay between institutional practices and student needs. The study underscores the necessity for a dynamic and responsive educational environment that aligns with contemporary student expectations. Future research should aim to validate these findings across diverse student populations and further investigate the factors influencing language education outcomes.

Keywords: language education, institutional practices, Generation Z, teaching methods

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”
Plutarch, in O’Sullivan, 1999.

A transformative picture of education, as articulated by Plutarch (in O’Sullivan, 1999), asserts that education is more than the mere acquisition of knowledge. It advocates for a holistic approach that encourages intellectual curiosity, promotes critical thinking and instils a lifelong passion for learning. This vision aligns with the growing importance of positive education practices which focus on creating a learning environment that supports both academic achievement and personal well-being. This approach integrates academic learning with social-emotional development, developing skills like resilience or self-awareness. It emphasises a holistic approach to education, where students are encouraged to progress not only intellectually but also emotionally and socially.

Positive language education practices involve creating an environment where learning extends beyond linguistic proficiency to support the holistic development of the learner. This approach aligns closely with the principles of both 21st-century skills and social-emotional learning (SEL), which are recognised within English language teaching (ELT) as vital components of education. SEL emphasises fostering emotional growth, self-care, interpersonal communication and independence in learners (Penton Herrera, 2020), while 21st-century skills focus on critical thinking, collaboration and creativity—skills essential for navigating an interconnected, complex world. Though this study was not explicitly designed with an SEL lens, it is essential to acknowledge the growing importance of SEL and 21st-century skills in creating meaningful, well-rounded educational experiences (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Kaspar & Massey, 2022).

Institutions often referred to as “enabling institutions” or “supportive ecosystems” play a crucial role in nurturing this holistic development. These institutions create environments that promote not only linguistic proficiency but also motivation, engagement and overall well-being. Their policies and practices integrate approaches aligned with both SEL and 21st-century learning, addressing the holistic needs of learners by fostering skills like self-awareness, emotional regulation, collaboration and critical thinking (Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024). Recognising and addressing individual learner characteristics—such as needs, expectations, personality traits, learning styles and intelligence types—allows educators to tailor their teaching methods, making the learning process more inclusive and effective.

In addition, recent scholarship has raised concerns about the dichotomy between “positive” and “negative” language, with researchers arguing that these terms can be subjective. What might be perceived as “positive” for one learner

may not be the same for another. Scholars such as Fredrickson (2001) and MacIntyre and Mercer (2014) suggest using more descriptive terms like “helpful,” “supportive,” and “beneficial” to better reflect the diverse range of learner experiences. This shift towards a more nuanced vocabulary resonates with the broader goals of SEL, which emphasises the importance of addressing diverse social and emotional needs within language education (Kaspar & Massey, 2022).

The research presented in this study explored the relationship between supportive institutional practices and individual learner needs and expectations. By examining how institutions can foster environments that address not only linguistic development but also the broader personal growth of students, this study aimed to identify best practices applicable across various educational contexts. The integration of SEL and 21st-century skills within positive language education practices provides valuable insights into how we can create more enriching, transformative and supportive educational experiences for learners.

Review of Literature

The attempt to foster positive language education practices demands a nuanced understanding of the dynamic synergy between institutional frameworks and the diverse characteristics of individual learners. This complex interplay encapsulates the essence of optimising language teaching and learning within educational settings. Institutions embarking on this journey must harness past learning experiences, linguistic diversity and pedagogical innovation, as underscored by Wijayanti (2024). Such an approach not only accommodates the complex nature of language education but also adapts to evolving linguistic initiatives designed to enhance educational quality and inclusivity. Moreover, the reflective and respectful engagement with linguistic varieties, as demonstrated in the work of Mouboua et al. (2016), serves as a foundational pillar for developing language competence that incorporates the nature of language itself with all its components. This perspective emphasises the importance of fostering settings where learners can discover and value the richness of language variety, contributing to better understanding and appreciation of linguistic complexities.

Community Language Learning, highlighted by Entwistle (2020), advocates a holistic relationship between educators and learners. This model prioritises removing uneasiness from the learning process and encouraging learners to become self-sufficient in their language use. Such an approach significantly contributes to creating a supportive learning setting that empowers students and makes the process of language acquisition learner-friendly. Bearing in mind

various pedagogical strategies, combining communicative principles with learning strategies has shown effective implications for language education, fostering an environment ripe for the adoption of positive and effective teaching practices (Oxford et al., 1989). This combination of methodological approaches underlines the transformative potential of pedagogical innovation in fostering enriched language learning experiences that exceed traditional instruction. Furthermore, a suitable understanding of social representations and learner attitudes towards language, as explored by Selvi et al. (2023), brings to light the key impact of native and non-native speaker dynamics on language learning outcomes. Addressing these dimensions can significantly enhance engagement and performance, especially in diverse sociolinguistic contexts where representations can either facilitate or hinder language learning processes.

Institutional practices being rooted in supportive policies and environments cannot be overstated, as evidenced by the work of Kibler and Román (2013). Their research highlights the transformative impact of institutional support in encouraging teachers to integrate students' native languages in classroom instruction, moving from mere acknowledgment to active inclusion and integration, thereby enriching the educational experience. These attempts emphasise the role of positive attitudes, motivation and the teacher-learner relationship. Mantiri (2015) emphasises these as crucial elements for successful language learning and teaching, pointing towards the importance of developing positive educational climates that combines institutional frameworks and the individual characteristics and needs of learners. All in all, fostering positive language education practices is a complex undertaking that entails deliberate actions from educational institutions to craft policies and practices that reflect an understanding of the complex interaction between the institutional environment, teacher methodologies and learner diversity. Through such efforts, the goal of creating effective, inclusive and empowering language education experiences becomes an achievable reality, promising enriching outcomes for learners.

Goodman et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study exploring the factors that support or limit language development in English-medium instruction programs in Kazakhstan. They identified structural, pedagogical, sociolinguistic and cultural factors as critical components influencing language development. The study highlighted challenges such as inadequate policy support, varying English proficiency levels among students and faculty and the dominance of Russian and Kazakh languages, which impact the creation of an effective English-speaking environment. The authors highlighted the need for professional development and a supportive institutional framework to enhance language learning. The study titled "Foreign Language Learning and Its Impact on Wider Academic Outcomes: A Rapid Evidence Assessment" conducted by Murphy et al. (2020) explores the broader academic benefits of foreign language learning. The review assessed the impact of foreign language instruction on

other academic subjects and cognitive abilities. It was found that foreign language learning can enhance metalinguistic awareness and potentially improve outcomes in other subjects, although the evidence is mixed and varies according to context and implementation. The review also highlighted the need for rigorous and systematic research to better understand these relationships, particularly the effects of content-based instruction and immersion models.

Research on language education practices concerning the Polish language offers an insight into a variety of approaches, challenges and innovations tailored to meet the needs of diverse learner populations, including both native and non-native speakers. The most recent research sheds light on the effectiveness of Polish language teaching practices for non-native speakers, including Ukrainian refugee students in early education. The article by Ćwirynkało et al. (2024) focuses on the essential theoretical and practical competencies required by teachers to support Ukrainian refugee students in achieving Polish language proficiency for social interactions and learning. These represent broader efforts and challenges in language education in Poland, highlighting the country's commitment to addressing the linguistic and cultural integration needs of diverse learners in changing socio-political landscapes. The teaching of Polish as a foreign language to Ukrainian refugee students in early education highlights the adaptability of language education in Poland to address current socio-political challenges, focusing on practical competencies necessary for social integration and learning (Ćwirynkało et al., 2024). Such initiatives emphasise the interconnectivity of language education with societal needs and the capacity of educational systems to respond to humanitarian crises with targeted educational support. In higher education, Pentón Herrera and Byndas (2023) explore the effects of interrupted education on Ukrainian refugee students in Polish higher education institutions, noting that language plays a critical role in their access to academic opportunities. The ability to acquire Polish language skills significantly influences these students' integration into higher education and their potential for academic success, demonstrating how language education not only addresses immediate needs but also contributes to long-term academic and professional trajectories.

The field of foreign language teaching and learning, both in Poland and abroad, is a dynamic area characterised by diverse methodologies, challenges and innovations driven by globalisation, technological advances and evolution of education. In Poland, foreign language education has become a pivotal aspect of the educational system, reflecting the country's efforts to integrate with the European Union and the global market. While English remains the most popular foreign language taught in Polish higher education institutions, other languages such as German, French and Spanish are also widely offered, often depending on the specific educational context and student preferences (Świerk, 2016; Wolski, 2016). This trend is mirrored in the emphasis placed

on improving the quality of language education at Polish universities, where inter-person cooperation, differentiation based on language mastery levels and the exchange of experience between educators have been identified as effective strategies (Sheverun, 2022). Additionally, the linguistic education landscape in Poland has been responsive to the needs of multicultural classrooms, with a focus on developing inclusive teaching materials and methods to engage both native Polish speakers and second language learners.

In the broader context of international language education, there is a growing emphasis on communicative language teaching, task-based learning and the integration of technology, reflecting a global trend toward adapting language instruction to meet the practical needs of learners in real-life communication (Abdelhamid, 2021). Poland's approach to foreign language education, which balances traditional grammar instruction with modern communicative methods, aligns with these international practices. This approach not only prioritises language proficiency as a tool for global communication, collaboration and cultural exchange but also integrates essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication. These skills are crucial in preparing students to effectively navigate the complexities of a multilingual, interconnected world, fostering both academic success and social-emotional growth (Łączek, 2019; Pawlak, 2021).

The landscape of foreign language teaching and learning is marked by an ongoing progress shaped by the demands of globalisation, technological innovation and socio-political changes. Poland's engagement in foreign language education, both within its borders and abroad, demonstrates a commitment to developing linguistic competencies that connect cultures and promote international dialogue and understanding.

Holistic Understanding of Learner Traits

Contemporary students or digital natives, as they are often referred to because they have grown up surrounded by technology, are adept at navigating digital environments. Their familiarity with tools and platforms suggests that incorporating various forms of technologies into language education can effectively engage them. By integrating multimedia-based learning methods, educators can improve understanding and retention levels (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). Modern students, often called digital natives due to their upbringing in a technology-rich environment, are skilled at navigating digital spaces. Their comfort with digital tools and platforms suggests that incorporating technology into language learning can enhance student engagement. Using multimedia-based methods can improve both

comprehension and retention (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). However, these learners tend to have shorter attention spans, stressing the importance of dynamic teaching strategies. Therefore, language educators should implement interactive lessons, varied tasks and frequent strategy shifts to maintain student focus and interest. Thus, language teachers could employ lessons, interactive tasks and frequent changes in strategies to sustain student interest and concentration.

Moreover, contemporary learners highly value authenticity. They are more inclined to interact with material that feels authentic and relevant to their lives. In language education this can be accomplished by incorporating real world materials and contexts like events, popular media and authentic dialogues to make the learning process more relatable and significant (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011). Educational institutions should establish inclusive environments that not only support academic development but also address emotional well-being. Teachers of language have a role to play in creating stress-free environments for learners. This unique combination can be applied in language education by discussing issues and promoting projects that involve community participation and activism. These approaches not only enhance learning but also give it a social significance (Palfreyman & Al-Bataineh, 2018). Additionally, these students are practical, focused on matters that are directly applicable in real-life situations. Language courses can meet this practical orientation by emphasising skills like business communication, travel or academic needs, aligning with their pragmatic concerns (Posecznick, 2015).

The emphasis on embracing diversity and inclusivity in student populations demands language education. This involves recognising differences and ensuring inclusivity for students from various linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, modern learners often exhibit a mindset marked by innovation and initiative. Language education can nurture this spirit through promoting projects, problem solving tasks and opportunities for self-directed learning, like language clubs or independent projects. Furthermore, these students value self-improvement as well as freedom to guide their own learning experiences. Teachers can assist them by offering resources for self-directed study which enable them to continue learning beyond the confines of a classroom. In addition, modern learners place increasing importance on social awareness. Language instruction can address this by including topics related to sustainability and caring for the environment in the curriculum connecting course content with students values and interests.

The abovementioned traits underscore the significance of student focused teaching methods, in promoting language education practices. By identifying and integrating these characteristics into class planning educators can boost student motivation and enhance achievements while fostering inclusive and supportive educational settings.

Research Methodology

Research Tools

The research was carried out at the State University of Applied Sciences in Przemyśl (henceforth university). The reason for the research presented in this report was driven by the university's continuous efforts to enhance the quality of education. The study, carried out between March and April 2024, sought students' opinions on various aspects of the university's operations, particularly the teaching programs across different fields of study, the organisation and delivery of the educational process and the distinction between general university courses and English language classes. To ensure clarity and comfort for participants, given the diverse student population, the questionnaire was provided in both Polish and Ukrainian.

The research employed a highly standardised quantitative online questionnaire, created using MS Office's Forms, consisting of 33 questions (see Appendix 1). This methodology was chosen for its wide reach, cost-effectiveness and quick implementation, allowing the university to gather timely feedback from a large number of students. The ability to export data to programs like Excel also facilitated efficient data analysis. Additionally, the modern digital format was expected to appeal to younger generations, encouraging higher participation rates. However, limitations included a lack of control over the sample, as it relied on self-selected volunteers rather than a deliberate or probabilistic sampling method and the potential for technical issues during the data collection process. Despite these challenges, the methodological rigor of the study and its alignment with the demographic structure of the student population provide a solid basis for drawing general conclusions.

Research Objectives and Scope

The below described research was a part of a large-scale research project which focused on several key areas of inquiry concerning all the students. All the areas were of great importance to the university authorities as they all concern the assessment of the existing and development of the future curriculum offerings. The research project aimed to explore the motivations behind their decision to pursue studies at this institution, examining the conditions of the learning process for these students. Additionally, the study sought to assess the students' perceptions of the opportunities for self-development provided by the university and the extent of support offered by the institution in facilitating their knowledge acquisition. The evaluation extended to the study

programmes, considering how students perceived the alignment of general university courses with their personal needs, their relevance for future careers and the engagement of faculty in the teaching process. Furthermore, the research investigated students' opinions about the English language classes, focusing on the preparation and delivery of these classes and the involvement of instructors in the educational process. Lastly, the study explored the extent to which students used the English language outside the university. The exact list of all the research areas included the below:

1. Motivation to pursue studies;
2. Assessment of learning conditions;
3. Evaluation of self-development prospects in relation to studies;
4. Evaluation of the level of support from the institution;
5. Assessment of study programmes;
6. Course alignment with personal needs, career usefulness and teacher engagement in the educational process;
7. **Evaluation of English language classes in terms of their synergy with education practices.**

The primary objective of the research which concerned the last element, namely, the evaluation of English language classes in terms of their synergy with education practices, aimed to uncover how students evaluate their English language classes in relation to their preferences and needs. This included examining students' perceptions of the course content, teaching methods and overall learning experience, as well as how these aspects align with their personal goals and expectations for language learning. The further aim was to identify strengths and areas for improvement in the current language teaching practices to better support student learning and development. Therefore, the problem statement and its objectives were as follows:

Problem Statement:

Fostering positive language education practices:

Exploring the synergy of institutional practices and individual characteristics of learners.

Objectives:

Discover how students evaluate the English language classes in terms of their preferences and needs.

Institutional Practices

Prior to the launch of the research, over the period of the previous academic year, the following general institutional practices were introduced to facilitate and support language learning.

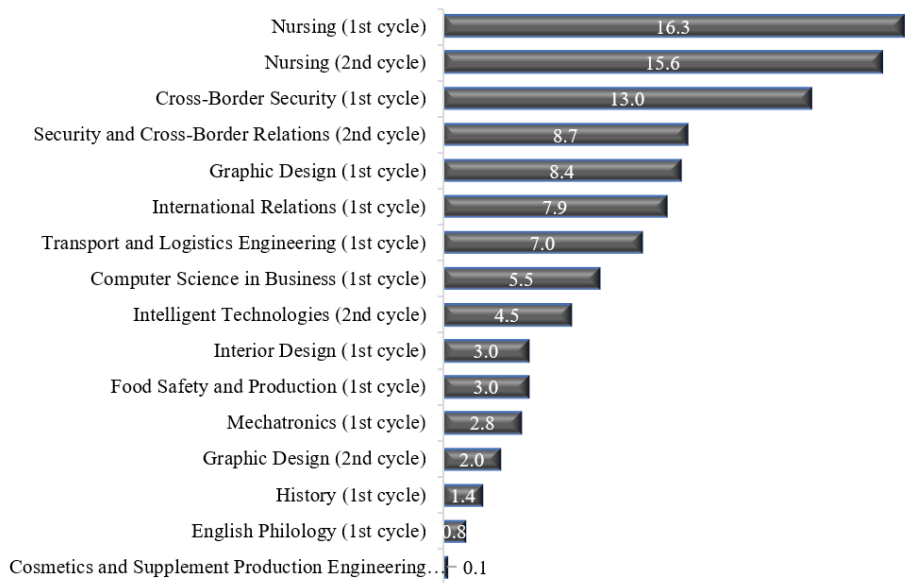
- Interfaculty English language groups where students from different faculties are grouped together to learn English. On the one hand, it aims to create a more dynamic and diverse learning environment by bringing together students with varying academic backgrounds, perspectives and levels of language proficiency. On the other hand, it lowers running costs by creating students groups of optimal sizes and resources.
- Coursebooks available in the library which allows students to borrow rather than buy their own coursebooks, reducing individual expenses.
- An online language platform which provides students with access to additional learning resources and exercises, enhancing their language practice outside regular class.
- Regular class times: 3 pm—8 pm to offer flexibility for students to attend classes alongside other, often professional, commitments.
- Classrooms equipped with modern technology (e.g., interactive whiteboards, projectors, computers) to facilitate interactive and engaging lessons, improving the learning experience.
- Companion website for the coursebook which provides additional digital resources and exercises that complement the coursebook, reinforcing students' learning.
- 90-minute classes which provide ample time for in-depth learning and practice, allowing for comprehensive coverage of material.
- Small group sizes ensure personalised attention and more active participation, enhancing the overall learning experience.
- International Projects (e.g., Global Partners in Education) which offer students real-world language use opportunities and exposure to global issues.
- Qualified teachers bring expertise and effective teaching methods to the classroom, ensuring high-quality language instruction.
- Placement tests which ensure students are grouped according to their proficiency levels, allowing for more tailored and effective learning.

The abovementioned institutional practices impacted language learning by creating a diverse environment through interfaculty groups and optimising resources. Access to coursebooks, an online platform and a companion website provided additional learning resources. Flexible class times and well-equipped classrooms facilitated engagement, while small groups allowed for personalised instruction. International projects provided real-world language practice and placement tests ensured instruction was aligned with students' proficiency levels, all under the guidance of qualified teachers.

The Structure of the Student Population

During the research conducted in April 2024, the university’s educational offerings comprised 16 fields of study, including 12 first-cycle programs and four second-cycle programmes. The total number of students in the period under review was 797 people, with Nursing (first-cycle studies) as the largest field of study at the time being, with 130 students., that is, approx. 16% of all students, and the smallest number was the phased-out Cosmetics and Dietary Supplements Engineering and Production. In addition to Nursing (1st cycle), the relatively numerous fields of study also include: Nursing (2nd cycle), which accounts for approx. 16% of the population and Cross-border Security (2nd cycle), which accounted for approx. 13% of the student population (see Figure 1).

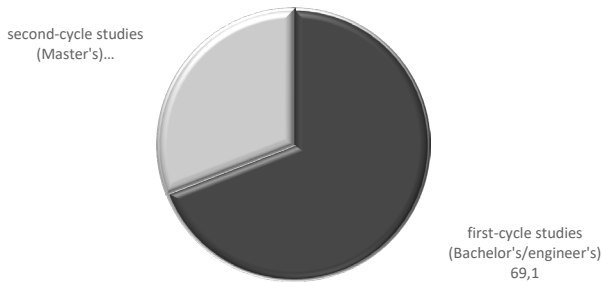
Figure 1
Structure of the Student Population by Field of Study (Data in %, N = 797)



Source: own research.

The vast majority of the students were first-cycle students (approx. 70%), compared to approx. 30% of second-cycle students (see Figure 2).

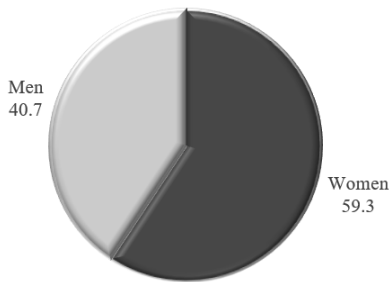
Figure 2
Structure of the Student Population by Level of Study (Data in %, N = 797)



Source: own research.

The majority of the students at the time of the study were women (approx. 59%) compared to approx. 41% men (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Gender Structure of the Student Population



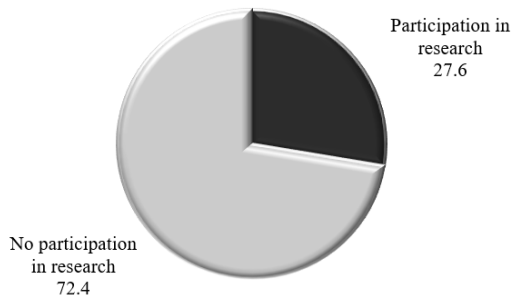
Source: own research.

Half of the courses offered by the university can be described as feminised due to the predominance of female students over the male ones. This is particularly visible in the case of courses such as Nursing (2nd cycle), where about 94% of students were women and Nursing (1st cycle) with about 92% women.

The Structure of the Research Sample

As many as 220 students took part in the conducted research, which constituted approx. 28% of the total student population (see Figure 4).

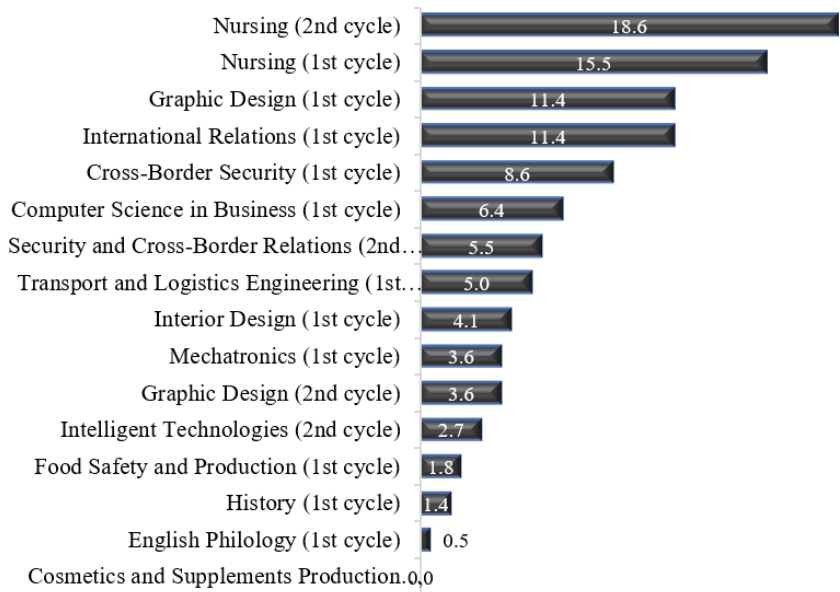
Figure 4
Sample Size (Data in %, N = 797)



Source: own research.

The largest percentage of respondents were students of Nursing (2nd cycle) – approx. 19%. A significant share in the research was also taken by students of the following fields: Nursing (1st cycle) – approx. 16%, Graphic Design (1st cycle) and International Relations (1st cycle) – approx. 11% each (see Figure 5).

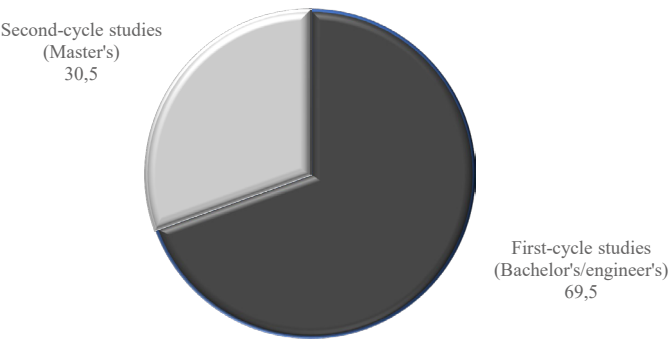
Figure 5
Structure of the Research Sample by Field of Study (Data in %, N = 220)



Source: own research.

Almost 2/3 of the respondents were first-cycle students (approx. 70%). The remaining respondents were second-cycle students (approx. 31%) (see Figure 6).

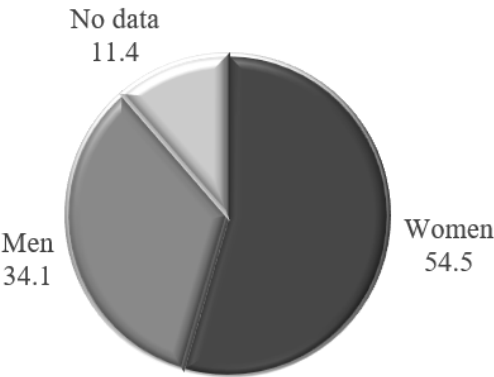
Figure 6
Sample Structure by Level of Studies (Data in %, N = 22)



Source: own research.

In the research sample, more than half of the respondents were women (approx. 55%), compared to approx. 34% of men. The remaining respondents did not want to answer the question about gender (approx. 11%) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7
Gender Structure in the Research Sample (Data in %, N = 220)

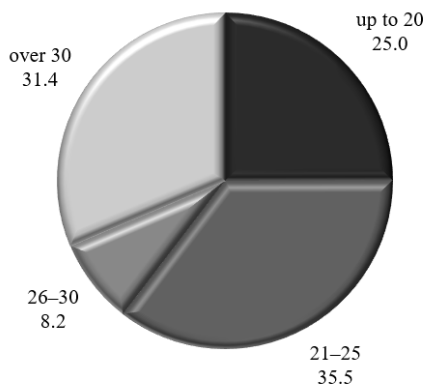


Source: own research.

Among the study participants, the largest percentage were people aged 21–25 (approx. 36%). A significant percentage of the respondents were over 30 (approx. 31%). Every fourth respondent was under 20 (approx. 25%) and only approx. 8% of the respondents were between 26 and 30 years old (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Age Structure in the Sample (Data in %, $N = 220$)



Source: own research.

The comparison of the age of the analysed students with the level of studies showed that in the case of Bachelor's or engineering studies, the largest percentage of them fell into the age group of 21–25 (approx. 39%), with a significant share of students under 20 (approx. 35%) at this level of studies. In the case of second-cycle studies, the largest percentage of students was over 30 (approx. 63%). Students aged 21 to 25 also had a large share in this category of respondents (approx. 26%). There is, therefore, a clear correlation between the age of the respondents and the level of studies, indicating that the overwhelming majority of younger people, that is, up to 25 years of age, study first-cycle studies and the overwhelming majority of older students, that is, over 30 years of age, study second-cycle studies (χ^2_3 , $N = 220 = 52.72$; $p < 0.001$; Gamma = 0.756).

The comparison of the population structure, taking into account the individual fields of study offered, with the corresponding structure obtained in the research sample showed that in the sample, in the case of twelve out of sixteen fields of study, the deviation from the actual proportions is within the range of $\pm 3\%$. Only in relation to four fields of study there was a slight overrepresentation of respondents noted in the sample, that is, International Relations (1st cycle) and Nursing (1st cycle) or a slightly lower than expected share of respondents, that is, Cross-border Security (1st cycle) and Cross-border

Security and Relations (2nd cycle). Based on the Relative Structure Similarity Index, it can be seen that the population and the research sample are very similar to each other ($Z = 0.756$).

In terms of the proportion between first-cycle and second-cycle students, the study sample almost exactly reflects the population. In both the population and the sample, first-cycle students constituted a significant majority (approx. 69% and approx. 70%, respectively). On the other hand, second-cycle students had a share of approx. 31% in the population and the sample. The difference between the sample and the population was within the range of $\pm 0.3\%$.

Comparison of the gender structure developed on the basis of collected data showed that the sample largely reflects the gender proportions in relation to the population, with the sample having about 5% fewer women than in the population and about 7% fewer men. Overall, based on the Relative Structure Similarity Index, it can be stated that the gender structure of the population and the sample are very similar ($Z = 0.796$).

In conclusion of the above data sets concerning the population and the research sample, it can be assumed that despite the fact that the selection of the sample used in this study does not directly allow for generalising the obtained results to all students due to the structure of the obtained data and the number of research participants, the obtained results can be considered reliable for the population. The arguments supporting this statement are twofold: (1) the sample closely mirrors the population in terms of key independent variables, such as the field and level of studies (i.e., first and second-cycle programs) and gender and (2) over a quarter of all students participated in the study.

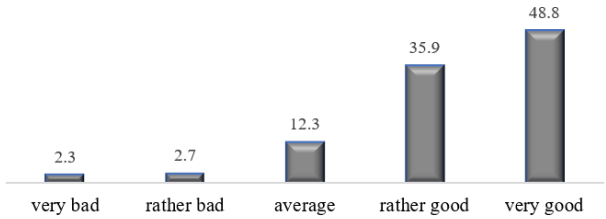
Findings

Assessment of the English Classes

The vast majority of study participants rated the quality of the English language course positively, with approximately 83% expressing satisfaction. Around 12% provided an average assessment, while only about 5% gave a negative evaluation (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Overall Assessment of the Quality of English Language Classes (Data in %, N = 220)



Source: own research.

English classes were rated as very good significantly more often by second-cycle students than by first-cycle students, with approximately 69% and 37% respectively. However, for ratings of “rather good,” the situation was reversed, as first-cycle students expressed this opinion much more frequently than second-cycle students, with approximately 44% and 17% respectively. A significant difference is also evident in the case of average grades, which were assigned more frequently by first-cycle students than by second-cycle students (approximately 14% and 8%, respectively). These results suggest that the surveyed first-cycle and second-cycle students showed a moderate level of similarity in their assessment of the quality of the English language course (Relative Structure Similarity Index $Z = 0.499$) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Assessment of the Quality of English Classes by Level of Study (Data in %)

English language classes quality rating	Level of studies		Total <i>N</i> = 220
	first-cycle studies (Bachelor's/engineer's)	second-cycle studies (Master's)	
	<i>N</i> = 155	<i>N</i> = 65	
Very good	37.4	69.2	46.8
Rather good	43.9	16.9	35.9
Average	14.2	7.7	12.3
Rather bad	2.6	3.1	2.7
Very bad	1.9	3.1	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: own research.

The very good assessment of the quality of the language classes, as the research results show, increases with the age of the respondents. This type of very positive opinions were given in the youngest age category of the surveyed students, that is, up to 20 years of age (approx. 35%). Among people aged 21–25, it was approx. 37%, in the age group 26–30, it was already approx. 56%. Almost 2/3 of the students over 30 who took part in the survey expressed a very good opinion of the quality of the classes (approx. 65%). In the case of good assessments the trend was the opposite and such answers were most often given by the youngest students (approx. 46%). In the following age groups it was approx. 44% (21–25 group), approx. 28% (26–30 group) and approx. 22% (over 30 group). Also in relation to average assessments, it can be noted that they were most frequent among the youngest participants in the study (approx. 16%), while with age this percentage decreased and the result being very similar in the age categories 26–30 and 30 and over. On the other hand, negative assessments of the quality of the language course discussed here appeared relatively frequently among people in the age group 26–30 (approx. 11%). However, it should be emphasised here that due to the small numbers of individual age categories, the above findings cannot be treated categorically as a statistically significant relationship, but rather as an indication (see Table 2).

Table 2
Assessment of the Quality of English Classes by Age (Data in %)

English language classes quality rating	Age (in years)				Total
	below 20	21–25	26–30	over 30	
	N = 55	N = 78	N = 18	N = 69	N = 220
Very good	34.5	37.2	55.6	65.2	46.8
Rather good	45.5	43.6	27.8	21.7	35.9
Average	16.4	15.4	5.6	7.2	12.3
Rather bad	1.8	1.3	11.1	2.9	2.7
Very bad	1.8	2.6	0.0	2.9	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: own research.

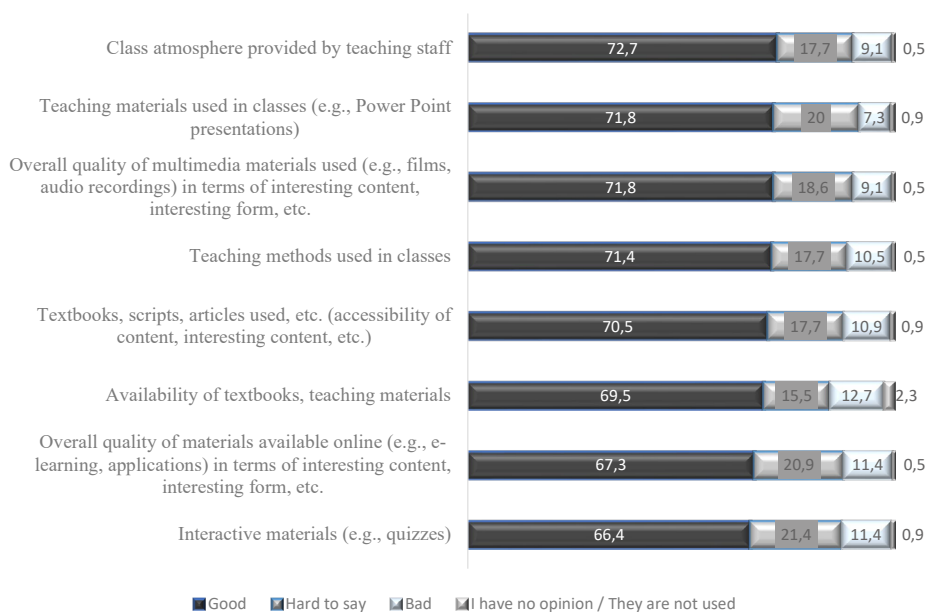
Students who participated in the study had the opportunity to evaluate various aspects of the preparation and delivery of the English language classes. The highest rating was given to the atmosphere fostered by the teaching staff, with approximately 73% of students expressing their satisfaction. Other aspects also received predominantly positive evaluations, including the teaching materials

used in classes, such as PowerPoint presentations and multimedia resources (e.g., films, audio recordings), with approximately 72% approval for each. Additionally, the teaching methods employed, as well as the use of textbooks, scripts and articles—especially in terms of content accessibility and engagement—were rated positively by approximately 71% of students.

Furthermore, the availability of textbooks and teaching materials was assessed favourably by around 70% of respondents. The quality of online materials, including e-learning platforms and applications, was also well received, with approximately 67% of students expressing approval, while interactive materials, such as quizzes, were positively rated by approximately 66% (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Overall Assessment of the Preparation and Delivery of the English Classes—Individual Aspects (Data in %, N = 220)



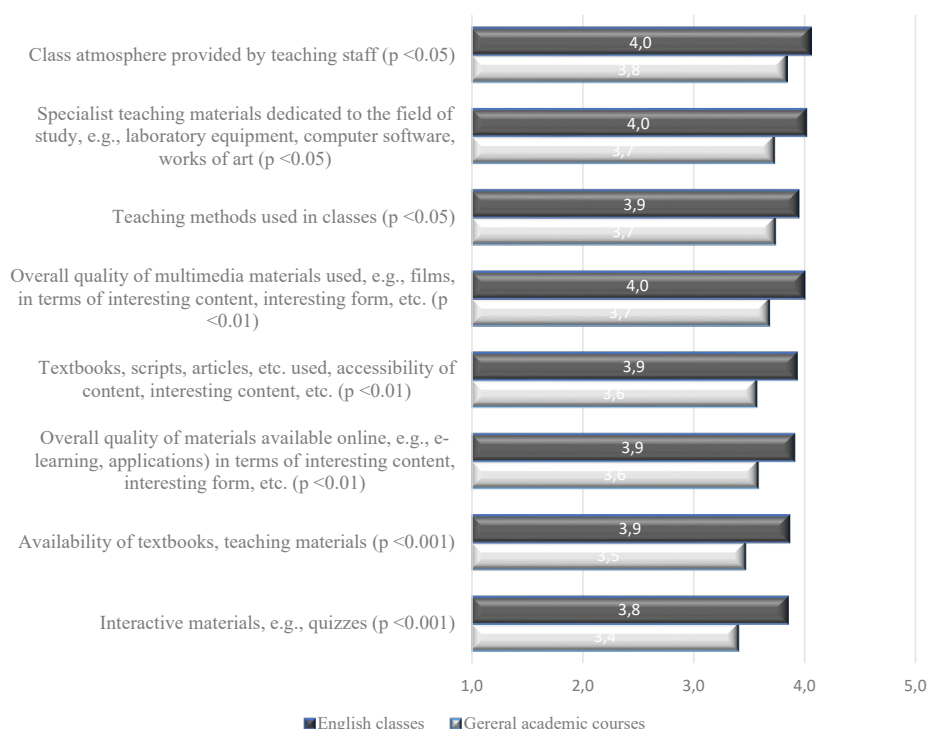
Source: own research.

By treating the questions regarding the quality of general academic courses (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.942$; KMO = 0.914; $p < 0.001$) and English language classes (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.955$; KMO = 0.921; $p < 0.001$) as scales, it was possible to employ the parametric Student's t-test for independent samples

to compare opinions on various aspects of the preparation and delivery of both categories of subjects taught at PANS in Przemyśl. The analysis revealed that, across all evaluated aspects, the English language course received slightly higher ratings than the general academic courses. These differences were statistically significant, with particularly pronounced distinctions observed in the areas of interactive materials and the availability of textbooks and teaching resources. Moreover, the English language course was rated significantly higher than the general academic courses in terms of the quality of textbooks, scripts and articles used. The smallest differences were noted in areas such as teaching methods and the classroom atmosphere fostered by the teaching staff (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Evaluation of English Classes in Comparison to the General Academic Courses (Average Mark)

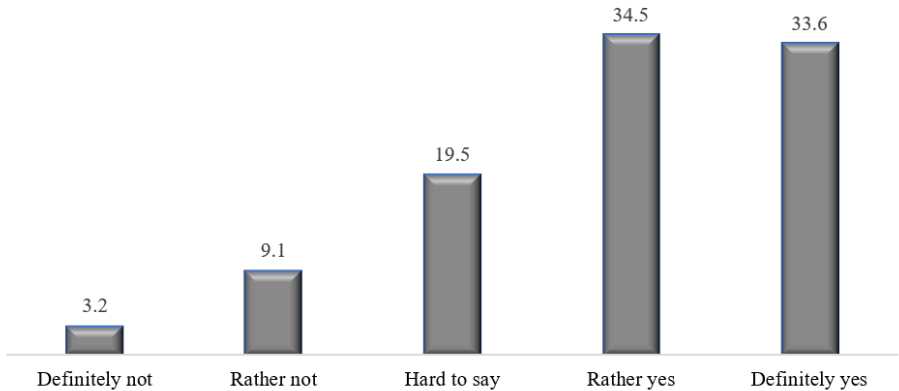


Response scale: 1 – definitely bad, 2 – rather bad, 3 – average, 4 – rather good, 5 – definitely good.

Source: own research.

The majority of study participants acknowledged that various teaching methods are employed during English classes to enhance the appeal of the content, including project work, gamification (the integration of games into the teaching process) and the use of language platforms, with approximately 68% affirming this. About 20% of the respondents were unable to provide a definitive opinion on this matter, while only around 12% indicated that such methods are not utilised (see Figure 12).

Figure 12
Application of Teaching Methods in English Classes Aimed at Making the Teaching Content More Attractive (Data in %, N = 220)



Source: own research.

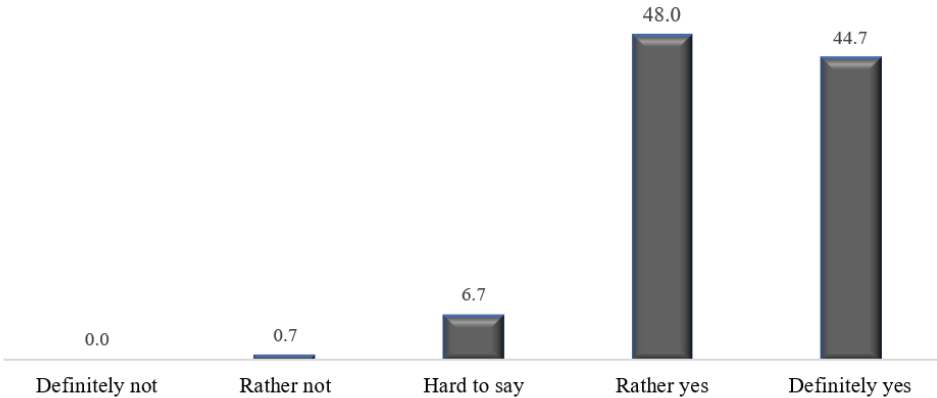
The comparison of the issue of using teaching methods aimed at making the teaching content delivered in English classes more attractive with the assessment of the quality of the English language course showed that when the aforementioned methods were used, almost exclusively positive responses were given (approx. 91%). The research results suggest that using such teaching methods contributes to better assessment of the language course in terms of the quality of classes. On the other hand, the lack of use of such methods may result in an increase in average and bad opinions in relation to the quality of the course. Although the structure of the data is unambiguous here, the research result should be approached with a certain amount of caution due to the distribution of data in absolute numbers, the relatively small research sample, which, given the construction of variables, does not allow for the credibility of this relationship, for example, using the chi2 independence test.

The study participants indicated that teaching methods aimed at making the didactic content taught in English classes more attractive are clearly more often used in second-cycle studies than in first-cycle studies (approx. 86%

and approx. 61%, respectively). On the other hand, the lack of use of such methods was more often reported by first-cycle students than by second-cycle students (approx. 15% and approx. 6%, respectively). The relationship between the declaration of using the above-mentioned methods and the level of studies is statistically significant, but given the overwhelming majority of affirmative answers, it is not strong ($\chi^2_4, N = 220 = 27.605; p < 0.001$; Contingency coefficient $C = 0.354$).

Respondents who admitted that teaching methods aimed at making the teaching content more attractive were used during English classes were asked to determine whether these methods met their expectations. In this context, the vast majority of respondents gave affirmative answers (approx. 93%). The remaining people usually had a problem expressing an unequivocal opinion on this matter (approx. 7%) (Figure 13).

Figure 13
Adaptation of Teaching Methods Aimed at Making the Teaching Content More Attractive Used in English Classes to the Needs of the Students (Data in %, $N = 150^$)*



*Note: *Only the responses of respondents who stated that teaching methods aimed at making the teaching content more attractive were taken into account.*

Source: own research.

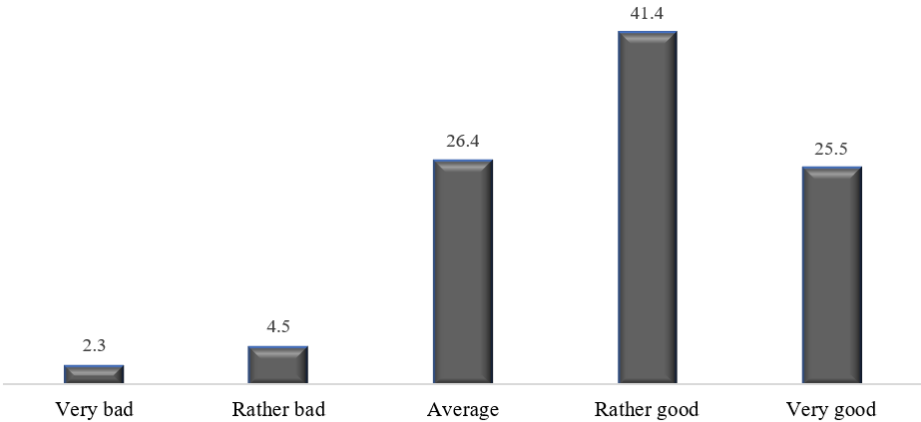
The students who considered that the teaching methods used in the English language course did not meet their expectations in this regard were asked to justify their opinion in this regard. They indicated a problem with the teaching methodology, including the lack of focus on the specialist languages. Another

difficulty that was indicated was the lack of knowledge of the language and thus the problem with effective participation in classes.

Regarding the availability of teachers outside regular class hours (e.g., during office hours at the university or through electronic communication), the majority of the respondents provided a positive assessment, with approximately 67% expressing satisfaction. About 26% of the respondents gave an average rating, while only around 7% offered negative feedback (see Figure 14).

Figure 14

Assessment of Teachers' Availability Outside of Classes (Data in %, N = 220)



Source: own research.

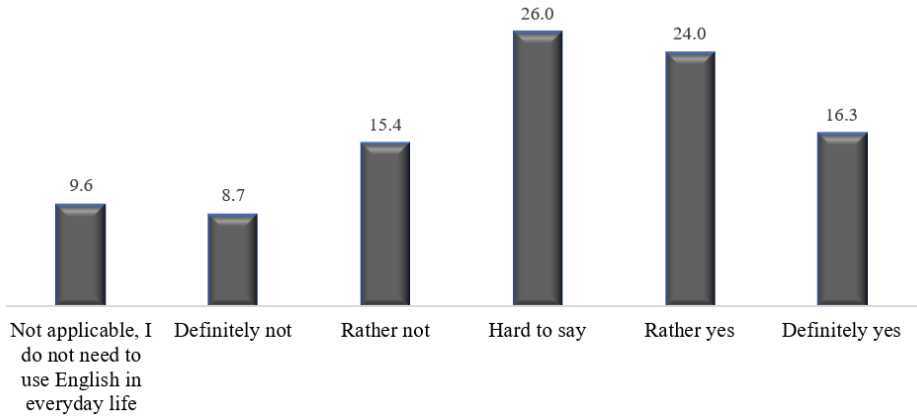
The availability of teachers was more frequently reported as satisfactory by second-cycle students compared to first-cycle students, with approximately 83% and 60%, respectively, indicating positive assessments. Conversely, first-cycle students were more likely to rate this availability as average, with approximately 32% compared to 12% of second-cycle students. Negative responses were slightly more common among first-cycle students as well, at approximately 8% compared to 5% for second-cycle students. The relationship between the level of study and the assessment of teacher availability is statistically significant; however, given the clear predominance of positive responses, the association is not particularly strong ($\chi^2(2, N = 220) = 11.220$; $p < 0.01$; Contingency Coefficient $C = 0.220$).

The majority of the responses indicate that English classes generally meet current needs related to learning languages, resulting from, for example, the type of work performed, travel, Erasmus mobilities, etc. (approx. 40%). The problem with taking a clear stance on this issue was evident in approx. 26% of the responses received. Critical opinions in this regard were noted in approx.

24% of the responses obtained. Every tenth respondent who took a position on this issue stated that the issue discussed here does not concern them because they do not need to use English in everyday life (Figure 15).

Figure 15

Assessment of the Fit of the English Classes to the Current Needs of the Students (Data in %, N = 104)*



Note: *Missing data omitted N = 116.

Source: own research.

On top of the above, the research participants offered several recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of English classes in the open-ended questions section of the study. These suggestions can be summarised and organised into the following key areas:

– Rational division of exercise groups

Participants stressed the need for a better division of students into groups based on their actual language proficiency. This includes the creation of distinct groups for beginners and more advanced students, ensuring that each group receives instruction tailored to their skill level.

– Enhancement of course content

Participants suggested a particular focus on incorporating specialist vocabulary, such as medical terminology, to better meet the needs of students in specialised fields.

– Improved teaching methodology

Some students suggested more interactive and engaging teaching methods. Participants expressed a desire for classes that go beyond traditional lecture formats, incorporating practical language exercises, discussions on everyday

topics and activities that involve all students. The use of quizzes and computer-based tasks was also recommended as an alternative to conventional lectures.

- Interaction with native speakers

Many participants highlighted the importance of incorporating more opportunities for students to interact with native English speakers. This could include conversational practice, reading and communication exercises aimed at enhancing speaking skills.

- Increase of course hours

There was a recommendation to increase the number of instructional hours per week, allowing more time for comprehensive language learning and practice.

- Improved access to learning resources

Participants also called for better availability of textbooks and other learning materials, which they believe are essential for supporting their studies.

In summary, the detailed feedback from the participants underscores a strong preference for more interactive, practical and student-centered learning experiences, along with greater access to native speakers and specialised vocabulary. These changes, combined with adjustments in group placement and increased instructional hours, are seen as crucial steps in enhancing the effectiveness of English language classes.

Finally, it is worth quoting a statement from one of the students, who expressed their opinion related to studying in the following way: “Studying at PANS in Przemyśl has been an exceptional experience. I truly feel at home here, thanks to the supportive environment created by the lecturers. Their effective communication skills and thoughtful approach to each student have made a significant impact on my studies” (Q).

Discussion

The large-scale research project which focused on several key areas of inquiry related to the education practices at the State University of Applied Sciences in Przemyśl. It aimed to understand the motivations behind students’ choice to study at this university and evaluated the learning conditions they experienced. The research also assessed students’ perceptions of the opportunities for self-development and the support provided to facilitate their knowledge acquisition. Additionally, it examined the alignment of the academic program, particularly how well the general academic courses met students’ personal needs and future career relevance, as well as the engagement of faculty in teaching. Lastly, which was the foremost objective of this paper, the study looked into students’ opinions about English language classes.

The current research emphasises how institutional methods are crucial in creating friendly language education settings. These results support existing literature that emphasizes the need for approaches that consider both academic and emotional aspects of learning. Within this context the idea of social and emotional learning along, with 21st-century skills have been distinguished as key components in modern education, as they emphasise not only academic proficiency but also interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence and resilience (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Kaspar & Massey, 2022). The findings of this study, which indicate high levels of student satisfaction with the learning environment, particularly among graduate students, suggest that institutional practices at PANS in Przemyśl support these broader educational goals. The personalised teaching methods and supportive classroom atmosphere highlighted in this study can be directly linked to SEL's emphasis on emotional growth and well-being, as noted by Pentón Herrera (2020). This connection suggests that the implementation of SEL principles may be an unrecognised factor contributing to the high satisfaction levels, particularly in second-cycle students.

The literature underlines the importance of establishing environments or institutions that facilitate not only academic education but also address the wider social and emotional requirements of students. This research suggests that factors, like class sizes, availability of up-to-date technology and flexible class schedules all play a role in fostering conducive learning atmospheres. According to MacIntyre and Mercer (2014), shifting from simplistic categorisations towards descriptions of classroom environments as “supportive” and “helpful” or, conversely, as “negative,” allows for a more accurate and nuanced representation of students' complex experiences in these educational settings. It is supported by the predominantly favourable responses, from students regarding the teaching environment quality of resources and instructor accessibility.

In language education different learner characteristics are crucial since students have cultural and academic backgrounds as noted by Mantiri (2015) and Mouboua et al. (2016). This research focused on establishing English language groups across faculties that united students, with interests and language skills resulting in a rich learning experience. Having a mix of perspectives in the classroom enhances learning but also brings challenges in adapting course materials to suit students with varying language skills levels accurately; students' call for improved grouping by proficiency level underscores the importance of refining approaches to cater to these differences effectively.

The significance of focusing on learner centered methods becomes clear when we consider feedback indicating a requirement for increased personalised material in fields such as technical and medical English. This corresponds with research indicating an increasing desire for practical and applicable learning encounters, among Generation Z students (according to Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). Research indicates that students tend to be more enthusiastic and involved

in their studies when they see the course material as relevant to their goals and aspirations. Whether professional (Posecznick, 2015; Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011). The results of these studies imply that although students value the standard of teaching provided to them, there is a demand for course content that is more tailored, to their specific academic and career pursuits. The shift is evident in language education towards incorporating subject terminology and content focused teaching methods to better prepare students for real world applications within their professional domains (Goodman et al., 2021).

The incorporation of technology into education settings has been a topic of discussion among educators and researchers alike. The research highlights the value of leveraging technology to captivate learners who are adept at using digital tools from an early age. The researched students expressed a level of appreciation for multimedia materials and online learning platforms indicating that integrating technology into settings can greatly enhance student engagement and knowledge retention (according to Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). This discovery is consistent with the patterns in language education. There is a growing adoption of blended learning approaches that merge teaching methods with tools to cater to the demands of modern learners (Abdelhamid, 2021).

Teacher availability outside of regular class hours, another key finding of the presented research, was particularly appreciated by second-cycle students. This aligns with Kibler and Román's (2013) emphasis on the importance of teacher-student relationships in creating supportive learning environments. By being accessible to students outside of class, instructors provide additional emotional and academic support, which is crucial for language learners who may struggle with both the academic content and the social aspects of language acquisition.

However, even though the general assessment was positive, it was clear from the feedback that there is a demand for educational opportunities. Several students mentioned a preference for increased engagement with speakers and a stronger emphasis on language. These results indicate that while current institutional methods are mostly successful, there is potential for enhancing the curriculum to meet the students' requirements, especially in specialised areas. The evidence backs this up since research indicates that participating in programs and engaging in real life language interactions can greatly improve both language skills and cultural understanding (Murphy et al., 2020).

In light of the research question, this study demonstrates that institutional practices, such as the use of multimedia resources, flexible class times and small group sizes, create a supportive and engaging learning environment. These practices align with key components of social-emotional learning and 21st-century skills by fostering emotional well-being, interpersonal communication and critical thinking, which are essential for effective language acquisition. The findings further reveal that personalised teaching methods and a diverse

range of learning resources contribute to higher satisfaction levels, especially among second-cycle students, highlighting how these institutional practices meet the needs of learners at different academic stages. Additionally, student feedback on the need for better grouping based on proficiency and more specific content indicates areas where institutional practices could be further refined to ensure that English language education aligns with students' personal and professional goals, thereby directly addressing the core research question.

Conclusions

Creating effective language education methods involves a strategy that integrates institutional structures and a detailed grasp of each student's unique traits, as highlighted by Kaspar and Massey (2022). A learning setting that encourages curiosity and analytical thinking while catering for the needs of students fosters successful educational experiences. The results of this research support the existing body of work, including those on social and emotional learning and 21st century competencies. It underscores the significance of an approach, to education that not only improves language skills but also fosters students' overall personal and academic growth. This equips them to tackle the demands of an interconnected world (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Pentón Herrera, 2023).

Based on the research findings at the State University of Applied Sciences in Przemyśl, it can be seen that students generally have a favourable view of the educational practices. They appreciate the classroom environment created by teachers, find the teaching methods and resources effective and value the availability of teachers for help outside class hours. These results align with Goodman et al.'s study (2021) that underscores how supportive educational environments can greatly enhance language acquisition. Nevertheless, the research also points out opportunities for improvement in how student groups are formed according to their English language skills. According to students' feedback, the current method does not take into consideration the range of language abilities among students, which might impact how effective the teaching is. Kibler and Román (2013) stress the significance of adapting teaching to match each student's proficiency level proposing that employing assessment techniques could lead to better grouping and enhance the learning experience as a whole.

Furthermore, the results emphasise the importance of tailored language training that matches the fields of students. It is crucial to incorporate terms from areas such as technology and law to make language courses meaningful and beneficial towards students' career ambitions. This mirrors a wider movement in language education as discussed by Posecznick (2015) and Murphy et al.

(2020) advocating for teaching approaches that cater for students' requirements. By including tailored material in their curriculum offerings, schools can boost student involvement, enhance the perceived worth of their language classes thus nurturing a learning atmosphere cantered on meaningful goals.

While the overall findings of this study are optimistic, it is important to acknowledge that the research is based on a relatively limited sample size. Future research should aim to involve larger and more diverse student groups to ensure that the results are representative of the entire student population. Additionally, longitudinal studies are necessary to explore the long-term impacts of the suggested improvements, particularly regarding student outcomes and satisfaction (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). As indicated by Entwistle (2020), a continuous cycle of assessment and adjustment in educational practices is critical for sustaining student engagement and improving educational quality.

On a broader scale, this study presents a favourable view of the university with only a minority of students offering critical feedback. However, as Fredrickson (2001) suggests, even critical feedback offers valuable insights that institutions can use to drive continuous improvement. By addressing these concerns, the university can further enhance the quality of its educational offerings and strive to make the most of student satisfaction.

In summary, while the findings of this study are promising, they also highlight several opportunities for improvement. The inclusion of specific content, more strategically formed student groups and continued research involving larger and more diverse samples are essential steps toward refining the English language courses and ensuring that they are aligned with student needs. These efforts will not only improve language learning outcomes but also contribute to a more inclusive, relevant and impactful educational experience.

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Appendix 1

Droga Studentko, Drogi Studencie!

*W związku z dążeniem do podnoszenia poziomu kształcenia na naszej uczelni realizujemy niniejsze badania mające na celu zapoznanie się z Twoją opinią na temat poszczególnych aspektów działalności PANS w Przemysłu. Twoje odpowiedzi pomogą nam w opracowaniu działań, które będą korzystne z punktu widzenia jakości kształcenia. Prosimy o udzielenie **szczerych odpowiedzi**, gdyż tylko takie będą miały wartość poznawczą. Badania są **anonimowe**, a uzyskane wyniki zostaną zaprezentowane wyłącznie w postaci zbiorczych zestawień statystycznych. Pamiętaj, że nie ma złych odpowiedzi. Wszystkie Twoje opinie i oceny są dla nas bardzo istotne. Od Ciebie, od **rzetelności i kompletności** Twoich odpowiedzi zależy powodzenie całych badań.*

Pyt. 1. Jakie były powody Twojego wyboru PANS w Przemysłu jako miejsca kontynuacji nauki?

Przy każdym z poniższych stwierdzeń udziel odpowiedzi na skali: zdecydowanie nie – 1; raczej nie – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej tak – 4; zdecydowanie tak – 5.

Lp.	Kategorie motywacji	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	bardzo dobra kadra naukowo-dydaktyczna	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	brak większych problemów z ukończeniem studiów	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	chciałem(-am) mieć fajny okres w życiu, dobrze się bawić	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
4)	dobrze wyposażenie w infrastrukturę dydaktyczną (laboratoria, specjalistyczne urządzenia, pracownie językowe, informatyczne)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
5)	dobrze zorganizowane praktyki u pracodawców i pozwalające zdobyć doświadczenie zawodowe	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

cd. tabeli Pyt. 1.

Lp.	Kategorie motywacji	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6)	dypłom tej uczelni pozwoli zrobić karierę zawodową	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
7)	interesuje mnie tematyka studiów	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
8)	jest to najbliższa uczelnia w okolicy	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
9)	możliwość rozwoju swoich zainteresowań, samorealizacja	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
10)	na studia poszli tu moi znajomi/koledzy	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
11)	nauczyciele, wychowawcy stwierdzili, że to dobra uczelnia	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
12)	nauka na tej uczelni jest tania i stać mnie na nią	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
13)	rodzice wybrali dla mnie tę uczelnię	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
14)	studenci są tu otoczeni szacunkiem i opieką	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
15)	ta uczelnia ma wysoką renomę i prestiż	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
16)	uczelnia prowadzi współpracę z zagranicą i umożliwia zagraniczne wyjazdy na studia częściowe, praktyki zawodowe i staże	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
17)	w tej uczelni jest wysoki poziom nauczania	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
18)	wysokie stypendia i inne formy pomocy materialnej dla studentów	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 2. Jakże znacznie przy wyborze miały dla Ciebie poniższe zagadnienia?***Przy każdym z poniższych stwierdzeń udziel odpowiedzi na skali:******zdecydowanie nie – 1; raczej nie – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej tak – 4; zdecydowanie tak – 5.***

Lp.	Kategorie motywacji	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	poznawanie nowych kultur	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	przygotowanie do dalszej edukacji (np. studia magisterskie, doktoranckie)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	rozwój umiejętności miękkich (np. komunikacja, praca zespołowa)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
4)	uzyskanie certyfikatów	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 3. Jakie czynniki spośród wymienionych poniżej sprzyjają Twojej nauce?
Przy każdym z poniższych stwierdzeń udziel odpowiedzi na skali:
zdecydowanie nie – 1; raczej nie – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej tak – 4;
zdecydowanie tak – 5.

Lp.	Kategorie czynników sprzyjających nauce	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	aktywności i projekty poza zajęciami	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	ciekawe materiały dydaktyczne	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	dostęp do nowoczesnych technologii i zasobów	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
4)	możliwości nawiązywania kontaktów zawodowych	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
5)	możliwość uczestnictwa w wymianach międzynarodowych lub stażach	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6)	perspektywy zawodowe	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
7)	rozwój osobisty poprzez różnorodność kursów i zajęć	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
8)	wsparcie w planowaniu kariery i rozwoju zawodowego	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
9)	wsparcie wykładowców	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 4. Jakie czynniki spośród wymienionych niżej przeszkadzają Ci w nauce?
Przy każdym z poniższych stwierdzeń udziel odpowiedzi na skali:
zdecydowanie nie – 1; raczej nie – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej tak – 4;
zdecydowanie tak – 5.

Lp.	Kategorie barier przeszkadzających w nauce	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	brak dostatecznej ilości czasu	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	brak wsparcia ze strony uczelni	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	problemy osobiste	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
4)	problemy z dostępem do zasobów edukacyjnych (np. biblioteka, laboratoria)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
5)	problemy z pogodzeniem pracy i studiów	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6)	stres i przeciążenie	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
7)	trudności w komunikacji z wykładowcami lub innymi studentami	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
8)	trudności z materiałem	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
9)	zła organizacja zajęć	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 5. Jak ogólnie oceniasz program studiów na kierunku, na którym studiujesz, pod wymienionymi niżej względami w odniesieniu do zrealizowanych przez Ciebie dotychczas przedmiotów (poszczególnych kursów)?
Przy każdym z poniższych stwierdzeń udziel odpowiedzi na skali:
zdecydowanie źle – 1; raczej źle – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej dobrze – 4; zdecydowanie dobrze – 5.

Lp.	Przedmiot oceny	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	dopasowanie programu studiów do osobistych oczekiwań edukacyjnych	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	interesujących treści zawartych w ramach poszczególnych przedmiotów	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	przydatność zdobytej wiedzy i umiejętności w kontekście planów zawodowych	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Uwaga! Jeśli studiujesz na drugim roku studiów II stopnia (magisterskich), przejdź do pyt. 7.

Pyt. 6. Jeśli przed Tobą jest jeszcze rok lub więcej lat studiów, to jak oceniasz program studiów przewidziany na Twoim kierunku w kolejnym(-ych) roku (latach), uwzględniając poniższe aspekty?
Przy każdym stwierdzeniu wybierz jedną odpowiedź na skali:
nie dotyczy jeszcze się tym nie interesowałem (-am) – 0;
zdecydowanie źle – 1; raczej źle – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej dobrze – 4; zdecydowanie dobrze – 5.

Lp.	Przedmiot oceny	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	dopasowanie programu studiów do osobistych oczekiwań edukacyjnych	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	interesujących treści zawartych w ramach poszczególnych przedmiotów	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	przydatność zdobytej wiedzy i umiejętności w kontekście planów zawodowych	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 7. Czy ewentualnie masz jakieś sugestie dotyczące poprawy programu studiów?

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Pyt. 8. Jak oceniasz rozwój swoich kompetencji w trakcie studiów?
Przy każdym z poniższych stwierdzeń udziel odpowiedzi na skali: zdecydowanie źle – 1; raczej źle – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej dobrze – 4; zdecydowanie dobrze – 5.

Lp.	Kategorie umiejętności i kompetencji	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	kreatywność	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	krytyczne myślenie	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	praca zespołowa	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
4)	rozwiązywanie problemów	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
5)	umiejętności informatyczne	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6)	umiejętności komunikacyjne	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
7)	umiejętności przywódcze	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
8)	umiejętność adaptacji	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
9)	umiejętność negocjacji	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
10)	zarządzanie czasem	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
11)	zarządzanie stresem	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 9. Jak oceniasz ogólne wsparcie oferowane przez uczelnię w odniesieniu do poniższych rodzajów pomocy?

Przy każdym stwierdzeniu wybierz jedną odpowiedź na skali: nie dotyczy jeszcze się tym nie interesowałem (-am) – 0; zdecydowanie źle – 1; raczej źle – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej dobrze – 4; zdecydowanie dobrze – 5.

Lp.	Rodzaje wsparcia	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	doradztwo zawodowe	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	wsparcie administracyjne, organizacyjne	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	wsparcie dla studentów pracujących	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
4)	wsparcie dydaktyczne	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 10. Czy zajęcia ogólnouczelniane (tj. z wyłączeniem lektoratu języka angielskiego) zawierają dopasowaną do Twoich potrzeb ofertę przedmiotów fakultatywnych (tj. do wyboru)?

1) zdecydowanie tak

2) raczej tak

przejdź do pyt. 12

3) trudno powiedzieć

4) raczej nie

5) zdecydowanie nie

Pyt. 11. Jeśli oferta przedmiotów do wyboru nie odpowiada Twoim potrzebom, to jakich kursów Twoim zdaniem brakuje w programie Twoich studiów?

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Pyt. 12. Jak ogólnie oceniasz zaangażowanie nauczycieli przedmiotów ogólnouczelnianych (tj. z wyłączeniem lektoratu języka angielskiego) prowadzących zajęcia na Twoim kierunku w przekazanie wiedzy, wyjaśnienie, omówienie prezentowanych treści?

1) bardzo dobrze

2) raczej dobrze.

przejdź do pyt. 14

3) przeciętnie

4) raczej źle

5) bardzo źle

Pyt. 13. Jeśli zaangażowanie nauczycieli przedmiotów ogólnouczelnianych oceniłeś(-aś) jako przeciętne albo złe, to uzasadnij swoją opinię: Jaka część z tych zajęć jest prowadzona na takim poziomie (odpowiadając, określ przybliżoną proporcję takich zajęć w kategoriach: wszystkie, większość, ok. połowy, mniejsza część, wyjątkowe – nieliczne)? Jaki jest powód takiej oceny?

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Pyt. 14. Jak oceniasz przydatność przedmiotów ogólnouczeniowych (tj. wyłączając lektorat języka angielskiego), biorąc pod uwagę oczekiwane przez Ciebie efekty ukończenia studiów, karierę zawodową?

1) bardzo dobrze

2) raczej dobrze.

przejdź do pyt. 16

3) przeciętnie

4) raczej źle

5) bardzo źle

Pyt. 15. Jeśli uważasz, że przedmioty ogólnouczeniowe nie są przydatne z punktu widzenia Twoich planów po studiach, to uzasadnij swoją opinię: Jaka część z tych zajęć zasługuje na taką ocenę (odpowiadając, określ przybliżoną proporcję takich zajęć w kategoriach: wszystkie, większość, ok. połowy, mniejsza część, wyjątkowe – nieliczne)? Jaki jest powód takiej oceny?

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Pyt. 16. Jak oceniasz gotowość do pomocy wykładowców na zajęciach ogólnouczeniowych (tj. wyłączając lektorat języka angielskiego) mającej na celu wyjaśnienie prezentowanych treści?

1) bardzo dobrze

2) raczej dobrze

3) przeciętnie

4) raczej źle

5) bardzo źle

Pyt. 17. Jakie ewentualnie zmiany lub ulepszenia sugerowałbyś (-abyś) w odniesieniu do przedmiotów ogólnouczeniowych, tak aby były Twoim zdaniem bardziej przydatne w kontekście Twoich potrzeb edukacyjnych?

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Pyt. 18. Jak oceniasz wymienioną niżej kwestię związane z zajęciami, w których uczestniczysz, wyłączając z tej oceny lektorat języka angielskiego?

Przy każdym stwierdzeniu wybierz jedną odpowiedź na skali: trudno powiedzieć, nie mam zdania, nie są stosowane – 0; zdecydowanie źle – 1; raczej źle – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej dobrze – 4; zdecydowanie dobrze – 5.

Lp.	Przedmiot oceny	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	atmosfera na zajęciach zapewniana przez kadrę dydaktyczną	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	dostępność podręczników, materiałów dydaktycznych	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	specjalistyczne materiały dydaktyczne dedykowane kierunkowi studiów (aparatura laboratoryjna, oprogramowanie informatyczne, dzieła sztuki)	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
4)	materiały interaktywne (np. quizy)	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
5)	metody nauczania stosowane na zajęciach	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6)	ogólną jakość materiałów dostępnych online (np. e-learning, aplikacje) pod względem interesujących treści, ciekawej formy, itp.	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
7)	ogólną jakość wykorzystywanych materiałów multimedialnych (np. filmy, nagrania audio) pod względem interesujących treści, ciekawej formy, itp.	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
8)	wykorzystywane podręczniki, skrypty, artykuły itp. (przystępność treści, interesująca zawartość, itp.)	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 19. Jak ogólnie oceniasz jakość lektoratu języka angielskiego?

1) bardzo dobrze

2) raczej dobrze

przejdź do pyt. 21

3) przeciętnie

4) raczej źle

5) bardzo źle

Pyt. 20. Jeśli Twoja ocena jakości lektoratu języka angielskiego jest przeciętna albo zła, to jakie jest uzasadnienie takiej opinii?

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Pyt. 21. Jak oceniasz wymienione niżej kwestie związane z lektorem języka angielskiego, w którym uczestniczysz w ramach studiów?

Przy każdym stwierdzeniu wybierz jedną odpowiedź na skali:

trudno powiedzieć, nie mam zdania, nie są stosowane – 0;

zdecydowanie źle – 1; raczej źle – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3;

raczej dobrze – 4; zdecydowanie dobrze – 5.

Lp.	Przedmiot oceny	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	atmosfera na zajęciach zapewniana przez kadrę dydaktyczną	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	dostępność podręczników, materiałów dydaktycznych	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	materiały dydaktyczne wykorzystywane na zajęciach (np. prezentacje w Power Point)	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
4)	materiały interaktywne (np. quizy)	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
5)	metody nauczania stosowane na zajęciach	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6)	ogólną jakość materiałów dostępnych online (np. e-learning, aplikacje) pod względem interesujących treści, ciekawej formy, itp.	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
7)	ogólną jakość wykorzystywanych materiałów multimedialnych (np. filmy, nagrania audio) pod względem interesujących treści, ciekawej formy, itp.	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
8)	wykorzystywane podręczniki, skrypty, artykuły itp. (przystępność treści, interesująca zawartość, itp.)	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 22. Czy w ramach lektoratu języka angielskiego są stosowane metody nauczania mające na celu uatrakcyjnić przekazywane treści dydaktyczne (np. praca projektowa, gamifikacja – wykorzystanie gier w procesie nauczania, platforma językowa itp.)?

1) zdecydowanie tak

2) raczej tak

3) trudno powiedzieć

4) raczej nie

przejdź do pyt. 25

5) zdecydowanie nie

Pyt. 23. Jeśli w ramach lektoratu języka angielskiego są stosowane metody nauczania mające na celu uatrakcyjnić przekazywane treści dydaktyczne, to czy odpowiadają one Twoim oczekiwaniom w tym zakresie?

1) zdecydowanie tak

2) raczej tak

przejdź do pyt. 25

3) trudno powiedzieć

4) raczej nie

5) zdecydowanie nie

Pyt. 24. Jeśli metody nauczania stosowane w ramach lektoratu języka angielskiego nie odpowiadają Twoim oczekiwaniom w tym zakresie, to dlaczego?

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Pyt. 25. Jak oceniasz dostępność lektorów poza zajęciami (np. konsultacje w siedzibie uczelni, korespondencję elektroniczną)?

1) bardzo dobrze

2) raczej dobrze

3) przeciętnie

4) raczej źle

5) bardzo źle

Pyt. 26. Czy masz możliwość korzystania z języka angielskiego poza zajęciami na uczelni (np. rozmowy ze znajomymi, przygotowywanie projektów grupowych, itp.)?

1) często

2) od czasu do czasu

3) rzadko

4) nigdy

Pyt. 27. Czy lektorat języka angielskiego ogólnie odpowiada aktualnym Twoim potrzebom związanym z nauką tego języka (wynikającym z rodzaju wykonywanej pracy, podróży, wyjazdów w ramach Erasmus, itp.)? *Proszę wybrać jedną odpowiedź.*

1) zdecydowanie tak

2) raczej tak

3) trudno powiedzieć

4) raczej nie

5) zdecydowanie nie

6) nie dotyczy, nie potrzebuję wykorzystywać języka angielskiego w życiu codziennym

Pyt. 28. Czy uważasz, że umiejętności nabyte na lektoratach języka angielskiego będą w przyszłości przydatne w Twojej karierze zawodowej?

- 1) zdecydowanie tak
- 2) raczej tak
- 3) trudno powiedzieć
- 4) raczej nie
- 5) zdecydowanie nie

Pyt. 29. Czy masz jakieś sugestie w odniesieniu do poprawy efektywności kształcenia w ramach lektoratu języka angielskiego?

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**Pyt. 30. Jakie działania mogłaby podjąć uczelnia, aby lepiej Ci się studio-
wało?**

*Przy każdym z poniższych stwierdzeń udziel odpowiedzi na skali:
zdecydowanie nie – 1; raczej nie – 2; trudno powiedzieć – 3; raczej tak – 4;
zdecydowanie tak – 5.*

Lp.	Propozycje działań	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1)	inicjatywy wspierające równowagę między pracą a nauką	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
2)	lepsze wsparcie dla studentów pracujących	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
3)	organizacja warsztatów i szkoleń rozwijających umiejętności praktyczne	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
4)	poprawa infrastruktury (np. sale wykładowe, laboratoria)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
5)	rozwój programów mentoringowych i doradztwa zawodowego	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6)	ułatwienie dostępu do programów wymiany studenckiej i staży	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
7)	większa elastyczność w harmonogramie zajęć	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
8)	wprowadzenie więcej kursów interdyscyplinarnych	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
9)	wzmocnienie wsparcia psychologicznego dla studentów	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
10)	zwiększenie dostępności zasobów online (np. wykłady, materiały)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.

Pyt. 31. Jeśli uważasz, że uczelnia mogłaby podjąć jakieś inne działania niż wymienione wyżej, aby lepiej Ci się studiowało, to jakie to miałyby być przedsięwzięcia?

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Pyt. 32. Czy chciałbyś (-abyś) podzielić się jakimiś dodatkowymi uwagami na temat Twoich doświadczeń edukacyjnych, które pomogłyby podnieść jakość kształcenia na naszej uczelni?

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Pyt. 33.

Na zakończenie prosimy o udzielenie kilku informacji o sobie. Przypominamy, że wyniki niniejszych badań będą prezentowane wyłącznie w postaci zbiorczych zestawień statystycznych, a odpowiedzi na poniższe pytania nie powodują braku anonimowości respondenta. Natomiast są one niezbędne z poznawczego punktu widzenia, tj. umożliwiają zastosowanie analiz z zakresu statystyki indukcyjnej.

M1. Płeć

- 1) kobieta
- 2) mężczyzna
- 3) inna / nie chcę odpowiadać na to pytanie

M2. Wiek

- 1) do 20 lat
- 2) 21–25 lat
- 3) 26–30 lat
- 4) powyżej 30 lat

M3. Kierunek studiów

- 1) Bezpieczeństwo transgraniczne (studia I stopnia)
- 2) Stosunki międzynarodowe (studia I stopnia)
- 3) Historia (studia I stopnia)
- 4) Filologia angielska (studia I stopnia)
- 5) Bezpieczeństwo i stosunki transgraniczne (studia II stopnia)
- 6) Pielęgniarstwo (studia I stopnia)
- 7) Pielęgniarstwo (studia II stopnia)
- 8) Bezpieczeństwo i produkcja żywności (studia I stopnia)
- 9) Informatyka w biznesie (studia I stopnia)

- 10) Inżynieria produkcji kosmetyków i suplementów (studia I stopnia)
- 11) Inżynieria transportu i logistyki (studia I stopnia)
- 12) Mechatronika (studia I stopnia)
- 13) Inteligentne technologie (studia II stopnia)
- 14) Architektura wnętrz (studia I stopnia)
- 15) Projektowanie graficzne (studia I stopnia)
- 16) Projektowanie graficzne (studia II stopnia)

M4. Poziom studiów

- 1) studia I stopnia (licencjackie/inżynierskie)
- 2) studia II stopnia (magisterskie), *przejdź do pytania M6.*

M5. Rok studiów licencjackich/inżynierskich

- 1) pierwszy
 - 2) drugi
- przejdź do pytania M7.*
- 3) trzeci
 - 4) czwarty

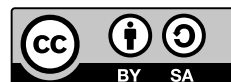
M6. Rok studiów magisterskich

- 1) pierwszy
- 2) drugi

M7. Obywatelstwo


- 1) polskie
- 2) ukraińskie
- 3) inne, jakie?

Bardzo dziękujemy za czas poświęcony na wypełnienie niniejszej ankiety!



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Understanding the Perception of Emotionality of GenZers as a Way of Developing Well-Being

Abstract

Emotionality plays a significant role in teaching and learning a foreign language. Emotions are always present in a foreign language classroom, and teachers and learners aim to determine how to regulate them (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). In the literature on applied linguistics and psycholinguistics, the importance of emotions has been subject to considerable discussion (Dewaele, 2010; Pavlenko, 2006; Wierzbicka, 1999). We already know that students' and teachers' emotional needs should be discussed, understood, and met to develop (Aron, 2013; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Despite the importance of emotionality, there remains a paucity of evidence on language learners' perceptions of emotions and emotionality. Researching perception seems to be an essential strategy for understanding any element influencing the affective dimension of a foreign language classroom, especially when we consider the psychological state of teachers and students due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the generally poor mental health that characterises young people from Generation Z. Thus, the primary aim of the following study was to analyse spoken definitions of emotionality, provided by Generation Z university students ($N = 70$). The analysis was conducted at the intersection of psycholinguistics and applied linguistics. It employed qualitative content analysis. The results show an informative picture of how GenZers talk about such personal issues as emotions, which will certainly be helpful for educators and researchers in the context of psycholinguistics and well-being research.

Keywords: student wellbeing, teacher wellbeing, understanding classroom life, personal development activities, delayed feedback

The issue of emotionality and well-being are closely linked, and naming and perceiving emotions in a language is a source of knowledge about the linguistic image of the world. The following study was conducted on a group of Generation Z students who openly admit to having problems

expressing emotions and declare a deteriorating state of mental health, equivalent to a lack of well-being, which the COVID-19 pandemic has only sharpened. Generation Z students are an interesting research group because the academic setting is the context in which young people form their identity, gather experiences, and gain complete independence. However, observations show that the period of study, commonly considered so far as a positive time in a young person's life, results in increased stress levels, anxiety, lowered mood and psychosomatic symptoms, which often reduce if not prevent functioning. In the words of the GenZers themselves, the university period is a rapid leap from a teenager's life to that of an adult, with all the responsibilities and problems, precisely their issues and those of the global world. GenZers, in informal conversations with me but confirmed with other teachers, complain about the overwhelming pressure that comes from families, teachers and, above all, social media. Being under constant and sometimes increasing pressure quickly deteriorates their mental health, which, they tell me, at best ends up in continuous use of professional support from doctors and therapists. Thus, the overall aim of this study is to better understand Genzers' perceptions and definitions of emotionality in order to subsequently support them on their path to well-being in an academic context, which, in turn, was my primary motivation for carrying out this project.

Theoretical Background

The Notion of Emotionality

Emotionality and emotions, as well as their expression in language, are the research subject of numerous scholars (e.g., Ekman, 2008; Pavlenko, 2016; David, 2018; Feldman Barrett, 2018; Dewaele et al., 2021). The majority of them stress the difficulty of defining emotionality and naming emotional states in precise terms; at the same time, they emphasise the significance of emotions in human life at its various stages and their impact on the functioning of humans.

Emotions are a process, a particular kind of automatic appraisal influenced by our evolutionary and personal past, in which we sense that something important to our welfare is occurring, and a set of psychological changes and emotional behaviors begins to deal with the situation. (Ekman & The Dalai Lama, 2008, p. 10)

Emotional agility is defined as "being flexible with your thoughts and feelings so that you can respond optimally to everyday situations [...]. Emotional

agility is about loosening up, calming down and living with more intention. It's about choosing how you'll respond to your emotional warning system" (David, 2016, p. 11). Such an understanding of these terms may be the key to the skilful and precise communication of emotion in L1 and in FL/L2. The case is similar to regulating emotions, which Shanker (2022) calls self-regulation and explains as follows:

The original psychophysiological definition of self-regulation refers to how we respond to stress—whether in a manner that promotes or restricts growth. Mindful self-regulation, which enhances learning and emotional, social and physical well-being, involves learning to recognise and respond to stress in all its many facets: positive as well as negative, hidden as well as overt, minor as well as traumatic or toxic. (Shanker, 2022, p. 23)

An attempt to strengthen the development of emotional agility from an early age can be made by using The Ekman's Atlas of Emotions (Ekman & Ekman, 2016). This tool, available free of charge on a website in the form of an application, serves as an excellent base for delving deeper into emotions as early as for nine-year-olds. It has the potential to be used in multifarious types of research, not only of a psychological nature. The Atlas of Emotions embraces the richness and plethora of emotional states, which is possible due to the presence of numerous lexical items (in a few languages) that neatly and precisely capture certain aspects, shades, and nuances of these states. Ekman and Ekman (2016) do not divide emotions into good and bad but show how many there are, how they can be defined, recognised and named. In previous years, schools did not lay so much emphasis on teaching emotions as is the case these days, which means that those who are children right now will be better off as concerns the sphere of emotions, whereas university students may be deficient in this respect. In light of the above considerations, the directions in which any education is going and any research similar to the one in this paper are not to be underestimated and are fully justified.

Ekman and Ekman (2016), as well as the aforementioned authors, suggest in unison that emotionality may have a direct impact on well-being, which, after Ryan and Deci (2001), we perceive as a group of hedonic elements related to "pleasure/enjoyment/satisfaction, and comfort/painlessness/ease" (Huta, 2015, p. 3), and eudaimonic ones related to such variables as "meaning/value/relevance to a broader context, personal growth/self-realisation/maturity, excellence/ethics/quality, and authenticity/autonomy/integration" (Huta, 2015, p. 4).

Moreover, Petrides (2009) perceives emotionality and well-being along with self-control and sociability as four main aspects of trait emotional intelligence (TEI), defined by him as "trait self-efficacies or dispositions of how people experience and utilize affect-laden information of an inter- and intrapersonal nature"

(Petrides, 2009, quoted in Jacobs & Wolny, 2022, p. 156). This proves that emotionality and well-being not only influence each other, remaining in a constant interplay, but also constitute the basic dimensions of one of the personality traits.

Mercer and Gregersen (2020) stress the subjectivity of research on well-being. Under that reasoning, any projects on emotionality should focus on the analysis of subjective definitions of emotionality and on individual perception of other constructs under scrutiny, not losing sight of the fact that “wellbeing is socio-contextually determined, and some aspects may be universal” (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020, p. 5). The results can also be interpreted with reference to Positive Psychology (PP) (Gabryś-Barker & Gałajda, 2016; MacIntyre et al., 2016; Goleman, 2020; Compton & Hoffman, 2020) while taking into account more complex models, like PERMA (Seligman, 2011) and EMPATHICS (Oxford, 2018), as well as the construct of flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997), and bearing in mind how the expression of emotions, but also our emotional states and well-being have changed (for worse) on account of the pandemic (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Seligman’s model and Oxford’s model take into account the factors defined by the authors that influence mental health and life satisfaction. Relating the results of studies such as the one described in this text to the aforementioned models can help to interpret the relationship between **Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishments** (Seligman, 2011), **Empathy, Motivation, Perseverance, Agency, Time, Hardiness, Intelligences, Character strengths, Self-factors** (Oxford, 2018) and well-being and thus more effectively understand respondents’ perceptions of mental states. The flow construct, on the other hand, describes, among other things, a state of optimal challenge and skill, thus allowing one to work towards a sense of fulfilment, balance and enhanced engagement. All of this is a counterbalance to the overload and pressure that young people currently see as major obstacles to well-being.

When looking at emotions from a psycholinguistic perspective, it is essential to mention that factors determining the communication of emotions in a given language include the level of proficiency and the psychological distance when processing a given language. The reflection of the intensity of emotions in a given language, the cultural framework and the individual preferences of bilingual and multilingual people also play a significant role (Oleszkiewicz, 2023). Code-switching is a natural phenomenon that characterises bilingual and multilingual people and concerns expressing emotions. A particular language may, for example, be perceived as more effective in conveying a specific emotional message and help create a sense of community with those with whom the language is shared. Some reasons for this may be the non-translatability of some expressions describing emotions and the fact that the terms in a given language influence the conceptualisation of specific emotional states (Wierzbicka, 1999). In addition, recognising and feeling emotions is much easier when one has the corresponding word in any known language in one’s mental lexicon.

Discussing Well-Being

It seems that perceiving and defining well-being is a very individual matter, and although academic sources (Das et al., 2020; Hascher & Waber, 2021) provide a fairly unified set of associations with the word well-being (happiness, health, contentment, comfort, ease, abundance, alleviation, amenity, felicity, bliss, cheerfulness, success, good, sake, benefit, satisfaction, enjoyment, pleasure, fitness, physical euphoria, energy, peace of mind, freedom, robustness, safety, joy, luxury, gratification, delight, soundness, strength, content, ecstasy, and soundness, all the associations generated by Google), understanding the individual's perception of this construct is hugely important for facilitating in a given context.

From a psychological perspective, well-being can be considered as made up of other constructs as components. In this text, we focus on selected constructs based on our teaching experience and knowledge from the literature. Guided by intuition, the following constructs (in addition to emotionality described earlier) may influence well-being in the university environment. The research project outlined in this text draws on the roots of well-being research, namely the interest in Positive Psychology (PP) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2020), integrative well-being models such as PERMA (Seligman, 2011) and the context-focused SLA EMPATHICS (Oxford, 2018), and current approaches to education, namely following Talbot (2022) positive education (PE), Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) and positive emotions in education. It is also only possible to refer in the interpretation of the data to the relationship between well-being and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (MacIntyre et al., 2020).

Reflections on well-being start with the concept of self-awareness, which Eurich (2018, p. 28) divides into internal and external, defining each as follows:

internal self-awareness, represents how clearly we see our own values, passions, aspirations, fit with our environment, reactions (including thoughts, feelings, behaviours, strengths, and weaknesses), and impact on others, and external self-awareness, means understanding how other people view us, in terms of those same factors listed above.

Self-awareness should be facilitated by a process of self-observation, in which we recognise situations, thoughts and emotions and then examine reactions. Another important aspect of building well-being is to focus on working on self-acceptance, which the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2022) defines as “a relatively objective sense or recognition of one's abilities and achievements, together with acknowledgement and acceptance of one's limitations. Self-acceptance is often viewed as a major component of mental health.”

Self-awareness and self-acceptance are important in building well-being, as they are the only way a person builds up knowledge about themselves, which they then learn to accept, thus fostering intrapersonality and a sense of coherence. Self-awareness and self-acceptance can also be considered key aspects of practising mindfulness. Mindfulness fosters an understanding of, for example, one's emotions and oneself in general, which in turn contributes to well-being and mental health in general. Understanding oneself and skilfully communicating one's needs and emotions fosters better communication with others, which also builds an individual's well-being, especially one of its pillars, social connection (Siegel, 2012). Mindfulness is also a holistic approach to reality and ourselves. By looking at things mindfully, one sees more and deeper and thus is more in touch with oneself and with others. This promotes effective communication and being in a relationship, but a prerequisite for this is the skilful use of language.

The next two components that build well-being may seem the most difficult to achieve, as we have very little experience and practice of them over generations. The first is self-compassion, about which Neff (2020) says the following:

Having compassion for oneself is really no different than having compassion for others. [...] First, to have compassion for others you must notice that they are suffering. [...] Second, compassion involves feeling moved by others' suffering so that your heart responds to their pain (the word compassion literally means to "suffer with"). [...] Having compassion also means that you offer understanding and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them harshly. Finally, when you feel compassion for another (rather than mere pity), it means that you realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience. [...] (Neff, 2020, What is Self-Compassion, para. 1)

Neff also adds that self-compassion is about treating yourself with kindness in the face of difficult experiences, failures or personal inadequacies. Rather than ignoring the pain or criticising oneself, one should pay attention to one's difficulties and look for ways to self-compassion. This attitude implies forbearance and acceptance of one's own weaknesses (Neff, 2020).

The second is vulnerability, which can already be problematic at a linguistic level because there is no proper equivalent in many languages, for example, Polish. Often translated as a weak point, or susceptibility to impression, it is associated with weakness, which is absolutely incompatible with understanding it in the context of psychology and well-being, as evidenced by the following quote from Brown (2017, pp. 154–155):

The definition of vulnerability is uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. But vulnerability is not weakness; it's our most accurate measure of courage. When the barrier is our belief about vulnerability, the question becomes: "Are we willing to show up and be seen when we can't control the outcome?" When the barrier to vulnerability is about safety, the question becomes: "Are we willing to create courageous spaces so we can be fully seen?"

In many countries, even in Europe, self-compassion (e.g., Gilbert, 2019; Matos et al., 2021) and vulnerability are considered part of soft skills that increase well-being and positively influence interpersonal communication and empathy, which is essential for creating overall social well-being. The inclusion of self-compassion and vulnerability in defining well-being also correlates with what Stahl (2022) writes about feeling and thinking personality types, emphasising that each of us manifests traits of one and the other type, which is not mutually exclusive and should be consistent if we look at ourselves and others with compassion, respecting them and our own vulnerability.

Last but not least, Proyer et al. (2015) point out that the traits that characterise us, enthusiasm, hope and a sense of humour, are predispositions to well-being. This is particularly important in the context presented in this article because of the characteristics of Generation Z discussed earlier. Representatives of Generation Z see humour as a way of coping with difficulties in life, which, on the one hand, is obvious, but their humour is very specific, black and mostly related to communication and the language of social media. The enthusiasm of Generation Z is, according to them, extinguished, and hope "died a long time ago" (informal student quote) despite being so young. The social and linguistic doomerism (Ray, 2020) observed only confirms this. While (at least partly) representatives of Generation Z have a sense of understanding and resourcefulness, following the Antonovsky (1996) coherence model, the third pillar, that is, making sense of their actions and the reality around them, is very scarce, making it impossible to achieve full well-being. Proyer et al. (2015) emphasise that it is worth considering who or what takes away our enthusiasm, hope and undermines our sense of well-being in life, as it is easier to take care of this in the context of nurturing well-being than to recover from lack of well-being later on.

The Characteristics of Generation Z and Their Communication

Generation Z are those born between 1997 and 2012, currently studying in the range from upper primary school grades and up to fresh out of university. They are the generation of young people who, in the context of this text, are the main recipients of the didactic process and who dictate trends in social

media while showing and commenting on reality, using slang and digital body language to communicate what they are unwilling or unable to express in words.

McKnight (2021) enumerates the following characteristics of Generation Z:

- “wired in” (2021, p. 38)
- claim no religious affiliation
- engage for their psychological and emotional well-being
- confront potential issues with their identity
- varied in terms of race and ethnicity
- “growing up ‘too slow’ and ‘too fast’” (2021, p. 42)
- their parents “are both overengaged and underengaged” (2021, p. 43)
- start their own business very early
- seek and see the value of education (2021, p. 44)

Generation Z representatives value convenience, constant accessibility and the absence of unnecessary interaction with strangers. The lack of face-to-face interaction gives a sense of security, for example, when starting a conversation. During lockdown, the convenience of remote communication turned into a necessity. Forced by this circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic, they assimilated to online communication without much difficulty and quickly became addicted to it, being online most of the time. Digital body language enables them to avoid awkward situations and communicate using visual tools. Many of them struggle with social anxieties that hinder their communication in the real world and use DBL as entertainment as well. The superiority of messaging can be understood as being able to respond later or interrupt the conversation at any time. Asynchronous communication facilitates multitasking. But at the same time, it is a way to entertain. Voice messaging is also the golden mean between a phone call and a text message.

Generation Z is also characterised by several phenomena common to most people representing this social group. Among many, one can mention black humour, irony, and sarcasm, which serve as an emotional buffer. Also related is doomscrolling, that is, devoting excessive attention and time to reading negative and anxiety-inducing social media news, and indirectly cautious optimism, that is, approaching reality cautiously while hoping things will turn out well. The GenZers combat the phenomenon of toxic positivity, which David (2016) says is telling others, “my comfort is more important than your reality,” and cultivate what can be called “self-talk,” a daily, often all-day internal monologue that can be vented in posts and comments on social media.

Discussing Generation Z from the linguistic perspective, it can be said that they use slang taken from social media, often creating idiolects; their language is very diverse, mainly due to new technologies, the internet and globalisation. Generation Z’s language perfectly portrays this generation’s characteristics, and the cultural dimension is highlighted by using English as a lingua franca. When talking about Generation Z’s communication, it is impossible not to briefly

discuss the digital body language (DBL) mentioned earlier, which Dhawan (2021, p. 19) says are “technique and understanding of interpersonal communication, using digital devices and symbols such as memes, emoji, emoticons, punctuation marks or capital letters.” Seemingly small actions, such as putting an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence or writing in capital letters, can greatly impact how we are perceived by the recipient of a message and influence their perception of us, our attitude and the message being conveyed. Ekman (2008) claims that non-verbal communication has five functions: repeating, substituting, complementing, accenting, and contradicting, and the same can be said of digital body language, using the following as an example:

- Meme: an image or graphic that links to text of a humorous nature;
- Emoji: a set of small icons used to express emotions;
- GIF: a format for an animated picture file;
- Voice message: short audio messages sent via mobile devices;
- Reaction pic: an image used in digital communication to highlight a reaction.

According to Gerova and Preslavsky (2022), DBL is a valuable form of communication that is used to convey our emotions in the digital world. It fills the cross-cultural gap, represents not only emotions but also concepts and creates a new environment for conversation. Also, it can engage more shy or introverted people in discussion.

Despite the many pluses and the fact that DBL gained prominence after the pandemic outbreak, researchers point out the negative aspects of DBL, such as the emphasis on informal communication in all contexts, the avoidance of direct contact with each other, the simplification of language, the tolerance of linguistic errors.

Digital body language can be subjected to multidimensional linguistic analysis, including discourse analysis, contrastive studies, and emotional messages, relationships, and psychophysical states, such as well-being (or lack thereof) and their expression in language. Sometimes, DBL is called the “new normal,” significantly influencing understanding contemporary communication skills and shaping communicative competence. The author of this text believes there is a need for research that holistically analyses DBL as part of the profile of an effective communicator. This will make it much easier to understand the communication of younger generations like Gen Z or the upcoming Generation Alpha behind them. Also, incorporating DBL into language instruction may help to support students’ multiliteracy as part of their everyday communication.

By establishing representatives of a particular generation as respondents to the research, the question arises about the validity and relevance of categorizing people in relation to the time in which they were born and lived. According to Gao (2023), this makes sense because “categorizing people with the framework of generation highlight the impact of certain time and events

on people's viewpoints, behavior patterns and lifestyles, much like the impact of culture on people. Therefore, we may view intergenerational communication as intercultural communication" (Gao, 2023, p. 426). Following such reasoning, Gao refers to Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, 1997), which emphasizes the differences in communication between people belonging to the same society and living in the same times. These differences are due to the fact that communication in different social groups is influenced by factors such as gender, culture, society and occupation, resulting in a speech code. These codes can also refer to the modes of communication presented by different generations since they are characterized, like the cultural groups Philipsen studied, by "substance (vocabulary, meaning, syntax)" (Gao, 2023, p. 427) and they are "the force [...] in social life for that [...] group" (Gao, 2023, p. 427). Since a generation can use different codes to communicate, this will also apply to expressing emotions. This is why it is so interesting to explore how Generation Z, with all its characteristics, perceives and defines emotionality.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in the study were second-year students of English philology at the University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland) ($N = 70$). As for linguistic proficiency, in the case of the respondents to this survey, these were L1 = Polish, L2 = English, and L3 = German ($N = 20$)/Korean ($N = 30$)/Arabic ($N = 20$), depending on the type of translation programme. All participants were of Polish nationality and belonged to Generation Z at the time of the study. This project defined them as people born between 1997 and 2012, with an average age of 20 in the case of the present study. The research group represented the majority of all students of the mentioned major and specialisation in the number of $N = 100$ who attended conversation classes in the third semester according to the curriculum scheme. It included those who voluntarily and anonymously agreed to participate in the study.

Research Instruments and Procedure

The study's main aim was to find answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do university students belonging to Generation Z define emotionality, and what are their perceptions of emotionality?

RQ2: What does Generation Z's definition and perception of emotionality tell us about their well-being, and how this information can help them develop their well-being?

The procedure for the survey was as follows. Students were asked to produce two recordings in English of a minimum of one minute: (1) an informal definition of emotionality and (2) a formal definition of emotionality, where both definitions were to be in their own words. The students were not given any other guidelines, and they could rely on their own experience and academic content that they found themselves or that had been discussed in class beforehand. The recordings were part of the conversation course credit and were assessed, feedback was given, and sent back to the students. Along with the recordings, students were asked to submit a transcription of both recordings, which they could provide with comments if they wished. The recordings, transcriptions and comments were in English, although this would have been noted in the analysis if respondents had used another language. The quotations from the received corpus included in this text have not been altered or corrected in any way by the author of this text, for example, in terms of linguistic accuracy.

My choice of English was made for several reasons. The participants in the study were students of English philology in their second year, which, according to the guidelines of the curriculum scheme, indicates their high level of competence (C1 according to CEFR). In addition, the study took place in conversation classes, which are held in English, and the students are used to communicating in this language in this context. Finally, and very importantly in the context of this study, students repeatedly declared that English is their second language, in which they communicate very willingly and spontaneously, even naturally, which correlates with the characteristics of Generation Z described above and the function of English as a global language.

Following this, the texts containing the transcription of formal (FD) and informal (ID) definitions along with the participants were coded (e.g., 1FD, 8SD, where the number denotes the number assigned to a particular student) in order to preserve the anonymity of the study participants. The ways of anonymising data include permanent removal of personal data prior to analysis and publication. The resulting corpus was subjected to qualitative content analysis (Table 1) adapted from Mayring's QCA (2000), in which I focused on both deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning meant assigning categories to confirm theories about the constructs under study as described in the literature (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2021; Eurich, 2018; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Coding rules were predetermined, "determining exactly under what circumstances a text passage can be coded with a category" (Mayring, 2001, p. 5). In the process of creating inductive categories, I re-read the collected

results to gain a deeper understanding of the raw data and familiarise myself with it. Sections of text marked with similar labels have been grouped together to form categories that did not appear among the deductive categories. These inductive categories and their labels came directly from the data and were not predetermined. For both deductive and inductive categories, I identified fragments that contained relevant information relating to the research questions. Data segments were assigned to specific categories.

Table 1
Coding Agenda (adapted from Mayring, 2000).

Inductive Categories	
Category	Definition
Past, present and future experiences	Description of what has happened, is happening or will happen to respondents and what affects them consequently and over time.
Respondents' personal comments	Something the respondent said, expressing their personal opinion.
Descriptions and metaphors addressing emotionality and emotions	A statement in which the respondent directly describes what something related to emotionality/emotions is or refers to something that is considered to have similar characteristics.
Particular examples referring to emotional states	Specific cases relating to emotional states.
Deductive Categories	
Category	Definition
Self-reg and emotionality	Experiencing and expressing emotions and the ability to regulate and understand them.
Self-acceptance and self-awareness	Understanding and accepting one's own abilities and limitations, being conscious of one's own character and the ways others perceive it.
Self-compassion and vulnerability	Feeling sympathy, understanding, empathy and kindness for oneself, having courage to face "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure." (Brown, 2017, pp. 154–155)

Results According to Deductive Categories—Formal (FD) and Informal Definitions (ID)

Self-Reg and Emotionality

Respondents emphasise that they cannot cope with expressing emotions because they do not have the relevant knowledge and experience. This may be why it is so easy for them to hide their emotions or hide them (and themselves) under sarcasm, a social media avatar, or any other elements of communication specific to DBL.

I don't know how to talk about emotions at all, no one taught me that, neither parents nor teachers. (10ID)

We do not regulate emotions, we hide them, deep, by the way, no one cares about them, we can express ourselves in social media. (23ID)

I express myself with gifs, I send emoji to my parents, my friends also understand TikToks because they feel and perceive it the same way. (17FD)

Self-Acceptance and Self-Awareness

GenZers emphasise that they speak negatively and critically about themselves, highlighting weaknesses. They attribute such a tendency to the experience they have had at home or which is characteristic of the education they know. Again, there is a theme of hiding actual emotional states, a tendency to cover them up with humour (often black humour) even in conversations with close peers. Social media, and the internet in general, is a “safe” place to hide and communicate practically one hundred per cent on one’s own terms. It is in the digital world that GenZers feel more listened to than in the real world, which makes them very sad and adds to the frustration of being seen as someone completely different with characteristics that cannot be attributed to them. The respondents, although also very confused by the messages they receive from their parents, are very aware of their problems, obstacles, and often the reasons for their condition.

When someone asks me, I list weaknesses right away, with strengths it is more difficult. (9ID)

I would constantly correct something in myself, but it's because of my parents and teachers, they keep saying that I still don't know something, that I should know more, and everything in general. (21ID)

My friends and I feel like losers, we turn it into jokes on social media or by writing to each other directly, but in reality we are sorry, it's sad. (18ID)

I know what I like, what is important to me, but I don't say it out loud, because no one listens and won't do anything about it anyway. (29 ID)

I'm glad we have social media, because I don't have to speak out loud in public, and I can still share my opinion and find those who think the same way. (58ID)

I'm annoyed by how others perceive me: I hear that I'm feisty, calm, always ready to speak up, and in fact, I'm the one who later fights it off, stress eats on me inside. (11ID)

I'm confused because my parents tell me once that I'm definitely going to make it, but right after that I'm supposed to study because I won't pass. (43ID)

Self-Compassion and Vulnerability

As the following responses confirm, finding parts of the corpus that could be classified in this category surprised me. Respondents are not used to showing vulnerability or self-compassion. They feel they have been brought up not to complain but to take responsibility and blame every time. In addition, they feel that they should be strong and confident rather than vulnerable, which is commonly assumed, especially compared to the Polish equivalent, to be associated with weakness and vulnerability. The division between vulnerable and brave is reminiscent of the division between good and evil, and such associations are confirmed by respondents. Furthermore, the more introverted GenZers see bravery as a problem because it costs them too much sacrifice and energy. GenZers emphasise that they are aware of their inability to take care of themselves, and the way they try to do this is more akin to addiction and further burying their emotions.

Our parents think that we have the internet, that we have opportunities, that we have everything and that we should embrace our issues and not feel sorry for them or ourselves. (23FD)

When I'm sad I immediately think that it's my fault, that I could have done something better. I can't feel sorry for myself, just figure out how to fix it. (3ID)

When I'm having a hard time and want to take care of myself, I feel like I'm acting self-destructively: binge watching, eating junk food, scrolling social media for hours. (19ID)

I don't understand this connection between courage and vulnerability. I read a lot of self-help books to feel important, courageous, confident. I don't want to feel fragile. (29FD)

For me, people have always been divided into the courageous and the vulnerable. I try to be brave, and vulnerable I am when I am alone with myself or with friends, when we laugh at memes, gifs, TikToks, they show it well, so sarcastically. (12FD)

Whenever I am "brave," it always ends badly for me. Then I suffer in solitude, stressed out, thinking how silly I was to say something and why, if no one listened. (36ID)

Results According to Inductive Categories—Formal (FD) and Informal Definitions (ID)

Past, Present and Future Experiences

Although the GenZers emphasise belonging to a group, they are aware that each of us has valid experiences and thus can process emotional states differently. Respondents can even give examples of past experiences that have influenced their perception of emotionality. They also know how experiences of specific emotional states can affect their life and health in the future.

Each of us has different experiences encountered in the past and therefore in the same situation each would react in different way. (47FD)

According to the research conducted by the first speaker, it's guesses constructed by the brain on the basis of our past experiences. (33FD)

From experience, I know that a highly sensitive person is sensitized to any kind of violence. (42ID)

Unfortunately, I had the occasion where I was laughed at because of being "too sensitive" or simply "paranoid." (29ID)

I am sensible of the fact that it is not all the knowledge I could acquire but I reckon that life depends on the constant growth, right? (53ID)

However, emotions have the greatest influence on the mental sphere. Over time, an excess of emotions can lead to many disorders that may require consulting a doctor, or in some cases even psychiatric treatment. (28FD)

Respondents' Personal Comments

There are numerous definitions in which respondents presented their opinions. GenZers use language skilfully, introducing personal opinions repeatedly, showing that they believe or are convinced about something. However, I need clarification on how much of the use of specific phrases is a natural desire to present one's opinion and how much is a learned form of communication for a particular task. The prevailing trend among personal opinions is that emotionality is difficult to define mainly because the experience of emotionality is very subjective. The authors of the quotes emphasise the importance of self-awareness and education regarding emotions.

I believe it is also hard to find most accurate words for this but I have to give it a go. (21ID)

I believe there is no such thing as "the best definition" because we are all aware of the fact that emotional states are hard to define and even think of. (37ID)

Personally, I define emotionality as the process of feeling that each and every one of us experiences during a certain event. (18FD)

In my opinion, the 'sensory processing sensitivity' and the 'highly sensitive person' are based on the same background – sensitivity. (10FD)

That is why, I strongly support the idea of publicising and popularising psychological subjects since the early stages of education or upbringing. (50FD)

All in all, as I said in the beginning, emotionality, emotions and accompanying emotional states are indeed hard to describe. (64ID)

Certainly, the notion is not sufficiently developed but personally, I use it due to its simplicity and clarity. (25FD)

I know this is a bad habit and whenever it happens I immediately regret it and feel stupid. (38ID)

This is beautiful that other people can sometimes see my emotions, which I am unaware of. (42ID)

Descriptions and Metaphors Addressing Emotionality and Emotions

This is one of the most data-rich categories. The respondents, both in describing emotionality and in providing a definition in the form of a metaphor, showed great sensitivity and linguistic richness. The metaphors appeal to the imagination, and the descriptions are concrete and specific. This makes it easier

to understand both cases and analyse the GenZers' perception of emotionality and emotion. Particularly in the metaphors, the attitude towards the subject is evident. Respondents speak positively and negatively about emotionality, often emphasising that it is a complex subject about which they have no experience and feel lost. Their knowledge of the subject of emotionality is very passive, and although the descriptions of emotionality are apt, respondents themselves emphasise that it is difficult to refine them so that they show their actual views.

[...] our upbringing (and many other generations as well) is full of holes when it comes to talking about emotions [...]. (43FD)

It is also defined as a 'dam' which prevents from mental illnesses [...]. (20FD)

Emotions influence every aspect of our lives and add colours and spice to them. (61FD)

It is an internal compass for me that shows me what choice would be the least harmful to others. (38ID)

Enveloped by changing the world, we try to predict and create our experience of world. (19ID)

Because it is like catharsis and clears our mind and brings us light in the tunnel. (33FD)

Feelings are just data, but no directions, which means that we own them, not they us. (49ID)

Particular Examples Referring to Emotional States

In this category, respondents are keen to share examples describing emotional states or highlighting the meaning of their words. Some examples are extended, others short. Some are descriptions, and others are listed examples. The most important thing about them is that they reinforce the message and that GenZers consciously use specific treatments. There are several such definitions of emotionality, and the examples underlining them are very well chosen and illustrated.

For instance, there comes the end of the semester. Everyone works all the hours God sends to finish every assignment, homework or studying for the test. Despite the effort, your mark isn't the one that you worked for. Additionally, you found out that your friend got a higher note even though you did pretty much the same things. (14ID)

For instance, churring stomach which can be interpreted as being stressed of being hungry. (29FD)

For example, when I am scary my heart beating faster, when I am crying my eyes are red, when I am shy my cheeks flushed. (37ID)

[...] like for instance when I am angry I often shout and argue with people who are important to me in order to express my emotions. (40ID)

[...] such as changing moods from happiness to sadness. (38FD)

An example may be hysteria, which was a disease that was attributed to women. 41FD)

[...] with fear of for instance falling in love. 12FD

Discussion

In response to the first research question (RQ1), it can be said that the characteristics of this group strongly influence Generation Z's perception of emotionality. GenZers are aware of their mental health and write about it openly, emphasising that the learning and teaching process further deteriorate their mental state. From the data received, it appears that Gen Z is no stranger to toxic positivity (David, 2016), defined by David as "forced, false positivity" (David & Brown (Host), 2021), nor to an "inner critic" who gets activated while resilience weakens. Gen Z is not able to appreciate their vulnerability (Brown, 2015), and what ensues is that they find it more and more difficult to develop the so-called emotional agility (David, 2016), something that we consider to be indispensable when it comes to acquiring new skills and knowledge, which in turn underlie the process of studying. The pandemic only highlighted all the above-mentioned issues, and the reality within which we have been functioning since 2020 has become challenging as it concerns effective emotional management.

Almost all GenZers surveyed wonder where emotions come from and how they can control them because they believe that self-reg is expected of them as adults, at least according to the metric. They realise that emotions are part of their mental equipment and a way of processing the world and reality in which they live and function. They do not know how but subconsciously feel that developing emotional intelligence is the key to well-being.

They try to cover their emotions with sarcasm, but they do so consciously. This is because they know that emotional states are what all people have in common, regardless of who they are, where they come from or how they were brought up. The same is true of social media communication, which

is also often fake and a buffer for emotional states, but the GenZers are also aware of this.

GenZers respond very well to tools for exploring their emotionality, such as the Ekmans' Atlas, which was regularly used as a supplement in conversation classes attended by the respondents, among others, and taught by the author of this text. Through this, they develop their awareness by learning how they are triggered, what they feel like and how they respond to various emotional stimuli. GenZers know that awareness is a strategy in itself because understanding our emotions helps deal with them; we do not want to get rid of them but rather respond to them in ways that will be constructive and helpful. Awareness also helps them understand how we experience emotions due to the activation of different mechanisms and analyse the interpretations of these experiences depending on the cognitive scenarios associated with the language. GenZers know emotions are not divided into positive or negative. How we manage them translates into moods and behaviours, which many categorise into good and bad, and hence, thinking in this way about the nature of emotions.

Language, especially language skills and being bilingual or multilingual, is significant for GenZers. They would generally like to use language to express emotions but find it difficult. As observed over the course of the conversation classes attended by the respondents, among others, they often express their emotionality through DBL, which they share with narrow circles of friends or people with similar interests and knowledge. Due to being the lingua franca of the internet, English is seen by Gen Z as an effective way to take care of their well-being and as a medium for communication in general.

In terms of the constructs discussed in this article, that is, concepts related to the self, which may be components of well-being, Gen Z knows that they have difficulty defining them and need guidance and a lot of patience and empathy to get to know and learn them. Due to an overabundance of information, they acquire knowledge about themselves late and sometimes not at all. They claim that previous generations know less about the online world but are generally better at relationships and the real world.

Answering the second research question (RQ2), the gathering of more data could result in the formulation of implications and an attempt to create a universal program to support the well-being of GenZers while learning and to train teachers from previous generations to understand GenZers' communicative behaviours: a universal repository of recommendations, one that will enable us to understand students and their emotional states better, and that will increase the effectiveness of cooperating with them in the context of broadly understood 'academic community'. For teachers, it would be something that should contribute to their personal development and increase their work comfort. What is more, the development of communicative competence in the mother tongue and in a foreign/second language employing students being involved

in discussions touching upon issues that are currently vital for them, upon communicating emotions, without focusing on general topics not directly related to their lives can enhance learners' well-being to a great extent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this research may serve as specific recommendations within the domain of applied linguistics or inspirations for further research within psycholinguistics, bilingualism, multilingualism, or text linguistics in relation to Generation Z. The main findings of this study indicate that GenZers know that it is impossible to build sustainable well-being without self-regulation and an understanding of (one's own) emotionality. However, they talk openly about the fact that, despite their age, they still need help working with their emotions, if only by naming them. The same is true of the components relating to the self: GenZers are aware of their existence but emphasise the need to support them in the process of cognition. Only through guidance can they fulfil their potential and develop the autonomy to look after their well-being. Understanding the emotionality and well-being of Generation Z should start by supporting GenZers in exploring these areas. By accompanying them in this process as teachers, for example, by facilitating the development of communicative competence, it is possible to get to know and understand better why and how emotionality is such an essential factor in building sustainable well-being among Generation Z young people.

Juxtaposing emotionality with well-being analysed from the linguistic angle may be an interesting undertaking for psychology-oriented researchers. In other words, such projects' interdisciplinary potential and universality are easily noticeable. Such complex research has already been conducted in many parts of the world (Bogolyubova et al., 2020; Vella-Brodrick et al., 2022). It should be pursued further in other countries to research not only single constructs, usually in social sciences, psychology in particular. The reference to linguistics in this study and its various fields (Wierzbicka, 1999; Sykulska, 2003; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2013) as well as connecting this research with a broader psychological perspective leads to a new approach to the subject particularly given the specific nature of GenZers. The linguistic picture of the world that will emerge from the data gathered could be juxtaposed with the results from other countries, and simultaneously, the selected research area can be expanded by the cultural context, which, although strongly influenced by globalisation in the case of Generation Z, can vary depending on language, for example.

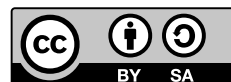
There are certain limitations to the study that was conducted, which, for example, could have been carried out on a larger group (broken down by age and gender identity), in two/some languages, in a different cultural context and subjected to a more thorough analysis (e.g., LIWC-22: to examine people's cognitive processes, emotional condition and intentions and/or Text Inspector: to enrich the linguistic analysis). Furthermore, it would have been worth investigating whether perceptions of emotionality change due to the speaker's gender identity. The research itself could be supplemented with, for example, formal/informal written definitions and other instruments, for example, association chains or association tests containing sample emotion. An interesting idea would be to conduct in-depth interviews in which interviewees could be asked about constructs related to well-being (e.g., self-compassion, self-reg, vulnerability, etc.) and their relation to perceptions of emotionality. Interviews could also clarify whether specific phrases concerning, for example, personal comments are used due to an inner desire or are learned as a response to a particular communication task. It would also be interesting and valuable to explore perceptions of emotionality and its relationship to well-being in contexts beyond the learning process, but still from the perspective of GenZers' modes of communication, including DBL.

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Using Personal Development Activities to Enhance Ecuadorian Student-Teachers' Wellbeing

Abstract

The Action Research report describes the carrying out of an exploration of student wellbeing combined with an intervention of personal development activities that were employed to enhance the mental and emotional wellbeing of 27 student teachers at an Ecuadorian teacher training university. While there are many studies exploring the factors that contribute to heightened levels of stress and anxiety among university students, looking for a better understanding of life in the classroom and improving it through introducing self-help methods is scarce. The findings of the report corroborate other accounts that wellbeing is an issue for tertiary level students in many contexts, and their challenges in the Global South are often multiplied. The researchers used pre- and post-intervention survey questionnaires as well as end-of-intervention and delayed student feedback to gauge changes in the participants' wellbeing. The findings show that the students' wellbeing has improved as a result of the personal development activities employed by the teacher researcher. The authors conclude that student wellbeing needs to be an institutional priority but individual teachers using a range of innovative and engaging activities can potentially achieve transformative and lasting effect when they treat their students as active practitioners of learning.

Keywords: student wellbeing, teacher wellbeing, understanding classroom life, personal development activities, delayed feedback

The present Action Research (AR) was carried out with the aim of exploring how a better understanding of life in the classroom (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019) and an intervention arising from that exploration could contribute to an improvement in student wellbeing.¹

Context and Rationale

In the first semester of the 2022/23 academic year, while delivering C1 level General English lessons to undergraduate student teachers on the English Language Teaching Degree Program at the National University of Education of Ecuador (UNAE), the teacher researcher (Agnes Orosz) and her teaching assistant, who acted as co-researcher (Andrea Chalco) noticed that many students struggled with various issues related to their mental, emotional and physical health, and that this sometimes affected their learning both inside and outside of the classroom.

In the previous semester, one student in another group had a panic attack in the teacher researcher's class, and when she asked the whole group about anxiety and depression, a startling number of students raised their hands. During conversations and through writing tasks in the group with whom the teacher researcher ultimately carried out the present AR project, she found out that many students struggled with various serious issues affecting their lives.

Based on her after-class notes, the teacher researcher was able to recall some of the long-term traumas, frequent incidents and daily struggles that the students faced:

Some were left behind as their parents emigrated to the US, one student's father was dying of cancer, two were single mums, one of which lived with her brother who one day before class hit her son and when she tried to defend him, hit her too. One student suffered from an eating disorder, 4–5 suffered from depression and anxiety, another had just been dumped by her boyfriend of 5 years. Two students' mums had died when they were young. Some said they had lost their motivation by this point (three years into their four-year studies).

Another student would fall asleep in class and when I asked her why she said that family circumstances meant that she was solely responsible for raising her two younger siblings and that she stayed up until midnight every night cooking for them and woke up at 5am every day to make them breakfast and drive them to school after which she would attend the practicum in the mornings and classes in the afternoons. By the time she got to my class

(4pm) she could barely keep her eyes open. Many struggled with money even more than previous cohorts because many of their families had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Personal Development Activities

In order to make an attempt to find solutions that might help students to cope better and improve their general wellbeing, during the semester of October 2022–February 2023 the teacher researcher decided to incorporate personal development materials and activities into her C1 PINE² English classes at UNAE to see whether such an intervention impacted students' lives and learning.

Serendipitously, the coursebook assigned for the course, *Personal Best C1* (Scrivener, 2018) lent itself easily to the topics and activities the teacher researcher wanted to cover. With unit and chapter titles such as: *What Matters*, *a Formula for Happiness*, *Live Better: Health Fact or Health Fiction*, and many others focusing on wellbeing, it was easy to incorporate the teacher-designed materials seamlessly into the syllabus during the semester.

The teacher researcher's own interest in personal development began when she attended a free 5-day online seminar by Tony Robbins during the pandemic, which led her to obtain more of his programs. These had a positive effect on her life and mindset, and she thought it would be beneficial for her students to learn some strategies and techniques that she had learned from her Tony Robbins courses and other sources. The teacher researcher was hoping to impact her students' lives positively, improve their mental as well as physical health, increase their motivation and allow them to deal better with the challenges they faced in the post-pandemic period.

An Overview of Relevant Literature

In order to find out if student wellbeing is a wider issue to which teachers and their educational institutions may wish to pay more attention, the authors carried out a review of academic research conducted in recent years with regard to the challenges affecting teacher and student wellbeing. In the brief literature review that follows we will be looking at four aspects: student wellbeing, teacher wellbeing, positive psychology and affective pedagogy, all of which have provided scholarly guidance for the present AR project. It needs to be underlined that even though student and teacher wellbeing are treated under

two separate headings below, we agree with those researchers who perceive them as “two sides of the same coin” (Mercer, 2021; Moskowitz, 2024; Roffey, 2012). Teachers with higher levels of wellbeing perform better in facilitating learning, and students with improved wellbeing become more engaged and perform better academically (Burić & Frenzel, 2020).

Student Wellbeing

The webpage of the European Education Area (managed by the European Union) provides a detailed list of what student wellbeing implies. Wellbeing at an educational institution means for students to feel safe, valued and respected. The document emphasizes that students should have positive self-esteem and a sense of autonomy alongside “positive and supportive relationships with teachers and peers” as well as a sense of belonging to their school and satisfaction with their lives (European Education Area, n.d.).

Empirical research seems to suggest that university students have been dealing with increasingly higher levels of mental and emotional health difficulties globally (Baik et al., 2019; Bennett et al., 2021). Researchers often stress that it is important that university educators and administrators develop policies that can prevent or reduce psychological distress. In this regard, Upsher et al.’s research study (2022) on how student wellbeing can be improved by interventions embedded in the curriculum is especially pertinent. They draw attention to the “increasing prevalence of youth mental health problems” (p. 1) and highlight that research has, so far, been mainly conducted in highly developed countries (see, e.g., McManus, 2019; Taylor et al., 2019). Upsher et al. (2022) advocate a whole-university approach, “whereby all aspects of university life should be targeted to promote positive wellbeing” (p. 1). In this regard, our AR report describes a project conducted in a specific context hoping that the issues identified and the recommendations made will help improve policy making at the local institutional level.

Close to the specific context discussed below, a pertinent study on pre-service language teachers’ (PSLTs) wellbeing was conducted by Sulis et al. (2021), who employed Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) to investigate the personal and contextual stress factors that PSLTs are exposed to. They underline that student teachers are, by definition, *students* and *teachers* with limited teaching experience, who are required to teach in unfamiliar classrooms while carrying on with their university studies. These factors often lead to “stress, burnout and attrition” (Sulis et al., 2021, p. 1).

During the pandemic crisis, over and above the usual challenges, pre-service language teachers had to cope with switching from face-to-face classes to online instruction both for their taught courses and their practicum.

At least in the Global South, they were also burdened by “intermittent internet connection, non-availability of instructional materials at home, [...] [and] no instant feedback about lesson planning from cooperating teachers” (Emia et al., 2022, p. 2). Having now returned to what is often termed as the “new normal,” pre-service teachers face additional challenges: they need to adapt to changes in educational technology and, occasionally, need to switch back to remote teaching at short notice (Emia et al., 2022). In the countries of the Global South, such as Ecuador where the AR project was carried out, these challenges have been exacerbated by worsening socioeconomic conditions, including poor health care, leading to frequent flare-ups of social unrest (Grigera, 2022).

Teacher Wellbeing

As we have stated above, student wellbeing cannot be separated from teacher wellbeing (Roffey, 2012). Students and teachers live and work in the same social space and are interconnected (Exploratory Practice Group, 2021). Consequently, wellbeing in education does not only relate to learners, it also encompasses other stakeholders, such as teachers, administrative staff and parents. In recent years, and especially in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic, teachers have become more alert to the need for addressing the issues of their learners’ and their own wellbeing (Ončevska Ager, 2024; Orosz, 2024).

In the field of language teaching, Mercer (2021) calls for an “ecological” perspective in the anniversary issue of *ELT Journal* emphasizing that “we need to be serious in defining and understanding well-being for research and teaching and get beyond superficial conceptualizations” (p. 14). Mercer’s argument is that wellbeing is not a fluffy ‘add-on’ but a key element of effective learning and teaching—as well as a human right. She emphasizes that language teachers face specific challenges that teachers of other subject matter do not, such as “increased emotional labour, shifting identities, energy-intensive teaching methodologies, language anxiety and intercultural demands” (p. 18).

Teachers’ mental and emotional wellbeing affects the amount of care and attention that they can devote to the challenges in their students’ lives both in and away from the classroom (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). MacIntyre et al. (2020) looked at language teachers’ coping mechanisms shortly after the onset of COVID-19. Acknowledging that “heavy workloads, time pressures, and difficulties juggling roles” (p. 1) make teaching a stressful profession to start with, the authors point out that during the pandemic “workloads that were once perceived as substantial have been complicated by a rapid conversion to online delivery for which many language teachers had not been prepared but whose effects seem likely to last for years to come” (p. 1). Teachers in the Global South, such as in Ecuador, face specific challenges owing to a range of socioeconomic

issues (Esteve, 2005). In their mixed-methods study, Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) gathered data from 394 Ecuadorian teachers using a web-based survey. Beyond the assessment of the level of psychological distress experienced by teachers, the authors also identified some of the most often applied coping strategies, such as “seeking social support, exercising and participating in leisure activities” (p. 933).

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that, among the coping mechanisms, teachers may also reach out for sources of self-help and personal development. Inspirational speakers, whose work can influence attitudes and behaviour, such as grit and resilience, have become influencers at global levels (Robbins, 1995, 2022). This was the personal experience of the teacher researcher of this report, which led directly to the AR project described in detail below.

Positive Psychology

In order to fully utilize students’ potential and reduce language anxiety (Gregersen, 2020), it is important to focus on aspects and personal traits or mindsets that may facilitate learning. Educators have been shifting to a positive, strengths-based approach to student development for a number of decades, but the use of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which “emphasizes *thriving* as a key element in success” (Williams et al., 2018, p. 85), was only given a recognizable push after Seligman started to use the term widely in the late 1990s and then summarized his vision in *Flourish* (2011). Positive psychology research in language education with a special focus on wellbeing is a relatively new field of inquiry but has already produced valuable insights (Dewaele et al., 2019). MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), for example, set out to explore the full range of emotional experiences by learners and teachers when they looked at the influence and interplay of both positive and negative emotions in language learning. With regard to wellbeing, such an approach implies a more balanced weighing up of factors that can protect and increase wellbeing on the one hand, and stressors and challenges on the other (Sulis et al., 2023). Nevertheless, Fredrickson’s (2001) *broaden-and-build theory* draws attention to the fact that the role of positive emotional states should be given their due as they potentially create space for learning and allow the mind to open up to new experiences.

Affective Pedagogy

There are several theoretical underpinnings for educational psychologists to believe that emotions in language learning play an important role in creating

the right conditions for memorable learning (Méndez López & Peña Aguilar, 2013; Tyng et al., 2017). Affective pedagogy (AP) acknowledges the profundity of emotional engagement and, with it, the primary role of the teacher. According to Clough (2007), alongside the increasing prominence of learner and teacher wellbeing, there has been an *affective turn*, which focuses on the affective experiences and states in learning. Zhao and Li (2021, p. 2) underline that affective pedagogy “foregrounds the development of psychopedagogies to increase students’ inner states which are preconditions for their academic achievement” and, as such, merges emotions and learning outcomes. Interestingly, in more recent literature, an agenda of *loving pedagogy* has also emerged. Wang et al. (2022) claim that optimal academic outcomes cannot be achieved without positively caring for learners’ and students’ feelings and emotions. Their tentative model (Wang et al., 2022, p. 4) depicts a kaleidoscope of positive characteristics from among which, for the purposes of the present research study, *bonding*, *intimacy*, *passion*, *kindness*, *empathy* and *acceptance* appear to be the most relevant, because in the course of the AR project, stretching out to the students’ delayed feedback, these were the aspects that stood out as prominent.

In Patience’s (2008) view, the concept of loving pedagogy and affective pedagogy are closely related. He defines the driving force behind AP as *agape*, namely, “comradely or selfless love” (p. 57) adding that “affective pedagogy is as much about feelings and emotions as it is about learning outcomes. Indeed the feelings and emotions are inseparable from the learning outcomes” (p. 57). Patience emphasizes that it is only “self-aware, self-confident and selfless” teachers that are able to establish close and healthy ‘relatings’ with their students (p. 58) and stresses that his concern is that “utilitarian pedagogy focuses on outcomes of *performance* rather than on outcomes of *understanding*” (p. 62).

It is exactly the *understanding* element of classroom pedagogy that guided the researchers in the present AR project, which was further led by the principles of Exploratory Practice (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019). Their assumption was that personal development activities and related materials may improve students’ wellbeing, and the reduction in stress levels as well as the heightened engagement with such materials may, hypothetically, contribute to enhanced language learning. This led the teacher researcher and the student researcher to phrase their research question as follows:

Research Question

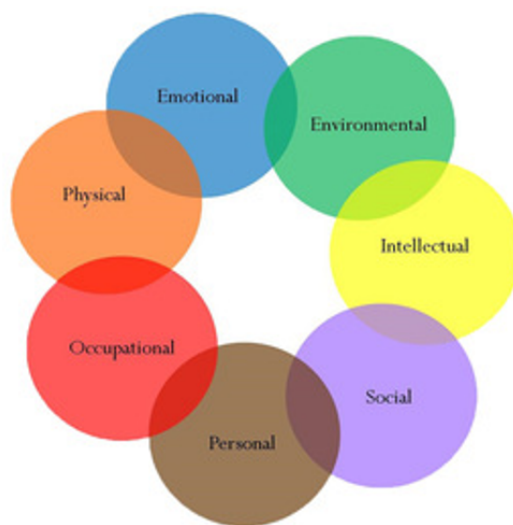
1. How far could incorporating personal development activities and materials into English lessons improve students’ wellbeing?

Understanding the Concept of Student Wellbeing

Student wellbeing can be conceptualized as a dynamic system of various interrelated factors. In this AR report, we follow Larsen-Freeman and Cameron's (2008) Complex Dynamic System Theory (CDST) and its adaptation by Sulis et al. (2021) to pre-service teacher wellbeing. The latter is described as "multifaceted, situated and dynamic" emerging "from the complex interaction of personal, professional and situated factors at specific points in time" (p. 2). Sulis et al. identify the following components: social connections, physical health, motivation, workload and the immediate physical environment. Turned into statements, all these domains appear as items in the Student Well-being Process Questionnaire designed by Williams et al. (2017), namely, the data gathering instrument that we used to quantify the participants' level of wellbeing.

Figure 1

Dimensions of Student Wellbeing



Source: <https://www.education.nh.gov/who-we-are/division-of-learner-support/bureau-of-student-wellness/dimensions-of-student-wellness>

It has already been mentioned that the teacher researcher aimed not at *replacing* but *complementing* the set coursebook (Scrivener, 2018) by using or designing materials that could reinforce the 'message' as well as expand the given unit's scope. A detailed description of the treatment is contained in the section titled Intervention.

Method

The AR project was conducted in the first semester of the 2022/2023 academic year by the teacher researcher (Agnes Orosz) and her teaching assistant acting as a student researcher (Andrea Chalco). While Agnes Orosz was delivering the sessions and carrying out the intervention, Andrea Chalco gained a full overview of the course, administered the survey questionnaires, gathered some of the qualitative data and accomplished the data analysis as well. The joint AR process, which involved 27 students that the teacher researcher taught, resulted in effective collaboration and the sharing of classroom research skills between the two authors (Allwright & Hanks, 2009).

Ethical Issues

Students were informed that the teacher researcher was aiming to explore issues related to student wellbeing so that she might be able to address the emotional, mental and cognitive challenges that the students were facing. It was made clear that the data gathering process and the resulting intervention would not involve extra classwork or homework that could be perceived as unrelated to improving the students' C1 level General English language skills. The students took part voluntarily and anonymously in responding to the pre-intervention and post-intervention wellbeing questionnaires using invented pseudonyms that were neither their real names nor their known nicknames. The reflective essay task on how students perceived the course which involved the self-development activities was also anonymous and there was no effort made to link the above three datasets with the students' grades. These assignments were set not as classwork but homework for reasons of privacy, anonymity and in order to provide sufficient time (between four days and a whole week) to accomplish them. The delayed feedback was also given anonymously by students responding to a single question on a Google form (see Appendix 2) even though the teacher researcher was not teaching this group of students any more.

The guiding ethical principle was to use Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities (PEPAs) in order to avoid "getting in the way of the normal educational processes of teaching and learning" (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019, p. vi). Such an approach lay at the heart of the present project, which treated students as "active participants, as practitioners of learning" (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019, p. 7). This aspect is all the more important since the student participants of the study were teacher trainees of English, whose education necessarily involves both language skills development and language teaching pedagogy.

The Action Research Process

To situate our AR project, we refer to some of the relevant implications arising from Exploratory Practice (EP), Exploratory Action Research and Action Research.

Exploratory Practice, as an approach, has become increasingly part of mainstream language teaching over the past decades (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019). There are two principles of EP that were particularly important with regard to the present project:

1. ‘Quality of life’ for language teachers and learners is the most important central concern for practitioner research in our field.
2. Working primarily to understand the ‘quality of life’, as it is experienced by language learners and teachers, is more important than, and logically prior to, seeking in any way to improve it.

(Allwright & Hanks, 2009, pp. 149–154)

Exploratory Practice does not exclude an attempt to improve the quality of life in the classroom, namely, an “intervention” in research methodology terms, but foregrounds the “exploratory” aspect (Hanks, 2017). Similarly, Exploratory Action Research (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018) emphasizes the importance of exploring the puzzles and issues encountered in the language classroom before starting any intervention. This exploratory phase entails the careful gathering of triangulated data from all the stakeholders in the language learning process. Action Research in general, and in language teaching in particular, “involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to your own teaching contexts” (Burns, 2010, p. 2).

The present project included the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. We employed non-random convenience sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2022), a standard procedure in EP where the focus of attention is a single class and their teacher. In line with EP principles, the data were gathered without the research process becoming “parasitic and time-wasting” (Slimani Rolls & Kiely, 2019, vi.),

When using extra materials during the *intervention* phase, care was taken to engage learners in what are called PEPAs. The latter can be defined as “classroom activities that integrate teaching practices and research purposes especially in collecting data” (Dikilitaş & Griffiths, 2017, p. 290). The ones employed in the present project included class discussions, brainstorming sessions, reflective essays and both end-of-intervention and delayed feedback. In this manner, the students became part of an “on-going dialogic feedback exchange” (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019, p. 41).

Participants and Data Collection

Our non-random convenience sample consisted of 27 students with 24 replying voluntarily to the pre-intervention and the post-intervention Student Well-being Process Questionnaire constituting our quantitative dataset. The age range of the participants was between 20–23 years, with 5 male and 19 female students (non-respondents: 2 female and 1 male student).

Originally theorized by Ryff and Singer (1998), the Student Well-being Process Questionnaire (Student WPQ) was designed by Williams et al. (2017). It is a 44-item survey that has been used in several countries in recent years, such as the UK (Smith & Firman, 2020), Romania (Lustrea et al., 2018) and Kazakhstan (Umurkulova et al., 2022) to gauge the emotional and social well-being of students, often in slightly modified forms to accommodate translated versions. It employs a 10-point Likert-type scale with 1 denoting “disagree strongly” and 10 denoting “agree strongly” (see Appendix 1 for the full set of questions).

The participants were also asked to write an essay on their reflections regarding the personal development aspects of the course. This activity was set specifically in order to prepare students for the reflective essay included in the university-adapted version of the Cambridge C1 Advanced exam. The writing task was set as homework with a word count between 220 and 260 words following a model in the coursebook with the teacher providing formative feedback on the students’ writing. Four months later (in early June 2023), students were once again asked if the personal development activities had any lasting effect on their lives. The response rate was lower, but still more than 50% (14 out of 27). The data were fully anonymized for both the quantitative and the qualitative research instruments by numbering the respondents and referring to them as “Students” (S1 to S24) for the questionnaires, “Reflective Students” (RS1 to RS27) for the reflective essays and “Participants” (P1 to P14) for the delayed feedback (see Appendix Table 1 and Appendix Table 2).

Intervention

As mentioned above, during the semester the teacher implemented a range of self-development activities which complimented the units that were being covered in the textbook.

Vision Boards

The very first activity was for students to create a Vision Board for their ideal future self. This activity drew upon and wove together several strands

(Waalkes et al., 2019) including Dörnyei's (2009) work on the importance of "vision" in learner motivation, as well as descriptions of the steps for creating Vision Boards by writers like Tony Robbins (2017).

First, the teacher took her students through Dörnyei's visualization process. This begins with asking students to imagine their ideal L2 learner self, and for the participants in the study, as pre-service EFL teachers, also their ideal L2 teacher self. The students were also asked to add other more personal elements here including their ideal state of mental and physical health. Students were invited to close their eyes, and imagine in as much vivid detail as possible, their ideal future life. They were asked guiding questions during the visualization such as:

- What would you like to become?
- Imagine your ideal academic/professional language learner/teacher self.
- What is your ideal identity?
- What will you be/do/achieve?
- Imagine your ideal English speaking self.
- What kind of English teacher will you be?
- Who will you inspire?
- Where will you travel?
- Who will you be able to have a conversation with?

Students then opened their eyes, and individually wrote down in note form what they saw in their ideal vision before speaking in pairs with their classmates about elements they were comfortable sharing of their vision. Then students were asked to close their eyes again and think about what they needed to do to achieve that vision. They were asked guiding questions such as:

- What do you need to do to achieve that vision?
- What do you need to do today? Every day? Every week? Regularly?
- How many hours do you need to spend studying?
- What do you need to give up?
- Who do you need to spend more time with? Less time with?
- What do you need to read? Research? Find out?
- Who can you ask for help?

When they opened their eyes, they each individually wrote an action plan of how to reach the objectives they set out in each area; in terms of professional success, mental and physical health as well as their personal goals, for example, relating to travel and family.

Students then used the information to create their Vision Boards for homework. This included cutting out pictures, phrases, quotes, photos that represented their goals and their action plan for reaching those goals. Students' Vision Boards included, for example, photos of the gym, healthy meals, airplanes, PhD caps, books, musical instruments, beaches, flags of countries they

wanted to visit or whose languages they wanted to learn and many pictures of happy, excited and engaged students in classrooms with enthusiastic teachers.

Figure 2

A Vision Board by One of the Students



Figure 3

Another Student's Vision Board



Students then brought their Vision Boards to class and put them on the walls in the classroom for a gallery walk, where students took turns to present their visions boards to their classmates. To avoid monotony and too much pressure on each student to speak in front of the whole class, 5–6 students presented their Vision Boards at the same time to the other members of the class in an open-house type set up.

Figure 4

Gallery Walk: Looking at Each Other's Vision Boards



Biography Driven Instruction (BDI) Interviews

The second activity drew upon an approach developed by Herrera et al. (2012) at Kansas University, a university with special ties to Ecuador because many Ecuadorian EFL teachers were given scholarships by the Correa government between 2006 and 2016 to attend a special Master's program at Kansas University as part of the "Go Teacher" program. Participating teachers were then expected to "repay" their scholarship by a certain number of years' service in public schools or universities, such as UNAE.

The activity applied the principles of Biography Driven Instruction (Holmes, 2023) by asking students to work in pairs to perform a detailed one-to-one interview about anything and everything that might be affecting their studies. Questions ranged from family and economic circumstances to past L2 learning experiences as well as work or other obligations such as caring for children or other members of the family.

Students then wrote up the answers their partner gave them in a short essay in the same class. This served both as an EFL speaking and writing activity as well as a kind of diagnostic or needs analysis activity for the teacher, as the information provided was useful to begin to understand some of the difficulties that students faced and the way it may be affecting their academic performance.

The Mood Meter, A Menu for Feeling Good, A Formula for Happiness

The first unit in the textbook is all about happiness. Unit 1A is entitled “A Formula for Happiness” and the target vocabulary is adjectives to describe mental states, emotions and moods. The class teacher saw this as the ideal opportunity to introduce students to an activity she had come across during a Tony Robbins seminar called the Mood Meter (Robbins, Measure your mood, n.d.). The Mood Meter includes 30 adjectives placed vertically from +15 (elated) to -15 (miserable), which is in itself a rich and ready-made cline of mood vocabulary.

The activity involves checking in with one’s mood at various times of the day and noticing when one feels the most positive and what drives those positive emotions, as well as noticing when one is feeling down and what provokes those negative emotions. Linked to this is then creating a **Menu of Ways to Feel Good** based on the things going on inside and outside a person when they notice that their mood is good. For example, taking the dog for a walk, listening to upbeat music, meditation, yoga, and connecting with friends.

In the classroom, this was applied by asking students to use the Mood Meter to go through in their mind’s eye some of the happiest moments from their previous week, and then some of their most negative states and to try to identify the emotions they felt on the Mood Meter and the cause of those emotions. Then, students were asked to write their Menu of Ways to Feel Good, which is essentially a list of all the things that make them happy. As homework, the teacher asked students to pull out this menu every time they felt a negative state in the following week to see if they could move up the scale on the Mood Meter by doing something from that menu. A week later, they reported on whether the menu worked to get out of negative states faster than before.

As a final step, students then created their own **Formula for Happiness**, which is a paragraph they wrote to serve as a personal and individual blueprint pinpointing consciously and concisely the things that make them happy.

Gratitude Diary

Linked to this first unit, the teacher asked students to write a special type of diary for a week and encouraged them to keep writing it beyond the class requirements. A Gratitude Diary (Nortje, 2020) is a written list of all the things one can be grateful for in their life if they choose to be. These could be small things like the hot water in their shower, or their favorite duvet, or bigger things like being grateful for the most important people in their lives. It could also be things we tend to take for granted, like the use of our legs, or that we can use our eyes to see. It is a powerful exercise in shifting perspective (Froh et al., 2008), since often we humans are programmed to notice what is wrong, and to take for granted what is right (Robbins, Effective gratitude, n.d.). Oprah Winfrey also talks of the power of Gratitude in her life (Winfrey, n.d.) as a way to increase contentment and happiness, and decrease feeling of depression and anxiety. Students wrote the diary for homework daily over the course of seven days, and shared their thoughts in class with their classmates and teacher after that time.

Your Most Valuable Possession

Unit 1D in the textbook was based around a listening activity where students watched a video of two roommates discussing their “burning building items” (If you could save one thing from a burning building, what would it be?). Related to this, students were asked to bring in three physical objects, one of true sentimental value and two others. They were asked to prepare a story about each of the items; the true story of the object of sentimental value and two made-up stories about the other two objects. They played Call my Bluff in groups; in other words, they had to sell all three objects as if they had true sentimental value and their classmates had to guess which story was real.

You Are What You Eat

Unit 2A in the textbook is entitled “Live Better: Health Fact, Health Fiction” and the teacher used this as a springboard to draw students’ attention to the effect that their nutrition might be having on their overall wellbeing.

First, students were asked to list absolutely everything they had consumed over the last week and then highlight all the foods that were high in sugar, salt and fat in one color and to highlight all the animal products in another. They were asked to look at their list to see what was left unhighlighted. Most students had not much if anything at all left.

The teacher then showed the students the documentary The Game Changers (Psihoyos, 2018), which follows various top athletes at the peak of their

performance who were on an exclusively plant-based (vegan) diet. After the showing, students took part in a debate about whether they were persuaded by the documentary that a plant-based diet is the healthiest (Souza et al., 2020). The following day the teacher brought in healthy snacks for students to eat during the 10-minute break halfway through the 2-hour class. She brought nuts, seeds, tangerines and bananas. Usually, students would snack on potato chips, chocolate bars, cupcakes and fizzy drinks during break time.

All these activities had as their objective to raise students' awareness of the importance of healthy nutrition and to help them understand some of the scientifically proven facts about nutrition and its link to overall wellbeing; not just physical health but also mental health.

Priming

Unit 2B is entitled "My Quest for Quiet Time," and is about stress-relief. In this context, the teacher took students through a process called "Priming" which aims at setting the mind up for the day in the most positive and optimal way possible. For this she used a free video on YouTube (about 15 minutes) led by Tony Robbins and called "Priming" (2020). It begins by using breathwork to focus the mind, then invites participants to focus on three moments they can be truly grateful for in their lives, three dreams or goals they envision as fulfilled, and finishes with a (non-religious) prayer or blessing in which participants send love and good wishes out to their loved ones and others. The teacher played the video for the class and students followed along visualizing each moment in detail and then they shared their thoughts with their partner using the narrative tenses which were the language objective of the unit. The results were powerful, as many students were visibly moved to tears by the experience. The students discussed their feelings afterwards sitting in a circle as a whole class speaking activity.

Meditation

During teaching of the same unit on stress-relief, the teacher introduced a guided meditation session to the students (Boho Beautiful, 2019). Meditation is not generally very common in Ecuador, and some students had never heard of it, and almost none of them had tried it. Given that many of them had initially reported high levels of stress and anxiety related both to their academic and home lives, the teacher felt this was an essential tool to introduce to them, so that they could add it to their Menu of Ways to Feel Good if they felt it was useful and helpful for them.

Wheel of Life, New Year's resolutions, RPM

Finally, in order to supplement the material in Unit 4A of the textbook, which is entitled “Success and Failure,” the teacher implemented three activities closely related to one another.

The first of these was the Wheel of Life (Swart, 2022), which later turned out to be the most memorable and favorite activity for the majority of the students. This activity involves students mapping on a circular wheel their perception of how well they are doing in each area of their lives, for example, academics, family, friends, finances, and health. They “grade” themselves out of ten in each area, and then color in the corresponding parts of the wheel. Low grades are represented by only a small area near the middle of the wheel being coloured in and high grades are represented by a whole segment reaching out to the perimeter of the wheel being shaded. At the end students have a “wheel” that is usually quite lopsided. This represents rather strikingly whether or not the various aspects of their lives are well balanced, and where they should possibly be putting more emphasis because that aspect of their lives is being neglected.

Figure 5

The Wheel of Life of One of the Students

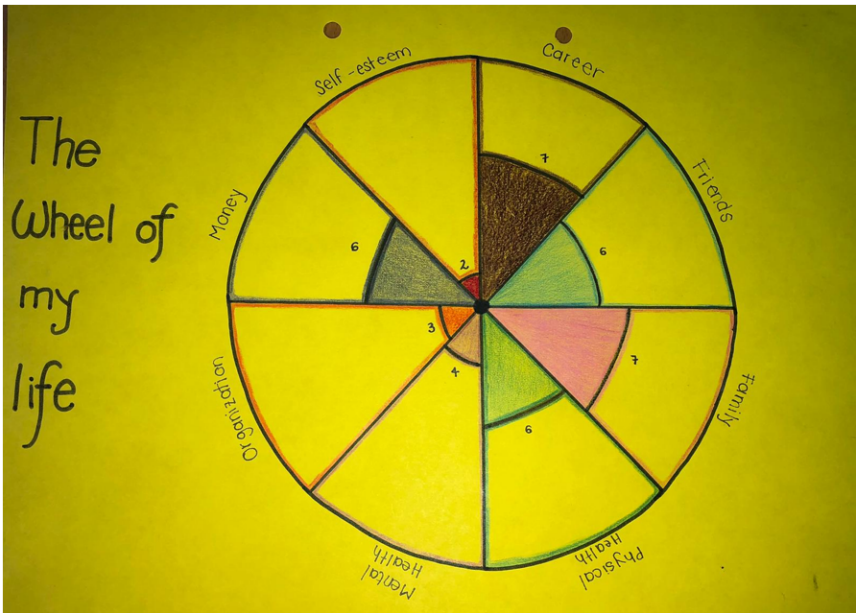
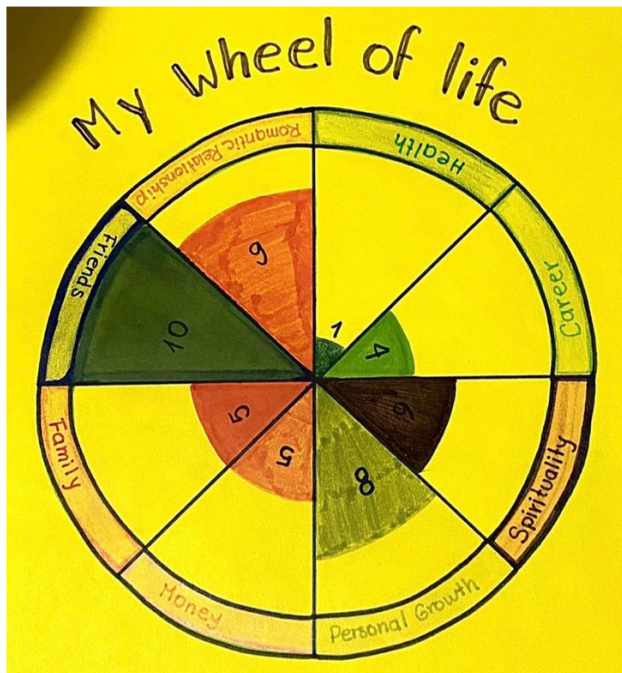


Figure 6*Another Wheel of Life*

Based on the Wheel of Life activity, which served as a kind of diagnosis of where students stood at the time, they then began to set goals for each area of their life that received a low score and then to think of strategies and actions that would help them to achieve those goals. The teacher used two activities to guide students in this process. The first was asking students to set New Year's Resolution; as the timing of this unit coincided with the New Year, it was a natural activity to do.

And finally expanding on their New Year's Resolutions, the teacher used Tony Robbins's RPM method to encourage students to create a more detailed action plan for what they wanted to improve in their lives. RPM stands for Rapid Planning Method (Robbins, Workbook, n.d.), and the acronym also corresponds to the headings of the 3-part table it refers to—Result, Purpose, Massive Action Plan. Students filled out the table by setting an objective for each neglected area of their life under Result, defining why they wanted to achieve that result under Purpose, and then writing a list of every possible action that would help them achieve that result under Massive Action Plan.

Before moving on to the data analysis and the presentation of our findings, in the next section we summarize the teacher researcher's own reflection on the intervention and the effect she perceives they have had on her students.

Reflection

This was the first time the teacher had used such deeply personal activities in class, and was unsure how the students would react, but she was often very pleasantly surprised and even touched by the high level of vulnerability displayed by the students. The students' willingness to truly open up and genuinely reflect on areas needing improvement in their wellbeing, was remarkable. Nearly all the students participated wholeheartedly, demonstrating genuine vulnerability and honesty in addressing their personal challenges. The shared experiences also fostered a visible sense of unity within the group and facilitated more relaxed collaboration during further language activities.

Students were often moved to tears by the activities. This happened in the Vision Board presentations, in the Priming activity, and the Most Valuable Possession activity. Feedback from some students seemed to suggest this was a positive reaction, for example, some students even described the topics covered as "transformative." However, it was also clear from some student feedback that there were students who felt uncomfortable with discussing deeply personal topics in class which elicited such intense emotions from some participants.

Reflecting on the whole experience, it is important to mention some valuable insights gleaned for the benefit of fellow educators considering a similar approach. It became evident that not all students were comfortable delving into personal matters. One student expressed feeling uncomfortable during certain discussions, suggesting that such tasks be assigned as optional homework rather than mandatory class activities. This feedback underscores the need for caution in integrating such exercises, especially considering that the course was initially designed as a General English class, not a self-development workshop. Moving forward, if the teacher should decide to engage in similar activities with a future group of students, she will emphasize the voluntary nature of sharing personal details, providing alternative, less intrusive tasks for those who prefer them. Furthermore, it is important to avoid potential triggers or re-traumatization, so issuing clear warnings about the nature of tasks and ensuring participation remains optional is significant.

Additionally, in order to avoid such potential pitfalls, it is beneficial to carefully curate self-development activities with a positive, forward-looking focus, such as Priming and Vision Boards. These activities encourage students to reflect on aspects of their lives for which they are already grateful and inspire them to envision a compelling future. By fostering a future-oriented mindset, such activities motivate students to pursue necessary changes to achieve their goals, creating a vision to strive towards.

The debate following the showing of the documentary advocating a plant-based diet, also needed a slightly different approach. Students noticed that the teacher was not neutral in this debate, but was clearly supporting a plant-based

lifestyle and thus saw the teacher's stance as too one-sided. In the future, it is important to remember running class debates with as little intervention from the teacher as possible, following a more Socratic Method such as the one used in P4C (Philosophy for Children), which allows students to explore topics through open debate without the teacher imposing their own view on the class.

Overall, the experience was a resoundingly positive one, both for the teacher and the students. The activities that students could include as habits in their lives if they chose to, such as priming, meditation, gratitude, a menu of ways to feel good, and healthy nutrition and so on clearly had a positive impact on the students beyond the classroom. Feedback from students mentioned increased happiness, excitement, and an improved overall quality of life, with some expressing feelings of flow and excitement in acquiring new knowledge. The data gathered confirmed the lasting changes observed in the students' lives. Responses indicated heightened focus, improved social relationships, enhanced self-reflection, and the development of self-awareness, motivation, confidence, and self-esteem. What follows here is a detailed description and analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected during and after the intervention.

Data Analysis and Findings

Responses to the Pre-Intervention and the Post-Intervention Wellbeing Questionnaires

To answer our research question and find out if personal development activities might positively influence students' wellbeing, in the next section the datasets that are related to the dimensions which are at the core of the Student WPQ are presented. These are: "purpose in life, personal growth, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, autonomy and positive relations" (Ryff & Singer, 1998, p. 119). For the purposes of the study, the 44 items were categorized into more easily identifiable domains (see Appendix Table 3).

Table 1 presents the individual changes between two points in time, namely, when the pre-intervention (October 2022) and post-intervention (February 2023) questionnaires were administered.

Table 1*Individual Changes in the Pre- and Post-Intervention Questionnaires*

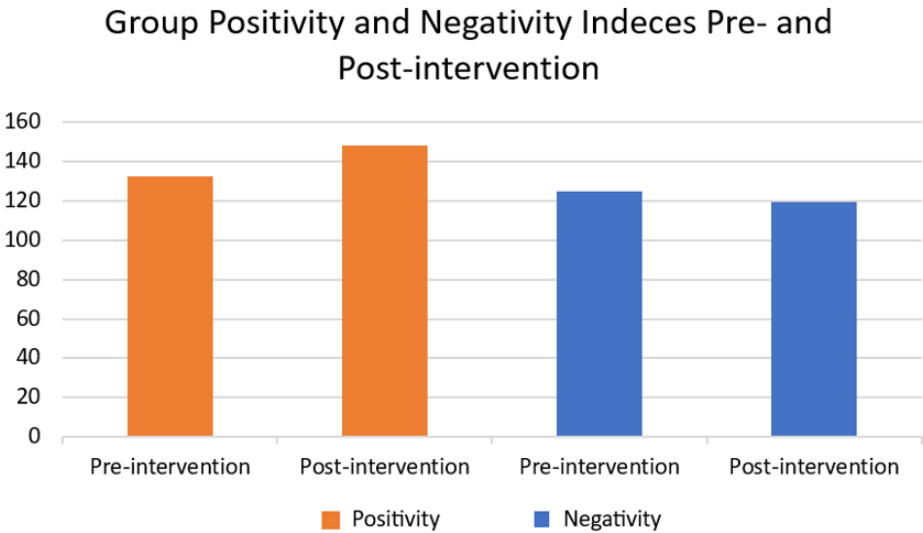
Student No.	Positivity Index pre-intervention	Positivity Index post-intervention	Change in percentage rates %	Negativity Index pre-intervention	Negativity Index post-intervention	Change in percentage rates %	
1	138	157	13.8	120	96	-20	
2	124	157	26.6	137	112	-18.2	
3	154	174	13	128	124	-3.1	
4	65	90	38.5	150	136	-9.3	
5	125	174	39.2	146	135	-7.5	
6	131	145	10.7	145	132	-9	
7	125	124	-0.8	107	121	13.1	
8	111	116	4.5	149	154	3.4	
9	97	123	26.8	146	158	8.2	
10	169	173	2.4	88	59	-33	
11	113	148	31	117	129	10.3	
12	120	93	-22.5	119	150	26.1	
13	182	154	-15.4	116	100	-13.8	
14	142	128	-9.9	132	138	4.5	
15	192	187	-2.6	76	194	155.3	
16	119	128	7.6	130	134	3.1	
17	191	179	-6.3	80	84	5	
18	109	114	4.6	167	141	-15.6	
19	85	169	98.8	155	93	-40	
20	128	164	28.1	116	96	-17.2	
21	173	192	11	100	75	-25	
22	136	152	11.8	128	108	-15.6	
23	122	139	13.9	124	121	-2.4	
24	124	178	43.5	119	74	-37.8	
			15.35				-1.6

In order to interpret that data in Table 1, we need to remember that Appendix Table 3 shows that the 44 questions contained in the Student WPQ were put into two groups: 21 reflecting positivity and 23 reflecting negativity. Table 1 contains the individual scores given by the students to these two groups of questions and the percentage rate change between those scores. Except for six students (No. 7, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17), whose positivity score was lower after the post-intervention by anything between -0.8 and -15.4% , the other 18 students' positivity rose within a range of 2.4 and 98.8%, the latter clearly being an outlier. The whole group's positivity score went up by a modest, but discernible 15.4%.

As for the negativity scores, it needs to be pointed out that the negativity percentage rates, when preceded by a minus sign, actually, imply an improvement (with negativity scores going down by that rate). Here again, we can observe a wide range. Eight students admitted that their negative thoughts and feelings were more intense at the time when they were filling in the second (post-intervention) questionnaire with a range between 3.1 and 26.1%. Student No. 15 (the ninth in this subgroup) is clearly in a crisis situation, as they declare that their negativity went up by 155.3%. The average change in the whole group is very close to zero (-1.6%), but if we were to add this improvement (lesser negativity) to the increase of positivity in the whole group, a noticeable figure of 17% is arrived at.

Figure 7 depicts the changes in positivity and negativity for the whole group.

Figure 7
Group Changes in the Pre- and Post-Interventions Questionnaires



The bar chart shows in a visually more accessible manner that positivity overall increased from a combined 132 points to 148 points and negativity decreased from 125 to 119 points.

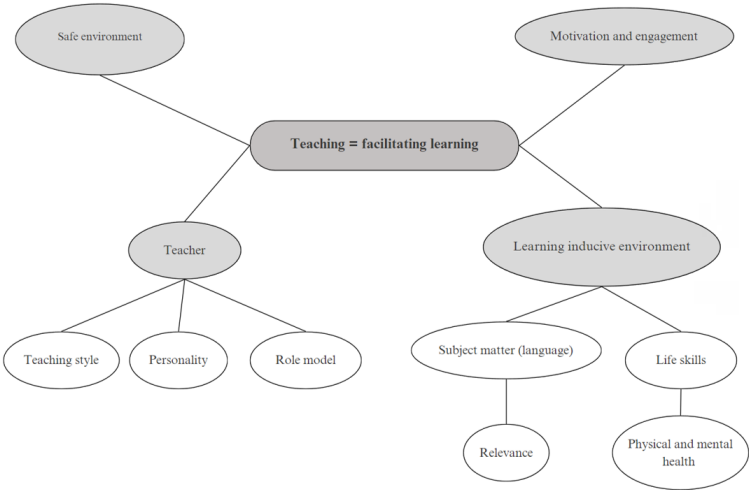
When looking at the data, we need to take into consideration that the two questionnaires were “snapshot” at a given point of time. Clearly, it is difficult to disentangle the various factors affecting wellbeing in the students’ lives because alongside the classroom activities there is a myriad of influences affecting them every day. Altogether, however, the findings show that there was an improvement in the students’ wellbeing, a contributing factor to which might have been their enhanced positive coping (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013). That this assumption may be true is borne out by the qualitative data provided by the student teachers at the end of the semester and, then again, four months later. It is to these results that we are turning now in order to triangulate the results of the Student WPQ.

C1 Writing Task for Gathering Qualitative Data

The qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework because it provides a useful six-phase guide for conducting this type of analysis. When evaluating the qualitative data gathered, the focus was on the themes that can be drawn out from the students’ writing task (reflective essay) and the delayed written feedback (see also Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The two sets of qualitative data were treated separately because the point in time when they were gathered and the response rate were different and so was the focus of the data gathering exercise.

As highlighted before, the authors were looking for opportunities to include activities that constituted PEPAs as described in Dikilitaş and Hanks (2018). These are activities that are conducted as part of an ordinary lesson plan, but the results can also be used for the purposes of data collection. In the present case, the writing task served the aim of preparing student teachers for a specific task at C1 level (reflective writing; writing a report) but it also provided valuable qualitative data, namely, a detailed account of how students perceived the experience of personal development activities and the teacher researcher’s role in introducing and managing those activities. Based on the students’ essays, Figure 9 illustrates the relationship that evolved between the various key constituents of learning and teaching in this specific instance.

Figure 8
The Mind Map of Memorable Learning



How Teaching Facilitates Learning

The student teachers emphasized several aspects that had helped them during the semester. They felt the teacher was able to create a safe and learning-conducive environment and her classes led to high levels of motivation and engagement. Classes were described as “amazing,” “ever more interesting,” “memorable” and “outstanding.” Several students emphasized that these were the best classes they had ever attended. One of them added: “I’ve never felt so excited to acquire new knowledge.” The teacher created a “fun and safe environment,” encouraged but did not force participation, while aimed at “involving all,” so that students were able to “feel comfortable to develop their skills.” Motivation was brought about by extra materials, fun activities and by “not only sticking to the book.”

Teaching Style

As student teachers, the respondents appear to have been very mindful of how they were being taught during the course. The teacher is praised for using “lots of strategies,” “good class management,” “paying attention to detail” and running well-planned and well-organized sessions. One student talked about receiving the “clearest, most detailed explanations,” others mentioned how classes were “non-traditional” characterized by a “dynamic atmosphere.”

Personality

Several students mentioned the fact that the teacher was exceptionally kind and caring. “I’ve never had a teacher who cares about her students’ mental health and well-being,” said one, while others added that she was “passionate,” emanating “contagious positive energy” and putting in a lot of effort so that “even at times when we are tired and unmotivated she tries to keep us busy and time flies.”

Role Model

Even though the C1 level course mainly had language development in its focus, the future language teachers looked to their teacher as a positive role model. “She has given me a new view of what teaching is” said one of the respondents, while another noticed “how a teacher can influence her students’ lives.” Statements such as “I will replicate how she teaches in my practicum” and “I have learned how to be a teacher through her example” show how someone whom one of the students calls a “pro master-educator” can make a lasting impression.

Learning Inductive Environment—Subject Matter Relevance

The students reflected on why they found their classes useful. They mentioned that by taking into account their interests and relating the coursebook and grammar points to students’ lives, the topics were “meaningful and life changing.” This linkage was spelt out in different ways, such as: “We learn the subject and at the same time learn about ourselves” by “addressing personal development issues.”

Learning Inductive Environment—Physical and Mental Wellbeing

The “meaningful content for our lives” and the “personalized topics,” many of which focused on self-development, had deep and memorable effect on the students. Some of the comments describe mental and emotional states in rather emotive terms: “Every time I leave the class I feel I can do this battle,” “I ended up crying with joy” (after the Priming activity), “I can remember all the lessons if I close my eyes” and “Classes are deep and touch your heart, there is a link between emotions and learning so we learn more this way.” All this has led to increased confidence and reduced levels of shyness. “Great learning and a big grin on my face” is how one of the students described their feelings after class, while others mentioned how they became “more courageous” and “more open-minded” as a result of their English classes.

Feedback on Personal Development Activities—Positives

One of the interesting elements of the feedback given to the teacher researcher is the confirmation that she was able to introduce the concept of wellbeing to her students in a way that created a sense of wellbeing (happiness and excitement) in class, namely, it enhanced the “quality of life” for all those engaged in the activities which, for some, created a sense of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Some students used expressions such as “[the] classes blew my mind,” “gripping lessons,” and how it was “impossible to be distracted” during class.

Feedback on Personal Development Activities—Negatives

Not all students were happy discussing private issues. One of the students said that there had been moments when they felt the conversations in class were too personal and, alongside with another student, suggested that such tasks should be given as homework and should not be made mandatory. Interestingly, there were four respondents who said that it was not them but their classmates who felt uncomfortable, one of them saying “don’t involve feelings too much, I don’t mind but others did.”

Feedback on Language Skills Development: Positives and Negatives

Less feedback came back from the students regarding the language skills development aspect of the course, but the student teachers appreciated the fact that learning was made easier by both the pedagogical approach (contextualized content) and the language teaching tools (activities) used:

We thought it would be really difficult but it hasn’t been the linguistic hell we thought it would be. (RS10)

We were learning the language while learning about our daily lives like how to reduce stress or what to eat. (RS14)

It is easy for us to learn the difficult vocabulary and grammar because of the different strategies, creative, funny activities. (RS18)

On the negative spectrum, some students found that there was no sufficient reinforcement of grammar rules or that the rules were not explained fully, and the phonetics part of the course was “confusing and complicated.” They also suggested that the teacher researcher should give more individual feedback because “students don’t all make the same mistakes.”

Delayed Feedback

The authors also wanted to find out if there might be any lasting effect of the intervention in the longer term, so the student participants were asked to reflect on what they took away from the self-development sessions after a lapse of four months. Altogether 14 students (out of 27) responded to the question: *Are there any changes you have made that have improved your life because of the English self-development lessons of last semester?*

The question is specifically asking about ‘changes,’ but many of the respondents described both the learning that had taken place and referred to their present (June 2023) mental and physical wellbeing.

General Remarks on Self-Reflection and Self-Awareness

The students’ responses reveal that there have indeed been lasting, positive changes in their lives. These refer to personal growth in both cognitive and social emotional skills. Several respondents described that they had become more focused and their social relationships have improved (P1, P2). Some of them felt that they were more self-reflective and were able to look at life from different perspectives (P2, P3). Self-awareness, increased motivation, growth in confidence and self-esteem (P7, P12, P13) were also mentioned. At least one student called the topics dealt with ‘life-changing’ (P5). The following excerpts highlight some of the major aspects of change that the self-development activities brought to the students’ lives.

Healthier Lifestyle Choices

More than half of the students (8) mentioned how they were now following a healthier diet, exercise more and spend less time on social media. This is confirmed by the concrete steps that they had taken in order to conduct a healthier lifestyle.

I started eating healthier than before, and I eliminate some junk food. I have been more concerned about my body. Therefore, I’m a more active person. I try to work out every day. (P4)

The discussions on veganism expanded my awareness and encouraged positive changes in my dietary choices because I started to eat healthier food. (P8)

I have been able to find motivation to change some bad habits, for example, the habit of wasting too much time on social networks. Now I try to make the most of every minute to do things that help me to be a better person. (P10)

I rarely eat junk food. However, I don't eat less meat than before. I don't believe that eating meat is the cause of my problems, but now I am more aware of the food I should eat to take care of myself. (P14)

Persisting Problems

This does not imply that all of the students' problems have been resolved. P1, P7, P13 and P14 made a mention of problems that they felt they had not managed to solve:

[...] lately I have a lot of anxiety and despair problems. (P1)

As for my mental health, I keep struggling with it, but that is because of outside factors. (P7)

Unfortunately, at this moment, I have lost all that motivation [that I had during the course] to keep going. (P13)

I keep struggling with my self-esteem and my social relationships. [...] I am still overthinking recent and past events; I think I need professional help. (P14)

Improved Language and Life Skills

The students' responses seem to suggest that the self-development sessions had a two-fold positive effect because beyond the personal development aspects, they contributed to language learning as well. The second excerpt also shows a shift in mindset.

The classes of the previous semester helped me a lot, not only to improve my level of English, but also in my personal growth. (P10)

Although I thought at the beginning that it is not necessary since I was only interested in learning English, I realized that as a student and a future teacher I should consider my well-being. (P13)

Favourite Activities

The students mentioned several activities that had made an impression on them, such as the Vision Board but, apparently, it was the Wheel of Life that had affected them the most in the long run.

The student teachers described the many ways in which the Wheel of Life had actually become a guiding force in their lives:

I would say that the activity of the wheel of life made me establish specific objectives. (P2)

[...] the activity of the wheel of life made me realize what I am doing to full fill [sic] my goals. [...] it inspired me to develop new habits. (P3)

I have my wheel of life in my bedroom, I always use it to motivate me to achieve the next step. (P4)

The Wheel of Life exercise guided me in creating a more balanced life, and I also could see how I was growing as a person in my personal and professional life. (P8)

It seems that the Wheel of Life is a powerful tool for taking stock of one's life and the balance between its various segments (Swart, 2022). The more out of line the circular shape is, the more there is an imbalance, which is visually easy to spot and appreciate. Working on it has proved to be a memorable activity and the expectation is that it will become a permanent feature in the language teaching toolkit of the student teachers who took part in the project.

In sum, the combination of an engaging coursebook, all the additional activities created for personal development as well as the teacher's inspiring attitude seem to have created the conditions for students to improve their overall language skills by a significant degree. The results are supported by recent studies which suggest that emotions can play a significant role in language learning motivation (Bown & White, 2010), and students can develop resilience towards negative emotions (Méndez López & Peña Aguilar, 2013).

A more detailed investigation of the correlation between student wellbeing and higher-level language skills would require the replication of this study with some modified elements and a data gathering process that is specifically oriented to this aspect—a plan that has been incorporated in the authors' future research activities.

Discussion

Altogether, the findings of the AR project, which was carried out at a public university in Ecuador, seem to echo the results of other studies carried out in several other countries: it appears that tertiary students' mental and emotional wellbeing is a widespread problem, one that only deteriorated during and after

COVID-19 (Sulis et al., 2021; McManus, 2019). In accordance with the studies conducted by Baik et al. (2019) and Upsher et al. (2022), both our quantitative and qualitative datasets suggest that the group of 27 student teachers involved in the AR project struggled with the same challenges as their international peers: they had low self-esteem, negative feelings about the self and problem-avoidance strategies. It also transpired that tertiary level students in the Global South face additional challenges that arise from socioeconomic issues, and these have become aggravated under COVID-19 and in the post-pandemic period (Grigera, 2022).

What started as an individual language teacher's quest for self-help strategies under COVID-19 and online remote teaching, turned into a piece of (exploratory) classroom research (Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2019) which gauged the levels of wellbeing in a group of student teachers whose language skills and pedagogical tools needed to be enhanced. The semester-long project successfully applied the strengths-based approach promoted by positive psychology (Seligman, 2011) and affective pedagogy (Patience, 2008), which acknowledges the power of emotions in any kind of knowledge sharing.

Exploiting the coursebook, which accommodated the personal development activities that the teacher researcher decided to introduce, it was possible for half of the students in the group to improve three main factors that affect student wellbeing: the affective, the physical and the cognitive factors. The responses given to the post-intervention Student Well-Being Process Questionnaire (Williams et al., 2017) as well as the feedback after the elapse of four months suggest that the intervention had both deep and lasting effect, at least on the participants who responded to the single question posed to them on the Google Form document (see Appendix 2). It appears that these students have taken away learnings that they can use both in their personal lives and as future language teachers to help themselves and their prospective students.

The methodological considerations guiding the project were manifold. The teacher researcher aimed at sharing her personal experience that helped her through the challenges created by COVID-19 and the extraordinarily difficult circumstances at the time when students returned to face-to-face classes after the pandemic had subsided in Ecuador. Her own interest in her students' lives in and outside of the classroom made her realize that applying to her students what had helped her might be the way forward (Moskowitz, 2024). The extensive and creative use of authentic materials, often coaching tools, led to deeper levels of engagement and lasting learning for a considerable number of participants. Involving a student teacher (Chalco) as a co-researcher is also a novel feature, one that is fully aligned with the principles of Exploratory Practice as a collaborative and inclusive approach to classroom research.

Research Question Answered

1. How far could incorporating personal development activities and materials into English lessons improve students' wellbeing?

Incorporating personal development activities and materials into English lessons have resulted in positive changes in student wellbeing. This suggests that such activities can become part of a teacher's toolkit. While it is difficult to completely disentangle how far the improvement in students' wellbeing was related to the specific personality traits of the teacher, for example, an optimistic attitude, positive energy, enthusiasm, or the activities, such as the Wheel of Life, it appears to be the case that individual teachers can achieve a lot when the activities conducted in class are not only exciting, but have a deep connection with the students' lived experiences.

Limitations and Recommendations

Limitations

From a methodological point of view, the present study has several limitations with regard to the following aspects.

Potential Gender Bias

Out of the 24 students that constituted the sample for the research study, there were 19 females (79%) and five males (21%). Research studies (Graves et al., 2021; Cabanach et al., 2013; Martínez et al., 2019) suggest that females and males self-declared stress levels and coping mechanisms are different and, consequently, the gender distribution in the group surveyed may have resulted in an over-representation of female coping strategies.

The Use of a Written Task for Feedback Instead of Other Data Gathering Tools (e.g., Semi-Structured Interviews)

Semi-structured interviews can provide essential data that "allow us to better understand the singularity or the experience that individuals or groups of individuals have of their relations with others, with institutions, or more broadly of social phenomena" (Pin, 2023, p. 1). In our case, however, beyond class time and homework assignment limitations, the purpose was to use the

written task as a PEPA. Setting a writing task served as preparation for the written part of the C1 exam (reflective writing or writing a report) and, simultaneously, allowed the researchers to gather data on the effectiveness of personal development activities of students' wellbeing.

Beyond research methodology, one limitation that the researchers have identified is the fact that the Student Well-Being Process Questionnaire administered to the participants does not include any questions related to the students' economic situation, even though probably in many contexts, and especially in the Global South, this is a very real problem that has affected student wellbeing, particularly in the post-pandemic period. If the researchers were to replicate the present study, they would adapt the questionnaire to include this aspect.

Recommendations

Suggestions for future projects include similar AR interventions in other ELT contexts, the use of refined and well-calibrated wellbeing questionnaires, and projects that might aim at discovering any potential links between not only wellbeing and performance and resilience, but wellbeing and improved language skills as well. One avenue could be exploring the active vocabulary use of students after they have been exposed to rich and varied teaching materials of high-level authenticity.

Conclusion

The present AR report aimed at describing what one language teacher at a specific tertiary level institution was able to do in order to improve their students' wellbeing. By measuring the wellbeing index of a cohort of 27 student teachers both at the beginning and at the end of the first semester in 2022/2023, the researchers were able confirm that there is a beneficial effect of personal development activities on students' feelings of self-worth and positive outlook on life. While it should be the task of every educational institution to construct multiple levels of help for students dealing with emotional stress, there is a lot that teachers can do at classroom level. To succeed in this effort requires enthusiasm and positive energy from each and every teacher who understands that student wellbeing cannot be separated from teacher wellbeing, and is ready to work on their own self-development before starting to share the knowledge gained. The complex system of classroom dynamics requires that students and

teachers search together for better learning outcomes and become more resilient in the process whilst jointly aiming to improve the quality of life in the classroom. Even though the AR project did not intend to establish a direct relationship between student wellbeing and improved language skills, it might be assumed that a stress-free and trusting environment can only help overcome language and performance anxiety. With the literature on student and teacher wellbeing expanding, the hope is that future research projects will contribute to this academic area by providing new understandings that may create a pathway to enhanced cognitive performance and emotional equilibrium.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all 27 participants who were engaged in the personal development activities of the C1 General English course from October 2022 to February 2023. Without their enthusiasm and resilience this project could not have been successfully accomplished.

Endnotes

1 The word ‘wellbeing’ is either spelt as one word or is hyphenated. In this article it is spelt as one word unless our sources use the hyphenated form.

2 PINE is the Spanish acronym for Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros. Translated into English, it is the Department of Pedagogy for National and Foreign Languages.

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Students’ Well-Being Questionnaire (Williams et al., 2017)

Name or pseudonym

Avoid thinking too much about your answers, your first instinct is usually the best.

1) I have been feeling in good spirits. (For example: I feel optimistic about the future, feel good about myself and confident in my abilities.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

2) Overall, I feel that I have low self-esteem. (For example: At times, I feel that I am no good at all, at times I feel useless, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

3) On a scale of one to ten, how depressed would you say you are in general? (For example: feeling “down,” no longer looking forward to things or enjoying things that you used to.)
Not at all depressed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely depressed

4) I have been feeling good about my relationships with others. (For example: Getting along well with friends/colleagues, feeling loved by those close to me.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

5) I feel able to relax when I want to.
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

6) I feel energetic and interested when I need to be.
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

7) I don’t really get on well with people. (For example: I tend to get jealous of others, I tend to get touchy, I often get moody.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

8) Thinking about myself and how I normally feel, in general, I mostly experience positive feelings. (For example: I feel alert, inspired, determined, attentive.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

9) In general, I feel optimistic about the future. (For example: I usually expect the best, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad, It's easy for me to relax.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

10) I am confident in my ability to solve problems that I might face in life. (For example: I can usually handle whatever comes my way, If I try hard enough I can overcome difficult problems, I can stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

11) I feel that I am laid-back about things. (For example: I do just enough to get by, I tend to not complete what I've started, I find it difficult to get down to work.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

12) I am not interested in new ideas. (For example: I tend to avoid philosophical discussions, I don't like to be creative, I don't try to come up with new perspectives on things.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

13) Overall, I feel that I have positive self-esteem. (For example: On the whole I am satisfied with myself, I am able to do things as well as most other people, I feel that I am a person of worth.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

14) I feel that I have the social support I need. (For example: There is someone who will listen to me when I need to talk, there is someone who will give me good advice, there is someone who shows me love and affection.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

15) Thinking about myself and how I normally feel, in general, I mostly experience negative feelings. (For example: I feel upset, hostile, ashamed, nervous.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

16) I feel that I have a disagreeable nature. (For example: I can be rude, harsh, unsympathetic.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

Coping Style:**Problem Focused**

17) When I find myself in stressful situations, I take a problem-focused approach. (For example: I take one step at a time, I change things about the situation or myself to deal with the issue, I don't let my feelings interfere too much.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

Seeks Social Support

18) When I find myself in stressful situations, I look for social support. (For example: I talk to someone to get more information, I ask someone for advice, I talk to someone about how I'm feeling.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

Blame Self

19) When I find myself in stressful situations, I blame myself. (For example: I criticize or lecture myself, I realise I brought the problem on myself.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

Wishful Thinking

20) When I find myself in stressful situations, I wish for things to improve. (For example: I hope a miracle will happen, I wish I could change things about myself or circumstances, I daydream about a better situation.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

Avoidance

21) When I find myself in stressful situations, I try to avoid the problem. (For example: I keep things to myself, I go on as if nothing has happened, I try to make myself feel better by eating/drinking/smoking.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

22) I prefer to keep to myself. (For example: I don't talk much to other people, I feel withdrawn, I prefer not to draw attention to myself.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

23) I feel that I have an agreeable nature. (For example: I feel sympathy toward people in need, I like being kind to people, I'm co-operative.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

24) In general, I feel pessimistic about the future. (For example: If something can go wrong for me it will, I hardly ever expect things to go my way, I rarely count on good things happening to me.)
Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

25) I feel that I am a conscientious person. (For example: I am always prepared, I make plans and stick to them, I pay attention to details.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

26) I feel that I can get on well with others. (For example: I'm usually relaxed around others, I tend not to get jealous, I accept people as they are.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

27) I feel that I am open to new ideas. (For example: I enjoy philosophical discussion, I like to be imaginative, I like to be creative.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

28) Overall, I feel that I am satisfied with my life. (For example: In most ways my life is close to my ideal, so far I have gotten the important things I want in life.)

Disagree strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Agree strongly

29) On a scale of one to ten, how happy would you say you are in general?

Extremely unhappy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely happy

30) On a scale of one to ten, how anxious would you say you are in general? (For example: feeling tense or "wound up", unable to relax, feelings of worry or panic.)

Not at all anxious 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely anxious

31) In general, how would you rate your physical health.

Extremely poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely good

32) Overall, how stressful is your life?

Not at all stressful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very Stressful

Please consider the following elements of student life and indicate overall to what extent they have been a part of your life over the past 6 months. Remember to use the examples as guidance rather than trying to consider each of them specifically:

33) Challenges to your development. (For example: important decisions about your education and future career, dissatisfaction with your written or mathematical ability, struggling to meet your own or others' academic standards.)

Not at all part of my life 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very much part of my life

34) Time pressures. (For example: too many things to do at once, interruptions of your school work, a lot of responsibilities.)

Not at all part of my life 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very much part of my life

35) Academic dissatisfaction. (For example: disliking your studies, finding courses uninteresting, dissatisfaction with school.)

Not at all part of my life 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very much part of my life

36) Romantic problems. (For example: decisions about intimate relationships, conflicts with boyfriends'/girlfriends' family, conflicts with boyfriend/girlfriend.)

Not at all part of my life 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very much part of my life

37) Societal annoyances. (For example: getting ripped off or cheated in the purchase of services, social conflicts over smoking, disliking fellow students.)

Not at all part of my life 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very much part of my life

38) Social mistreatment. (For example: social rejection, loneliness, being taken advantage of.)

Not at all part of my life 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very much part of my life

39) Friendship problems. (For example: conflicts with friends, being let down or disappointed by friends, having your trust betrayed by friends.)

Not at all part of my life 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very much part of my life

Please state how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

40) There is a person or people in my life who would provide tangible support for me when I need it. (For example: money for tuition or books, use of their car, furniture for a new apartment.)

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strongly Agree

41) There is a person or people in my life who would provide me with a sense of belonging. (For example: I could find someone to go to a movie with me, I often get invited to do things with other people, I regularly hang out with friends.)

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strongly Agree

42) There is a person or people in my life with whom I would feel perfectly comfortable discussing any problems I might have. (For example: difficulties with my social life, getting along with my parents, sexual problems.)

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Strongly Agree

43) In the last two weeks did you find that you have problems of memory (e.g. forgetting where you put things), attention (e.g. failures of concentration), or action. (For example: doing the wrong thing)?

- a) at university
- | | | | | |
|------------|--------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Not at all | Rarely | Occasionally | Quite frequently | Very frequently |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
- b) outside of university
- | | | | | |
|------------|--------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Not at all | Rarely | Occasionally | Quite frequently | Very frequently |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

44) How frequently in the last two weeks did you find that you were not getting as much done as you would have liked?

- a) at university
- | | | | | |
|------------|--------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Not at all | Rarely | Occasionally | Quite frequently | Very frequently |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
- b) outside of university
- | | | | | |
|------------|--------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Not at all | Rarely | Occasionally | Quite frequently | Very frequently |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Delayed Feedback Question

Are there any changes you have made that have improved your life because of the English self-development lessons of last semester?

Table 1
Quantitative Data Gathering Tools

Quantitative	No. of students	No. of respondents	Coding
Pre-intervention wellbeing questionnaire	27	24	S1 to S24*
Post-intervention wellbeing questionnaire	27	24	S1 to S24*

S = Student

*The same code corresponds to the same student in the two questionnaires.

Table 2
Qualitative Data Gathering Tools

Qualitative	No. of students	No. of respondents	Coding
Reflective essay on course activities	27	27	RS1 to RS27*
Delayed feedback on course activities	27	14	P1 to P14*

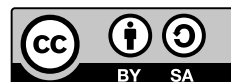
RS = Reflective Student

P = Participant

*The same code does not correspond to the same student in the RS and the P category.


Table 3
Positive and Negative Items in the Student WPQ

Positive items	Negative items
Positive feelings about self, others and relationships, optimistic mindset, happiness level: Q1, Q4, Q8, Q9, Q13, Q14, Q23, Q26, Q28, Q29, Q40, Q41, Q42	Negative feelings about self, others and relationships, pessimistic mindset, unhappiness level: Q2, Q7, Q15, Q16, Q19, Q24, Q30, Q36 Q37, Q38, Q39
Positive coping: Q5, Q10, Q17, Q18	Negative coping: Q20, Q21, Q22
Mental and physical health: Q6, Q25, Q27, Q31	Mental and physical health: Q3, Q11, Q12, Q32
	Academic difficulties and cognitive problems: Q33, Q34, Q35, Q43, Q44



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Uncovering Procrastination in Language Teaching: Self-Efficacy, Anxiety, and Situational Influences

Abstract

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the relationship between English language teachers' teaching efficacy, emotional experiences, and situation and task-related procrastination. It aimed to explore both self-reported teaching self-efficacy beliefs and the factors influencing language teachers' procrastination behaviors and emotions during task delay. A total of 305 Croatian EFL teachers participated in this study. Descriptive, correlation, and directed content analyses were carried out. According to the findings, the Croatian language teachers viewed themselves as highly effective in the classroom and they also reported engaging in procrastination infrequently. When inquired about language proficiency-related anxiety, they admitted having experienced it sporadically. Those confident in utilizing instructional strategies and implementing classroom management strategies procrastinated less and reported lower anxiety levels. Qualitative analysis revealed that demotivating or fatiguing tasks, especially administrative and testing-related ones, instigated procrastination, among others. When procrastinating, the teachers reported primarily unpleasant emotions, such as anxiety, nervousness, frustration, and guilt.

Keywords: self-efficacy beliefs, anxiety, procrastination, EFL teachers, tasks, emotions

Let us set the scene—we have a language teacher and a class full of language learners. The teacher, armed with experience, knowledge, and enthusiasm for their work, is in full teacher mode, engaging the class with questions, thought-provoking prompts, and tasks that are meant to enrich the language learning process. We might even say that there is potential for inspiring the learners to become not only proficient but independent and curious language users. Interestingly, further examination may reveal that this seemingly

effective teacher also happens to grapple with insecurity, low self-confidence, and emotions that lead them to delay their work till the very last minute. Procrastination entails deliberately postponing a planned activity, even when one is aware of the potential negative consequences. It is associated with lower well-being, and higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, among others (Stead et al., 2010). Steel (2007) lists several other correlating factors, such as low self-efficacy, perfectionism, neuroticism, and task aversion. Yet, procrastination is not merely a behavioral issue; it often stems from deeper psychological factors that warrant examination. One such factor is self-efficacy, a construct that represents our beliefs in what we think we can do, not what we can do (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Every teacher goes through what Bandura (1997) calls information processing which entails analyzing the task in front of them with respect to their teaching abilities. Research has shown that self-efficacy beliefs determine the choices teachers make, the tasks they engage in, their behavior, and how long they persist in the face of obstacles. Teachers with lower levels of self-efficacy expect to fail, expend less effort and time, and may choose to retreat despite being aware of a solution that may aid them in attaining their goals (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

Teaching is a multi-role job filled with human interaction, one that requires a high degree of autonomy, self-regulation, and the ability to cope with unforeseen social and emotional events. Language teachers, unlike their colleagues who teach other subjects, are unique in that they engage in emotional labor pertaining to managing the dynamic interplay between identity, language, and social reputation (Gkonou & Miller, 2019). These teachers report lower levels of self-efficacy and language anxiety because they use a language that is not their L1 to instruct their learners (Horwitz, 1996). Like language learners, some teachers who are foreign language users suffer from anxiety tied to the use of the target language and their proficiency levels (Dewaele, 2018). However, language teachers have the propensity to entertain irrational beliefs about the standards they are to attain, and they tend to enlarge the smallest of imperfections in their speech production. A study carried out by Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) listed different sources of foreign language anxiety, among which were perfectionist tendencies (e.g., unrealistic language learning goals) and exaggerated responses to errors. All the above-listed variables can lead to lower levels of confidence in a teacher's ability to instruct learners, use the target language appropriately, and regulate their actions. Should they find themselves under emotional duress, teachers may succumb to dilatory behavior as a way of coping.

While academic procrastination has been extensively studied in various contexts, including second language research (e.g., Asmah & Sayin, 2022; Bobe et al., 2024; Khooei-Oskoei et al., 2021), less is known about its impact on language teachers' instruction quality and well-being. The study of language

teacher procrastination represents an underexplored area within the broader field of academic procrastination research. Given the unique challenges faced by language educators, such as managing emotional labor and navigating language anxiety, understanding the causes and implications of procrastination among language teachers is crucial for ensuring their well-being and instructional quality. Thus, this study aims to explore the relationship between Croatian EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, anxiety, and procrastination. It also seeks to investigate the causes of procrastination, activities/tasks promoting dilatory behavior, and the emotional experiences involved. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to offer a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the phenomena under investigation. By utilizing multiple research methods, including qualitative inquiry, the study enhances the validity of the data by capturing the teachers' experiences from diverse perspectives and angles.

Theoretical Overview

Language Teacher Self-Efficacy (LTSE) Beliefs

Bandura (1997) defines perceived self-efficacy as the ability to organize and execute actions needed to achieve specific goals, influencing motivation, well-being, and a sense of accomplishment (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007). Four sources of efficacy expectations are presented: mastery experiences, physiological and emotional states, vicarious experiences, and social persuasion. Mastery experiences, based on past successes or failures, strongly shape self-efficacy beliefs. Physiological and emotional states also play a role; higher enthusiasm enhances feelings of mastery, while increased anxiety undermines them. Vicarious experiences involve modeling, where observing others' successes or failures influences one's beliefs accordingly. Social persuasion, such as feedback from superiors or colleagues, can motivate or demotivate, depending on the credibility and expertise of the source. Teachers evaluate both the demands of the teaching task and their competence in meeting those demands. This includes considering factors like available resources, student characteristics, and contextual elements. This dual assessment involves reflecting on personal strengths and weaknesses (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teachers may perceive their teaching self-efficacy differently from external assessments impacting their instructional approaches (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Overestimating their abilities and investing extra effort can help them overcome challenges. Additionally, teachers' self-efficacy beliefs influence their instructional actions and outcome expectations. Dörnyei and Ushioda

(2011) distinguish between teaching efficacy, which reflects teachers' beliefs in facilitating student learning, and personal efficacy, which illustrates how teachers evaluate their effectiveness as educators. This division highlights the multifaceted nature of teacher self-efficacy, informed by Bandura's (1997) four sources, and described as cyclical.

LTSE beliefs in the L2 domain have been investigated with respect to different domains, predominantly language proficiency (Chacón, 2005; Faez, Karas, & Uchihara, 2019; Ghasemboland & Hashim, 2013; Lee, 2009), then grammar instruction (Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2019); motivation and burnout (Song, 2022), live stream teaching (Liu et al., 2021), emotions and emotional labor strategies (Dumančić, 2021), discourses on effective teaching practices (Phan, 2015), and teaching enjoyment, grit, and work engagement (Zhang et al., 2023), to name a few. To briefly illustrate some of the studies, Chacón (2005) explored the self-efficacy beliefs of Venezuelan English language teachers. Her research revealed a direct association between teachers' self-efficacy and their perceived language proficiency. This suggests that teachers who viewed themselves as more proficient in English also demonstrated greater confidence in their teaching capabilities. Ghasemboland and Hashim (2013) explored the link between non-native English as an LTSE belief and their English proficiency. Like Chacón (2005), they found a positive correlation between teachers' perceived language proficiency and their self-efficacy in teaching. In their investigation of factors influencing self-efficacy in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Phan and Locke (2015) reported that social persuasion emerged as a primary influence on LTSE beliefs among university teachers in Vietnam. The authors found that various sources interacted to shape self-efficacy dimensions and highlighted the impact of cultural aspects and contextual changes on teacher self-efficacy. Additionally, Phan and Locke (2015) emphasized the importance of improving leadership, teaching conditions, and professional development programs to enhance teacher self-efficacy.

Foreign Language Teacher Anxiety (FLTA)

The early era of teacher emotion research was marked by the interest in teacher anxiety. Horwitz's (1996) study highlighted the adverse impact anxiety had on foreign language teaching, particularly for non-native language instructors whose confidence in their target language proficiency was compromised. Non-native foreign language teachers may experience anxiety due to the unpredictable nature of contemporary language classrooms (El Ouastani, 2020). This unpredictability can coincide with other sources of FLTA, such as perception of one's competence and cultural and linguistic background; moreover, it can be particularly challenging for teachers who have invested significant

time and effort in mastering the target language. Language instructors, who are also language learners, have likely faced various anxiety-provoking situations during their language acquisition journeys. Horwitz's (1996) seminal work served as a springboard for all subsequent research on the topic. FLTA has been associated with perfectionist inclinations such as setting unrealistic language learning objectives and reacting excessively to errors (Horwitz & Gregersen, 2002). A recent study carried out among 151 Chinese college English language teachers revealed the primary drivers of foreign language anxiety among the respondents, such as fear of language inadequacy, fear of negative outcomes, and lack of confidence in the teachers' English competence (Liu & Wu, 2021).

Anxiety has also been investigated in relation to emotional experiences in the classroom. The primary cause of teaching anxiety stemmed from insufficient English proficiency, trailed by low confidence levels, limited understanding of linguistics and education, inadequate class preparation, and comparison with native teachers (Kim & Kim, 2004). The anxiety levels among foreign language teachers correlated with their teaching experience in the language. As language teachers accumulated more experience teaching the target language, anxiety diminished (Canessa, 2004). Other classroom-focused research revealed that FLTA was accompanied by other unpleasant emotions (e.g., frustration and irritability) to do with carrying out different classroom activities (e.g., those tied to speaking or content revision) (Dumančić, 2021). FLTA has also been examined with regard to experiences in teaching practicum. During the teaching practicum, 52 pre-service EFL teachers in Korea experienced anxiety primarily due to fear of speaking English in the classroom and lack of confidence in the target language (Yoon, 2012). Another study showed a discernible rise in FLTA among pre-service teachers compared to their non-practicum counterparts. Primary contributors to FLTA encompassed fear of negative evaluation, self-assessment of second language proficiency, and limited teaching experience (El Ouastani, 2021; Li et al., 2023). Current studies on language teacher emotions and work-related experiences often adopt multi-method, holistic approaches to capture the complexities of these phenomena. For instance, Frascini and Park (2021) employed Q methodology to examine shared anxiety experiences among Korean second language teachers. It underscored their diverse interactions within the profession and explored participant subjectivities comprehensively. Utilizing an appraisal-based emotion theory framework, Goetze's (2023) research examined the intricate emotional dynamics of teachers and the nuances of language teacher emotions during classroom interactions. Anxiety served as the focal point, with vignette methodology employed for emotion elicitation.

Foreign Language Teacher Procrastination

Procrastination involves voluntarily postponing intended actions, influenced by both personal and situational factors, despite awareness of potential negative outcomes (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). It has been extensively theorized, with scholars exploring both its positive and negative aspects (Chu & Choi, 2005; Steel et al., 2001). While some view procrastination as a deliberate delay despite expecting unfavorable outcomes (Steel, 2007), others highlight its undesirable nature (Beswick & Mann, 1994). Internally, emotions like shame and anxiety, low self-efficacy, and task characteristics such as complexity and lack of interest contribute to procrastination (Grunschel et al., 2013; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Steel, 2007). Externally, factors like high workload and poor course organization impact procrastination (Grunschel et al., 2013). Additionally, task traits like the timing of rewards and punishments, as well as task aversiveness, play significant roles (Grunschel et al., 2013; Steel, 2007). In addition, scholars have identified three key criteria for procrastination: (1) voluntary delay, (2) a gap between intention and action (Steel, 2007), and (3) expectation of unfavorable outcomes followed by a sense of unease, such as guilt (Ferrari et al., 1998; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). This consensus underscores the complexity of procrastination and provides clarity on its defining characteristics. Academic procrastination, often termed “student procrastination,” involves delaying intended study-related actions despite expecting negative consequences (Steel & Klingsieck, 2016). It has been extensively researched from various perspectives, such as the correlation between language students’ procrastination, satisfaction with their major, and motivation (Bekleyen, 2017); the impact of procrastination on achievement in language learning and classroom anxiety (Akpur, 2017); reasons for procrastination and coping strategies (Asmah & Sayin, 2022); the effects of procrastination on language learning and its use as a strategy (Khooei-Oskooei et al., 2021); and the relationship between learner self-efficacy beliefs and procrastination (Özer & Yetkin, 2018).

Research on academic procrastination surpasses that on teachers, especially in the L2 field. Laybourn, Frenzel, and Fenzl (2019) highlighted the limited empirical evidence regarding teachers’ procrastination, indicating potential negative effects. Pertinent to the current study is the research conducted by Özer and Yetkin (2018), which aimed to examine the correlation between academic procrastination behaviors and academic self-efficacy beliefs among pre-service English language teachers. While other L2 studies touch on procrastination, they do not directly address language teachers. For instance, Yadafarin and Farjami (2019) explored procrastination from both language teachers’ and learners’ perspectives, while Khooei-Oskooei, Ahangari, and Seifoori (2022) investigated teachers’ perceptions of their learners’ procrastination. However,

the scarcity of teacher-focused research suggests a need for further exploration in this area.

The Relationship Between Self-Efficacy Beliefs, Anxiety, and Procrastination

Bearing the lack of available studies on teacher procrastination in mind, the coming section will also present the works that have investigated procrastination regarding the variables examined among learners/students. As for the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and procrastination, research has shown that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy reported lower levels of procrastination over time (Hall et al., 2019). The authors conducted a longitudinal study on a large sample of faculty participants ($n = 3,071$) to investigate the relations between self-efficacy, procrastination, and burnout. Similarly, a negative association was reported between self-efficacy beliefs and academic procrastination among pre-service English language teachers (Özer & Yetkin, 2018). This finding suggests that participants with higher self-efficacy were less likely to postpone their academic obligations.

The importance of self-efficacy beliefs for self-regulation in predicting procrastination was underscored by Klassen et al. (2008) in their study on academic procrastination among 456 undergraduates. The authors hold that negative procrastinators, characterized by higher levels of procrastination, exhibit both immediate and long-term task management errors, emphasizing the need to enhance self-efficacy to mitigate procrastination tendencies and enhance academic success. As for the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, anxiety, and procrastination, it has been observed that undergraduate students with higher levels of self-efficacy in using self-regulatory strategies experienced lower levels of anxiety and engaged in procrastination less frequently (Yerdelen et al., 2016). This indicates that higher self-efficacy could protect against procrastination driven by anxiety, as those confident in task management tend to experience less anxiety and, consequently, procrastinate less. Given the apparent research gap on research focusing on procrastination behaviors of foreign language teachers, this study aims to examine how Croatian EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, anxiety levels, and procrastination tendencies are interrelated. Additionally, it seeks to uncover the underlying causes of procrastination among these teachers, identify specific tasks or activities that promote procrastination, and explore the emotional experiences associated with procrastinatory behavior.

Aims and Method

Aims

This mixed-methods study aimed to examine the relationship between language teachers' self-reported self-efficacy beliefs, anxiety, and procrastination, as well as to explore which situations and tasks related to language teaching led to procrastination and what emotions surrounded them. The present study follows the explanatory sequential design of mixed-methods research (Creswell & Clark, 2017) because it begins with the quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by the qualitative section. The primary objective of the initial quantitative phase is to identify relationships or patterns, which will subsequently be investigated in more depth during the qualitative phase. The following research questions were postulated for the quantitative portion of the research:

1. What are the levels of self-reported teaching self-efficacy among Croatian EFL teachers?
2. What are the levels of self-reported foreign language anxiety among Croatian EFL teachers?
3. What are the levels of self-reported procrastination among Croatian EFL teachers?
4. What is the relationship between teaching self-efficacy, foreign language anxiety, and procrastination?

Hypothesis related to the fourth research question:

H1: EFL teachers who report higher levels of teaching self-efficacy and lower levels of anxiety will display lower levels of procrastination.

The following research questions were posed for the qualitative segment of the research:

1. Why do Croatian EFL teachers (decide to) procrastinate?
2. Which specific situations and tasks commonly trigger procrastination among Croatian EFL teachers?
3. What emotional experiences do Croatian EFL teachers report when they find themselves procrastinating?

Sample

A total of 305 Croatian EFL teachers participated in the present study, among them 286 (93.8%) females, 18 (5.9%) males, and one (0.3%) gender non-conforming. All the teachers took part in both the quantitative and qualitative

segments of the study. The participants were employed in different institutions, for example, 188 (61.6%) worked in elementary schools, 106 in high schools (34.8%), and six at a university (2%). The average age was 43 (SD = 8.803), while the average working experience was 18 (SD = 8.583). The descriptive data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Analysis of the Sample

		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	18	5.9%
	Female	286	93.8%
Place of work	Elementary school	188	61.6%
	High school	106	34.8%
	University	6	2%

	Number	Mean	Stand. deviation
Age	305	43.56	8.803
Years of experience	305	18.07	8.583

Instruments

Given the nature of the research, different types of instruments were used in this study. In the quantitative portion, a four-part questionnaire was administered to explore the relationship between the participants’ self-efficacy beliefs, procrastination behaviors, and language anxiety. The first section of the survey required the participants to provide information regarding their gender, age, place of employment, as well as years of working experience. In the second section, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy’s (2001) Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) was used to measure the participants’ level of confidence across three distinct domains, namely, the efficacy in student engagement (e.g., How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?), use of instructional strategies (e.g., To what extent can you craft good questions

for your students?), and classroom management (e.g., How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?). The instrument consisted of 12 items and teachers used a 9-point Likert scale to indicate the level of their efficacy, ranging from 1 (nothing) to 9 (a great deal). The third section included Steel's (2010) Pure Procrastination Scale (PPS) which aimed to inquire about the frequency of engaging in specific procrastination behaviors. The instrument comprised three subscales with a total of 12 items. The subscales are as follows: namely, decisional delay (e.g., I delay making a decision until it's too late.), implemental delay (e.g., I am continually saying "I'll do it tomorrow."), and delay in meeting deadlines (e.g., I am not very good at meeting deadlines.). The teachers denoted the frequency of engaging in certain behaviors using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very seldom) to 5 (very often). Lastly, Horwitz's (2008) Teacher Foreign Language Anxiety Scale was used in the fourth section; the teachers utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree; 5 – strongly agree) to express the extent to which certain situations make them feel apprehensive. The instrument consisted of 18 items (e.g., It frightens me when I don't understand what someone is saying in my foreign language). With respect to the qualitative portion, three open-ended questions were presented to further delve into EFL teachers' procrastination, specifically its causes, related activities, and emotions. The questions are as follows:

Q1) Why do you (decide) to procrastinate?

Q2) What situations and tasks cause you to procrastinate? List examples of both and briefly elaborate on them.

Q3) What emotions do you experience when you engage in procrastination? Feel free to provide different examples and emotions accompanying them (e.g., I feel X when I delay doing Y).

Procedure and Data Analysis

The data were collected through an online questionnaire constructed in the Google Forms workspace. The link to the survey was disseminated through various channels, such as representatives of the Education and Teacher Training Agency, the Croatian Association of Teachers of English, and County Professional Councils. The ethical considerations were respected as the participants were informed of the aims of the study, their right to willingly participate and opt out of the research, as well as the fact that their anonymity would be ensured throughout the entire process. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier code, such as T1, T2, T3, etc. This allowed the author to track the responses back to individual participants. Regarding data analysis, quantitative data was subjected to descriptive (frequencies) and Pearson correlation analysis using the SPSS 26 package. The correlation analysis was carried out

to investigate the relationships between the variables tested, namely, teacher sense of efficacy, language teacher anxiety, and procrastination.

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for each scale. Qualitative data was subjected to directed content analysis with the help of NVivo 14 software designed to locate patterns and relations in transcripts, among others. The analysis entailed importing the data into the software. The author first conducted a general overview of all the data to gain a better understanding of the data set. Following the deductive coding approach and the research questions, the data was first placed under broader categories. The deductive coding approach involves starting with a predefined set of codes, which are then applied to the data. The initial codes, such as situations and tasks that cause EFL teachers to procrastinate or emotions experienced when procrastinating, were identified based on the research questions and then refined through iterative review. To aid with the data analysis a qualitative codebook was created with the help of the qualitative software used. After coding the responses thematically, the author organized them under the three major categories identified: reasons for procrastination, situations and tasks causing procrastination, and emotions experienced during procrastination. This process allowed for a more systematic analysis of the qualitative data, ensuring that relevant themes were captured and explored in depth. Different codes emerged during data analysis, however, the most frequent ones were highlighted (color-coded in the codebook to help the author separate them from the other) and reported in the paper.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was carried out on three distinct scales, namely, the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), Pure Procrastination Scale (PPS), and Teacher Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (TFLAS). The results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2
Descriptive Analysis of the Scales Used in the Research—Means, Number, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients

Scale	Range	Subscale(s)	N	M	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale	9-point scale (1–Nothing, 9–A great deal)	Efficacy for student engagement	305	6.89	1.09	$\alpha = .75$
		Efficacy for instructional strategies	305	7.70	.93	$\alpha = .82$
		Efficacy for classroom management	305	7.32	1.16	$\alpha = .90$
Pure Procrastination Scale	5-point scale (1 – very seldom or not true of me; 5 – very often or true of me)	Decisional delay	305	2.16	1.01	$\alpha = .87$
		Implemental delay	305	2.43	1.17	$\alpha = .95$
		Delay in meeting deadlines	305	2.03	.90	$\alpha = .83$
Teacher Foreign Language Anxiety Scale	5-point scale (1 – strongly disagree; 5 – strongly agree)	–	305	2.08	.64	$\alpha = .88$

Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated for the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale, and it revealed good internal consistency. The findings indicated a moderate to high level of confidence in the participants’ ability to teach. Specifically, the Croatian EFL teachers revealed a slightly higher level of efficacy in student engagement ($M = 6.89$, $SD = 1.09$). This would imply that they feel quite confident in their capacity to get their learners to do schoolwork and to make them believe they can do well in school. The score related to efficacy in classroom management was higher ($M = 7.32$, $SD = 1.16$), indicating that the Croatian EFL teachers felt more confident in their ability to control disruptive learner behavior and get learners to follow the rules. The highest score was observed in relation to efficacy in instructional strategies ($M = 7.70$, $SD = .93$). This would imply

that the teachers have more confidence when it comes to crafting appropriate questions for learners and using a variety of assessment strategies.

With respect to the Pure Procrastination Scale, the internal consistency coefficients for this scale were good. The results obtained revealed low scores across all three domains examined in the descriptive analyses. To illustrate, the findings tied to the first one, labeled Decisional delay, were quite low ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.01$), indicating that the EFL teachers in this study rarely wait till the very last minute to decide or delay acting upon the decision once it has been made. The highest among scores were detected in the second factor, named Implemental delay ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.17$). This seems to suggest that EFL teachers seldom waste time doing other things or delay before starting on the work they must do. The lowest score was related to the last factor, labeled Delay in meeting deadlines ($M = 2.03$, $SD = .90$). It potentially signifies that Croatian EFL teachers rarely find themselves running out of time, or in breach of a deadline. Lastly, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the Teacher Foreign Language Anxiety Scale was good. Apropos language teacher anxiety, the findings revealed a low score among the participants ($M = 2.08$, $SD = .64$). It could be argued that Croatian EFL teachers experience low levels of anxiety related to their language proficiency. Teacher Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (TFLAS) predominantly focuses on teachers' ability to speak and comprehend those around them (e.g., native speakers, other language teachers, and students). Bearing this in mind, the participants do not seem to be self-conscious when speaking in front of native speakers, or when they do not understand what they hear.

Relationships Between Variables

When observing the relationship between the self-efficacy and procrastination variables, the findings revealed a predominantly low negative significant relationship. When observing the relationship between the self-efficacy and procrastination variables, the findings revealed a predominantly low negative significant relationship. Specifically, teacher sense of efficacy for student engagement was significantly and negatively correlated with all three factors of teacher procrastination. It can be suggested that the more efficacious the teachers appraise themselves in various domains, the less likely it is that they will engage in different forms of procrastination.

A similar scenario can be noted regarding the relationship between said aspects of teacher self-efficacy and various forms of procrastination. To exemplify, there was a significant negative relationship between the respondents' efficacy in using varied instructional strategies and engaging in decisional delay. This suggests that teachers who display more confidence in their ability

to use adequate instructional strategies might be less likely to delay acting upon making a decision or wait to make one. Similarly, the findings also revealed a significant negative relationship between efficacy for classroom management and both decisional delay and implementation delay. This observation suggests that the teachers who exhibit more confidence in their capacity to manage the classroom might be less likely to procrastinate when having to make a decision or waste their time doing something else.

The relationships between different factors of teacher self-efficacy and language teacher anxiety indicated low to mid-negative significant correlations. Specifically, a weak negative relationship was detected between student engagement, classroom management, and foreign language teacher anxiety. This suggests that the more efficacious teachers feel about engaging students in class and using proper disciplinary procedures, the less probable it is that they will experience language anxiety. The findings also revealed a moderate negative relationship between instructional strategies and foreign language teacher anxiety, implying that teachers who feel more confident in their ability to choose effective instructional and assessment strategies might also experience lower levels of language anxiety. Lastly, when examining the relationships between various forms of procrastination behavior and foreign language teacher anxiety, weak positive correlations were found. To illustrate, there was a weak association between foreign language teacher anxiety and all forms of procrastination, including decisional delay, implementation delay, and delay in meeting deadlines. This would signify that teachers who experience higher levels of anxiety would be more likely to engage in various forms of procrastination. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Correlations Analysis of Different Variables (Teacher Sense of Efficacy – TSES, Pure Procrastination Scale – PPS, and Teacher Foreign Language Anxiety Scale – TFLAS); Pearson Correlation Values (r), Significance (p)

Variables		Significance (p)	Pearson correlation (r)
Student engagement	Decisional delay	<.0001	–.286
	Implementation delay	<.0001	–.244
	Meeting deadlines	<.0001	–.226
Instructional strategies	Decisional delay	<.0001	–.309
	Implementation delay	<.0001	–.218
	Meeting deadlines	<.0001	–.218

Table 3 continued

Variables		Significance (p)	Pearson correlation (r)
Classroom management	Decisional delay	<.0001	-.403
	Implementation delay	<.0001	-.309
	Meeting deadlines	<.0001	-.294
Student engagement	TFLAS	<.0001	-.257
Instructional strategies	TFLAS	<.0001	-.353
Classroom management	TFLAS	<.0001	-.267
Decisional delay	TFLAS	<.0001	.232
Implemental delay	TFLAS	.018	.135
Delay in meeting deadlines	TFLAS	.005	.162

Qualitative Analysis

As a natural progression from the quantitative phase, the qualitative segment delves deeper into the nuances of language teachers’ procrastination behaviors, targeting the underlying reasons, causes, and emotional experiences associated with procrastination. Building upon the quantitative findings, this qualitative exploration aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between self-efficacy, anxiety, and procrastination among Croatian EFL teachers. The findings in this subsection are presented according to the research questions presented in the Aims and Method Section.

Q1: Why do you (decide to) procrastinate?

The Croatian EFL teachers in this study provided a variety of responses to this question. Starting from most to least frequent, their causes of procrastination are as follows: demotivating/uninteresting tasks or activities (*n* = 55), numerous obligations (*n* = 44), feeling fatigued/tired (*n* = 26), and lack of time (*n* = 24). As far as the first category is concerned, the majority of the respondents admitted to delaying their course of action when they found the task or activity boring, unworthy of expending effort, unappealing, pointless, or simply not challenging enough. To quote some of them, T7 revealed: “I sometimes procrastinate because I don’t see the point of doing the paperwork.” T21 explained: “Because I find some things boring and unnecessary, and they still need to be done.” A similar point of view was also shared by T2 who explained

their motivational plight when faced with such activities/tasks. This teacher engages in procrastination and explains it as follows: “[...] some things I have to do are pointless and a complete waste of time. So, I have to force myself to invest my time into sth that is useless. E.g. heaps of paperwork.” The following example ties in some of the causes listed above, as well as some others mentioned in different categories. T44 claims to procrastinate because they are

overworked and tired. We are often required to do pointless busywork that takes away our time and energy which we could focus on more productive activities. In short, because I find a significant portion of my daily workload pointless.

The next category, labeled external demands and workload, depicts a range of additional obligations the teachers are faced with in addition to their professional duties. Many of them ($n = 44$) underscore the challenges of balancing work and personal responsibilities, including household chores, family obligations, administrative tasks, and unexpected obligations that arise outside of teaching duties. For instance, T87 explained: “I am overwhelmed with work, including household chores and errands related to family life. I don’t feel I have the skillset required to do a task.” Likewise, T223 admitted: “It is not my personal decision, there are obligations that I have to fulfill and that cannot be delayed. Some situations in life (taking care of children and parents) is more important than deadlines.” On the other hand, some teachers reflected on their professional domain. T14 said they procrastinated because they “[...] have got too many things to do, especially dealing with school administration, observing, making notes for each student, preparing lessons, etc.” The last example envelops both teaching-related and personal issues that cause them to procrastinate. T56 explained that:

It is most often connected to work, also it is most often stuff I have to do at home due to not having a place at school to prepare for English classes. So, since it’s about doing work at home I delay doing it as long as possible.

Fatigue was a prominent cause of procrastination according to many Croatian EFL teachers. It stemmed primarily from their work, and it entailed various emotional states, such as worry and anxiety, as well as a lack of motivation. While many participants provided curt responses (such as “because I’m tired,” “I’m overwhelmed and tired,” or “I’m too exhausted”), there were those that supplied somewhat more elaborate answers. For instance, when asked what causes them to procrastinate, T191 replied: “Tiredness and lack of motivation or if I don’t find the task fulfilling or worth the effort.” T8 reflected this state by underscoring it with stress. In their words, procrastination “is primarily caused

by feeling overwhelmed with the number of tasks I need to get done and/or feeling exhausted and anxious.” T42 explained that procrastination is not simply a matter of decision but something necessary. They reported:

I don’t decide to do so, but simply delay my obligations. Usually, the reason is that I need rest, want to enjoy some other activity, or most often because it feels overwhelming knowing that I ALWAYS have some school-related work to do well outside my working hours.

Regarding the Lack of time category ($n = 24$), the Croatian EFL teachers complained of not having enough time to do all that was needed. Akin to the category above, the responses were mainly brief (e.g., “Because I don’t have (enough) time,” “Lack of time,” or “Too little free time”). Some teachers followed up with additional reasons, such as those tied to motivation (e.g., “Lack of time, not feeling like doing certain things”), alternative options (e.g., “Lack of time, various interests in my free time...”), or psychological states (e.g., “Lack of time and a lot of self-doubt. I don’t think I am good enough to do this job due to lack of experience”).

Supplementary Insights

This heading is designated for additional findings that do not directly correspond to the research question posed in this section but are still pertinent to the discussion at hand. Two categories emerged in this segment, namely, the “I do not procrastinate” ($n = 54$) and “I rarely procrastinate” ($n = 24$). To illustrate the first category, many teachers ($n = 54$) attested to not engaging in procrastination. While this category cannot explicitly be classified under the confines of the first research question, it still gives insight into the current situation among Croatian teachers. Their answers were predominantly brief and to the point, with a few exceptions that will be presented below. When inquired why they choose to procrastinate, the majority replied: “I don’t,” “I never do it,” or “I don’t procrastinate.” Those that opted to provide some feedback alluded to their emotional states (e.g., “I don’t procrastinate as it makes me feel nervous”), preferences (e.g., “I am not fond of delays”), or professional training (e.g., “I don’t because I’m trained and experienced enough to not do so”). T180 gave a detailed description of their remedy for procrastination.

I always try to do everything I have to do. I even like doing things in advance because I know that there always can be some unexpected stuff to do, so I like to be prepared. I don’t like leaving things for the last minute. I feel more relaxed when I do things on time.

In terms of infrequent procrastination, 24 teachers reported to delay their obligations only in special circumstances, or those that they deem emergent and unexpected. Upon closer inspection, the reasons behind their still infrequent procrastination stem from their personal lives. To illustrate, several teachers mentioned their families and stated that they delay things (“Mostly due to family or personal reasons” or “See no point in putting things off unless I’m facing unexpected family obligations”). T85 implied personal reasons without referring to their family (“I never procrastinate with work, but I sometimes or often do procrastinate with tasks concerning my personal life”). Interestingly, only one teacher admitted to procrastinating because of their learners. According to T211, “I usually procrastinate when my students are not ready for examination, so I decide to review rather than obtain insufficient marks [sic].”

Table 4
Reasons for Procrastination

Categories	Frequencies	Percentages
Demotivating/uninteresting tasks or activities	55	18%
External demands and workload	44	14%
Feeling fatigued/tired	26	8,5%
Lack of time	24	6.8%

Q2: What situations and tasks cause EFL teachers to procrastinate?

Qualitative analysis revealed several categories related to this research question. In order of frequency, Croatian EFL teachers’ responses can be subsumed under the following categories: administrative and bureaucratic tasks ($n = 96$); tasks related to testing and assessment ($n = 50$); tasks teachers feel ill-equipped to handle ($n = 28$); and non-teaching related situations/tasks ($n = 27$). The data is presented in Table 5. The majority of the participants ($n = 96$) admitted to procrastinating when having to deal with administrative and bureaucratic duties. The first and most prominent category encapsulated personal reports of procrastinating when being required to fill out reports, tables, and paperwork, input personal observations and comments regarding learner progress, plans for SEN learners, and work on the curriculum, among others. The teachers’ responses uncovered varied experiences, ranging from those where teachers feel like administrators, not teachers (e.g., “Let’s not forget administration—I often feel like I am some office clerk and not a teacher”), doubt their competence (e.g., “Writing plans for the School year, writing plans for students that have special needs (I don’t feel competent enough”)), or experience unpleasant

emotions (e.g., “Writing reports, because they consume too much time and are boring”). T19 provided more information regarding the type of paperwork that is required of them. They provided an example of some tasks, meanwhile using Croatian terminology in the process, such as “GIK” (annual curriculum), “pp” (programs for SEN learners), “tematsko planiranje” (thematic planning/instruction). According to them:

I don't enjoy sitting for long periods of time in front of the computer writing documents (GIK, tematsko planiranje, pp programi) because I always do a detailed and thorough job, which takes a lot of time, especially if it has to be in Croatian.

T146 provided a detailed account of why they procrastinate when faced with “red tape” procedures in their school. They explained as follows:

I usually procrastinate on the so-called red tape, e.g. different tables with data that my school requires us to hand in, paperwork regarding SEN students, written records of teacher meetings or PTA meetings, etc. I feel that a lot of that work is unnecessary so that's why I tend to procrastinate.

The second most frequent category, labeled Tasks related to testing and assessment, mainly points to activities such as grading essays, exams, learner assignments, making tests, and being involved in formative assessment. When inquired about their procrastination behaviors, 50 teachers elaborated that they are strongly (and mostly negatively) affected by the repetitiveness of such work (e.g., “Usually it's something repetitive like entering formative assessment results for each student and trying to make it clear, affirmative, precise... I give up after an hour when I realize there are 50 more to go”), the emotional and physical toll on the teacher (e.g., “Also, grading papers, especially students' texts about certain topics, I hate doing it. It takes too much time and energy to read something that is most of the time written poorly”), or a circumstance that requires them to decide between different options (e.g., “If I have to choose between correcting students' tests and seeing a doctor/helping my parents/cooking dinner for my boyfriend/taking care of my physical and mental health, I will choose the latter”). T59 underscored the strenuous nature of being a language teacher. They admitted to procrastinating: “I teach two foreign languages, so I do have lots of things to do, very often I'm under pressure especially when I have to read and correct essays.”

The following category, named Tasks teachers feel ill-equipped to handle, is informative in that it gives insight into the teachers' self-appraisal, that is, self-efficacy beliefs related to their teaching and personal competencies. When language teachers feel ambivalent, insecure, or are unable to proceed with their

obligations, they tend to delay them. The responses obtained pointed to specific sources of procrastination, such as lack of language proficiency (e.g., “When I am not confident enough or if there are knowledge gaps. Situations like public speaking”), low self-appraisal of personal skills (e.g., “Something I am not good at, creative tasks, being inventive, responding to emails I’m not sure what to say), or situations causing teachers discomfort, such as interacting with parents (e.g., “Sometimes I’m nervous about certain situations that are unknown to me (dealing with some parents, e.g.) and I delay that out of nervousness”). A major factor behind many teachers’ desire to procrastinate was dealing with SEN learners. They experienced feelings of inadequacy, lack of preparedness, and worry when approaching that subject. These examples point to the interrelatedness between language teacher self-efficacy beliefs, emotions, and dilatory behavior. To illustrate, T138 said that:

The only thing I tend to procrastinate is writing the curriculum for SEN students. It’s because I think we should do it together with the social educator and I don’t feel competent enough to estimate the type/depth of the educational support the student is going to need during the entire year.

T17 attested to this by reiterating how much paperwork teaching SEN learners requires. They primarily procrastinated because: “All the consent forms for my lessons I need to get from parents, lesson plans for students with special needs who I do not know how to fill in because I am not prepared for teaching them.”

Non-teaching related situations and tasks were also one of the causes of language teacher procrastination. The teachers in this study ($n = 27$) delayed carrying out those duties that were outside the scope of their regular, teaching duties (e.g., filling out research questionnaires or organizing field trips), or they postponed their teaching obligations due to personal affairs (such as housework or child-rearing). To exemplify, T91 stated that they procrastinate when being required to do “obligatory tasks not directly involving my classes but other school things.” T249 showcased how their work life is impacted by their personal life: “My school work suffers because of my family obligations. I’ve been under a lot of strain.” This was echoed by T35 who said: “If I do postpone some tasks it is because of family obligations (I am a mother of 2—one of them is autistic and needs more time and effort than a neurotypical child).” Alongside numerous family-related responses, T180 expressed their preference for non-teaching activities over those tied to their profession; in their words: “Laundry, gym, cooking, dog walking: which all seem more interesting than GIK and other ŠzŽ things.” To illustrate, “ŠzŽ” in this context pertains to the curricular reform experimental program entitled ‘Škola za život’ (Engl., School for life).

Table 5
Situations/Tasks That Cause Language Teachers to Procrastinate

Categories	Frequencies	Percentages
Administrative or bureaucratic tasks	96	31.4%
Tasks related to testing and assessment	50	16.3%
Tasks teachers feel ill-equipped to handle	28	9.1%
Non-teaching related situations/tasks	27	8.8%

Q3: What emotions do you experience when you procrastinate?

The last question in the qualitative portion of this research probed into the emotions Croatian EFL teachers experience when they engage in procrastination behavior. The findings are clustered around the following categories (emotions): anxiety ($n = 67$), nervousness ($n = 46$), guilt ($n = 38$), frustration ($n = 28$), and stress ($n = 26$). While acknowledging that stress is a state, not an emotion, the author opted to keep it here as it is closely related to the teachers' affective state. The least frequent emotions, anger ($n = 22$) and worry ($n = 10$) will not be discussed, only mentioned. The data is presented in Table 6.

According to the findings, the majority of Croatian EFL teachers feel anxious when they delay certain obligations. Most teachers appeared laconic when responding to this research question, providing answers such as “anxiety,” “anxious,” or “I feel anxious”; these emotional states were accompanied by different bodily experiences, such as tension, headaches, or the feeling of being overwhelmed. The respondents' anxiety was frequently reported alongside other previously mentioned emotions, such as guilt. According to T74, they felt “[m]ostly anxious and guilty for not getting things done.” Some teachers experienced anxiety when they were about to perform an activity for the first time. This was corroborated by T129 who reported: “I always feel anxious because I do know I have to do something but I haven't done it yet.” Anxiety was also mentioned in cases when a teacher failed to organize their time properly. T46 recalled experiencing several emotions because of their poor timing. In their words: “It is a mixture of getting anxious, nervous, and disappointed because I couldn't find the time to do it all.” Approaching due dates, as well as having unfinished business, caused Croatian teachers to feel anxious. T215 said, “I feel anxious and often think about what needs to be done, even in my free time.” An interesting view of procrastination was shared by T82 who distinguished voluntary from unexpected procrastination. According to them, “Well, if it is my choice to procrastinate because I value my well-being, then I feel fine. If it is an unexpected situation, then I might feel nervous or even

anxious.” These responses yet again reflect the relationship between unpleasant emotions, in this case, anxiety, and procrastination behavior.

Nervousness was the second most frequently reported emotion regarding procrastination. The emotion appeared to permeate various domains of teachers’ lives as it manifested itself regardless of their current whereabouts (i.e., whether they were at work or at home). The teachers felt nervous owing to a pending deadline or one that was about to expire. Hoping to describe nervousness stemming from a task yet to be completed, T155 said, “I feel nervous when I delay doing whatever needs to be done because no one is going to do it instead and it just keeps hanging over my head.” T27 depicted how it feels for them to be close to a due date:

I feel very nervous when I am running out of time to finish certain activities. In the end, I managed to finish all activities on time. I am aware of the fact it would be much better to plan things well in advance but it takes a lot of time and patience.

There is an intriguing example in which T196 initially experiences a pleasant emotion when procrastinating, only to have it replaced by an unpleasant one along the way. They explained, “It starts with pleasant emotions, but eventually it may turn to nervousness and even anxiety when I realize that I have procrastinated too much.” Nervousness was also rooted in expectations teachers had of themselves, as well as not attaining previously set goals. In the words of T51:

I feel nervous and a bit anxious when I don’t do things/tasks on time (on time in my mind). I am usually very punctual and respect the deadlines and when I don’t sort all the things out, I feel as if I failed and am not able to organize my time properly.

When it comes to guilt, several teachers reported experiencing this unpleasant emotion because of delaying their obligations. As in the categories above, guilt was frequently accompanied by other unpleasant emotions, such as nervousness, anxiety, and feeling self-conscious. Before elucidating reasons for feeling guilty, T13’s vivid and personal recollection best describes experiencing a multitude of emotions alongside guilt:

When I procrastinate in the examples I’ve described previously, I usually feel guilt, anger, and desperation. I feel like I’m not a good fit for this profession. I see many of my coworkers neglecting their health and families to do tons of work, engage with students via WhatsApp, Yammer, etc., while I don’t want to have anything to do with anyone once I’m off the clock.

As stated before, one of the major sources of guilt when procrastinating is postponing work that needs to be done. T68 used a metaphor to describe how they “always feel very guilty, uncomfortable and restless because the task at hand is looming over my head like Damocles’ sword.” T104 had similar thoughts when it came to delaying working on learners’ assignments. They explained: “[I] feel guilty when I delay doing things that I know my students expect me to do—actually I feel the highest level of responsibility towards my students because I am deeply aware I should be a role model.”

Some teachers admitted to experiencing guilt when delaying their administrative duties. To clarify, T83 revealed: “When delaying with plan making I feel a bit guilty because I am scared that I might be the last person to hand them in.” This was attested to by T20 whose example involves putting in grades. They also: “feel guilty when I don’t write notes and grades immediately after a lesson in e-dnevnik. I feel guilty and like I’m not a good enough teacher when I don’t bring graded papers a week or two weeks after the exam (which often happens).”

Unlike the rest of their colleagues, T242 recognized their guilt and accepted procrastination as a necessary and welcome solution. They stated: “I sometimes feel guilty, but then I tell myself I deserve some rest and the world will not cease to exist if I don’t do whatever it is I need to do.”

Frustration was reported by a smaller number of EFL teachers, and their responses mainly revolved around experiencing the emotion owing to a job still pending or the fact that delaying work might cause further complications. This was reflected in the recollection of T39 who said: “I feel frustrated when I delay making a timetable of tests because I can’t choose the dates I need anymore and have to change my plans.” T167 expressed a similar sentiment when they responded: “I feel frustrated when I delay doing the above-mentioned plans and reports because I know I will have to do them in the end.” Some teachers experienced frustration regarding their learners. T95 mentioned frustration alongside low self-confidence; in their words, “When making plans for special needs students I sometimes get frustrated because I don’t feel confident enough even to decide how to do the task that is ahead of me.” T116 recalled feeling frustrated due to their learners’ disposition toward school obligations. They disclosed that: “I feel frustrated when I delay exams because my pupils are still not ready after many classes, exercises, examples simply because they aren’t interested or eager to learn.” Akin to the section above, T53 expressed mixed feelings towards procrastinating; according to them, “I feel human when I delay doing the paperwork. Frustrated as well. But adrenaline driven when I am about to finish something challenging in the last minute.”

The final category pertains to the state of stress that some Croatian EFL teachers experienced when deciding to procrastinate. While most teachers provided a brief response, such as “stress,” “stressed,” or “I feel stressed,” some

proceeded to clarify their experiences. The findings indicated that stress was mostly associated with delaying doing the administrative work or responding to the parents. Regarding the administrative domain, T219 recalled feeling under duress when they failed to enter the proper date in the class book. They felt: “Stressed and angry, sometimes I felt I had some major failure when I saw a remark that I hadn’t written a date of my control work in the register, the control work that I had done and announced by the rules just missed to write that it was done.” T71’s stress was related to them not providing corrective feedback on time, “I feel stressed when I don’t give feedback the next day after a test.” As for postponing parent-related obligations, T143 confessed: “I feel stressed, and I experience a bit of anxiety when I delay conversations with parents whom I have to tell about their children’s misbehavior at school.” T29 experienced stress tied to delaying correspondence with their learners’ parents; in their words, they are under “[s]tress when [they] delay responding to parents’ emails.”

Table 6
Emotions EFL Teachers Experienced When Procrastinating

Categories	Frequencies	Percentages
Anxiety	67	22%
Nervousness	46	15%
Guilt	38	12.4%
Frustration	28	9.1%
Stress	26	8.5%

Discussion

Given the scarcity of available research on foreign language teacher procrastination, the author will discuss the findings with respect to general or second language research conducted among other teachers, and/or language learners/students. The goal of this study was to investigate the relationship between Croatian EFL teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs, procrastination, and anxiety. Additionally, the aim was to examine the situations and tasks that caused the teachers to procrastinate, as well as the emotions they reported when they delayed their obligations.

The findings unveiled a relatively high level of confidence in the language teachers’ ability to engage students, instruct them, and ensure proper classroom

behavior. Using the hierarchy of dimensions outlined in Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) these findings hint at a notably high sense of teaching efficacy which represents teachers' overall beliefs regarding their capacity to facilitate student learning despite facing numerous challenges. When inspected individually, it can be observed that the teachers in this study felt most confident in their capacity to utilize various instructional strategies and manage the classroom but less so when raising learner motivation and promoting their learning process. These findings appear to be consistent with the findings of other researchers in the L2 domain (e.g., Chacón, 2005; Kostić-Bobanović & Grgić, 2016). To briefly demonstrate, Venezuelan teachers in Chacón's study also felt confident when having to devise and use new instructional strategies but not as much when it came to managing the classroom and promoting language learning. Certain discrepancies have been observed in relation to different facets of teacher efficacy when comparing Croatian teachers and their Asian counterparts. For instance, the Asian EFL teachers in Ghasemبولand's (2014) study reported higher levels of efficacy related to learner engagement whereas their Croatian colleagues felt more efficacious in their ability to employ different instructional strategies. Similarly, Iranian EFL teachers shared their level of appraisal of efficacy in learner engagement with the Croatian teachers; however, they diverged in their appraisal of classroom management efficacy (which was higher among Iranian colleagues) (Zakeri & Alavi, 2011).

The phenomenon of FLTA represented another point of inquiry in this study. The findings indicated a low level of anxiety among the Croatian language teachers. This would imply that the teachers appear to be quite confident in their language proficiency when conversing with other speakers (native and non-native alike) and are unperturbed by the fact that they might not understand everything. Their anxiety can be observed through the dynamic perspective, meaning that it is viewed as the teachers' response to continuing events (Gregersen et al., 2014). This finding highlights the connectedness between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and their emotional experiences, that is, the relationship between competence and anxiety. Deci and Ryan (1985) identified competence, encompassing feelings of efficacy and a sense of achievement, as a fundamental prerequisite for intrinsic motivation, whereas Bandura (1997) discussed emotional states as one of the sources that shape one's sense of efficacy. In this case, Croatian teachers' confidence in their language prowess helped dissipate their feelings of anxiety. The present findings were also echoed by Liu and Wu (2021); according to their study, Chinese college English teachers also expressed confidence in their teaching abilities, as well as their language competence. They were not concerned with failure nor were they apprehensive when speaking English in front of others. Similarly, a group of EFL teachers who came from and worked in various countries reflected on their experiences with language teaching anxiety. According to the results, they also

reported low levels of anxiety. Their self-appraisals were not the cause of the emotion, but their learners' lack of interest and negative evaluation were (Aydın & Uştuk, 2020). Both studies seem to align with the findings reported in this article. Conversely, Chinese EFL pre-service teachers appeared to differ from our participants in their levels of anxiety and self-appraisal. In addition to the low appraisal of their competence, they were also worried about negative evaluation and lack of experience (Li et al., 2023). This finding should be viewed through the prism of their current career phase. Pre-service language teachers often find coordinating university and initial teaching experiences daunting, and their lack of experience makes them feel unprepared for what awaits them in the real classroom (Sulis et al., 2023).

Broadening the scope of investigation, the study turned toward procrastination behavior among the Croatian language teachers. As it stands, the teachers in this study appear to engage in dilatory behavior infrequently. This seemed to be the case across all three domains tested, namely, the delay in meeting deadlines, the decision delay, and the implemental delay. It can be surmised that Croatian teachers rarely wait till the very last minute to do something, to decide, and they seldom do other things instead of what they ought to be doing. Furthermore, the present findings, given the teachers' higher levels of efficacy and lower levels of anxiety, are unsurprising, as internal factors such as low self-efficacy, anxiety, and shame, known to exacerbate procrastination, are not evident here (Grunschel et al., 2013). However, there appears to be a contrast in findings with some studies available. Specifically, Laybourn and colleagues (2019) reported that 16 out of 27 teachers in their study engage in procrastination frequently, whereas Balkis and Duru (2009) revealed that nearly half of the pre-service teachers in their study had either a moderate or high level of dilatory behavior. It can be speculated that there may be some cultural and educational factors at work that might help explain the discrepancy in these findings, or perhaps the respondents in this study provided socially desirable responses, thus precluding us from gaining insight into the true state of the matter.

When considering the relationship between the variables, namely, LTSE beliefs, FLTA, and procrastination, the findings presented would seem to correspond to the previously set hypothesis that states that teachers who feel more efficacious in the classroom will exhibit fewer dilatory behaviors and experience lower levels of anxiety. In this case, Croatian teachers' strong beliefs in their teaching abilities boosted their achievement behavior, as stated by Bandura (1997), and it enabled them to confront daunting situations confidently. Their lower levels of language anxiety implied that they prioritized task-oriented focus over self-doubt during task engagement. It can be predicted that they will be capable of persistently exerting effort even in the aftermath of setbacks. Kim and Kim (2004) reported several causes of anxiety, among

which were insufficient English proficiency low confidence levels, and limited understanding of linguistics and education. Judging by the present findings, Croatian teachers' strong language proficiency and teaching experience are what allow them to maintain higher levels of confidence in the classroom and offset both language anxiety and procrastination.

In line with the present findings, a negative association between self-efficacy and procrastination was also underscored by Steel (2007) in his meta-analysis. It can be gathered that individuals with higher levels of efficacy report lower levels of dilatory behavior.

Other studies among teachers and students outlined similar findings. To exemplify, a longitudinal study among post-secondary faculty carried out by Hall et al. (2019) attested to the fact there is a decrease in procrastination behavior among teachers who exhibit a higher level of efficacy. The authors noted that lower dilatory behavior was not solely observed at the baseline but also over a longer period. Similarly, Turkish pre-service teachers who displayed a higher level of confidence in their abilities avoided delaying their academic tasks. This study also confirmed the negative relationship between the students' academic self-efficacy beliefs and procrastination (Özer & Yetkin, 2018). The inverse relationship between self-efficacy and procrastination has been documented in academic settings by other scholars as well (Ferrari et al., 1992; Klassen et al., 2008; Yerdelen et al., 2016). Yerdelen and colleagues (2016), for instance, conducted a longitudinal study targeting procrastination, anxiety, and self-efficacy for regulated learning among undergraduate students. Their initial testing revealed that students who procrastinated were the ones who had low levels of self-regulation efficacy and high levels of anxiety. This only proves that self-efficacy beliefs are an important predictor of procrastination behavior.

After reviewing the quantitative data on language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, anxiety levels, and procrastination tendencies, it is necessary to get a better understanding of procrastination behavior by turning attention to the qualitative findings that are based on the real-life experiences of Croatian language teachers. The data obtained uncovered various antecedents of language teacher procrastination, ranging from uninteresting tasks/activities and external demands and workload to feeling fatigued. Uninteresting tasks/activities, including filling out reports, making tables, and working on syllabuses, plans, and notes related to learner progress, emerged as the most prominent antecedent of procrastination. It was found that the teachers mainly procrastinated when having to deal with tasks associated with testing and assessment, tasks that made them feel less efficacious, such as working on plans and materials for SEN learners. This link between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and dilatory behavior is evident in this case as Croatian teachers do not feel well-equipped to contend with the demands of teaching SEN learners. The respondents also admitted to having too many obligations, both professional and personal. When

discussing various sources of procrastination, Laybourn et al. (2019) mentioned extrinsic motivation, which involved, among other things, imposed duties, such as those mandated by the Ministry or the existing curriculum. Feeling fatigued was another prominent cause of language teacher procrastination. This finding can be categorized under internal reasons, according to Grunschel and colleagues (2013). More the point, the authors listed exhaustion and illness under mental and physical states, which would seem to encompass the weary state observed among the Croatian teachers.

The second research question explored the situations and tasks that instigate procrastination among Croatian EFL teachers. The findings revealed that they were primarily driven to procrastinate by what they considered uninteresting and demotivating tasks. This underscores the importance of considering various facets of procrastination, such as task characteristics, individual differences, outcomes, and demographics (Steel, 2007). Additionally, their appraisal of said tasks falls under the category of task aversiveness (Grunschel et al., 2013; Steel, 2007). Given the affective appraisal of a task, we can also discriminate between a dysphoric affect (Milgram et al., 1988) and task appeal (Harris & Sutton, 1983). Filing reports or doing any type of paperwork would certainly qualify as dysphoric for Croatian teachers.

Unappealing tasks and administrative duties were also reported by Laybourn and colleagues (2019). Respondents in their study procrastinated when they found the task aversive, complex, or evoking too much stress. Delving into data further, the participants reported tasks involving assessment as one of the main driving forces behind their dilatory behavior. These involved grading essays, and exams, correcting homework assignments, and being involved in formative assessment. This finding aligns with the experiences reported by German teachers, who also identified tasks such as correcting exams and evaluating learner performance as common triggers for procrastination. Similarly, like their Croatian counterparts, some German teachers postponed grading tests or evaluating homework assignments (Laybourn et al., 2019). In their assessment of teaching capability, teachers evaluate the demands of anticipated tasks and their personal competence (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). This evaluation considers factors like available resources, student attributes, and contextual elements. When confronted with tasks they feel ill-prepared for, such as preparing materials for SEN learners, teachers may perceive a gap between task requirements and their skills, leading to procrastination. This observation corresponds to the competencies category identified by Grunschel et al. (2013), who highlight instances where teachers lack the necessary knowledge and organizational abilities to effectively manage certain teaching responsibilities.

Regarding the emotional experiences and outcomes following procrastination, the respondents reported various unpleasant emotions, such as anxiety, nervousness, guilt, frustration, and a state of stress. Only one teacher recalled

having an occurrence of mixed feelings, indicating that they first felt good procrastinating (which might be attributed to what Laybourn and colleagues label as hedonistic reasons), and then they started experiencing unpleasant emotions. Some of the emotions mentioned were also reported by Laybourn et al. (2019) and Grunschel et al. (2013). For instance, German university students in the latter study felt both anxious and frustrated. Their anxiety stemmed from their fear of the future, as well as fear of failure. On the other hand, teachers in Laybourn and colleagues' study reported experiencing guilt, anger, and stress, much like their Croatian peers. An interesting contrast between these studies can be discerned about feeling anger. While it was the most frequently reported emotion among the German teachers (who turned the emotion toward themselves), only a small portion of Croatian teachers encountered it while procrastinating.

Certain common themes have been identified across both quantitative and qualitative portions of the research. Both segments discussed teacher self-efficacy beliefs; namely, the quantitative data hinted at high levels of teaching efficacy in instructional strategies and classroom management but lower in learner engagement. This was bolstered by the qualitative findings which also showed that Croatian teachers feel more confident in certain areas but less so in others, such as tasks related to special needs education. The quantitative findings indicate that the respondents exhibit a low level of language anxiety, whereas qualitative insights suggest that their confidence in language proficiency serves to mitigate this anxiety. This observation underscores the intrinsic link between self-efficacy beliefs and emotional states, emphasizing their intertwined nature. The relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and procrastination has been reflected in both portions of the study. The quantitative section showed that higher levels of teaching efficacy are tied to lower levels of procrastination. Qualitative, on the other hand, suggests that Croatian teachers procrastinate primarily due to feeling ill-equipped to handle certain tasks.

Conclusion

The objective of this mixed-methods study was to bridge the research gap that exists in the domain of language teaching by exploring the relationship between EFL teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, language teaching anxiety, and procrastination. The present findings offer valuable insights that carry both research and practical implications. The study reveals that teachers face the challenge of procrastination, which can contribute to heightened stress levels (Verešová, 2013). The findings of the present study highlight the importance

of exploring the interplay between teacher self-efficacy, anxiety, and procrastination, and underpin the need for further research and practical applications in the field of foreign language teaching. While the mixed-methods approach allowed the author to delve into essential aspects of procrastination, there are notable limitations to acknowledge. The sample, while suitable for research of this scope, would benefit from greater diversity, encompassing teachers from different countries, communities, cultures, and education systems. For instance, the results from this study highlight differences in teachers' self-efficacy in the Croatian context compared to their counterparts in Asian countries (Ghasembohlol, 2014), suggesting a need to examine what elements might be lacking in our local teacher education system. However, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this behavior, a longitudinal study could unveil the underlying factors and variables related to procrastination, potentially elucidating how these behaviors change over time (Gregersen et al., 2014). It is also incumbent that we acknowledge the potential for socially desirable responses among the Croatian participants, given that many language teachers claimed not to engage in procrastination. Qualitative research methods, such as focus group studies, journals, and interviews, could complement the quantitative findings, enabling a deeper exploration of the societal, cultural, and personal factors that influence procrastination.

In terms of practical uses, the present results have significant implications for language teachers and their work conditions. The findings obtained indicate that teachers are more prone to procrastinate when faced with repetitive administrative tasks, further straining a profession already known for its stress levels (McIntyre et al., 2017). The prevalence of unpleasant emotions, combined with high workloads and a lack of support or training in specific domains, reveals a necessity for an improved work environment and better support systems for teachers. A staggering 40% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Borman & Dowling, 2008), emphasizing the urgency for a more supportive and growth-oriented work environment. This includes implementing initiatives such as mentorship programs, professional development opportunities tailored to teachers' needs, and regular assessments of workload distribution to prevent burnout. While the teachers in this study exhibited low levels of anxiety linked to their language proficiency, it is important to recognize that they undoubtedly experience it in other domains of their professional lives. To ensure that teachers maintain their level of productivity and satisfaction, all stakeholders must take steps to alleviate bureaucratic burdens, implement appropriate reward systems, create a nurturing atmosphere conducive to growth and personal development, and provide services that safeguard their psychological well-being.

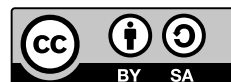
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Teaching Speaking Skills in Ecuador: EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs during the Practicum

Abstract

Teachers' beliefs shape their pedagogical strategies, yet many language teachers remain unaware of their educational philosophies and how these beliefs are manifested in their teaching practices. This issue becomes more significant regarding pre-service teachers' beliefs, which affect their performance during the practicum when they start university programs with pre-established beliefs about teaching. The present qualitative study aims to investigate five Ecuadorian EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills. Data were collected through written and visual narratives, focus group interviews, and reflective journals. The analysis was done following grounded theory. Findings show three different core beliefs: (a) the importance of English, (b) speaking error correction, and (c) methodologies to teach speaking skills. Research into teachers' beliefs is critical, as it may offer insights into teachers' thought processes and classroom planning strategies. Further research is necessary to see how these beliefs affect their teaching practices.

Keywords: speaking, teaching, practicum, EFL, Ecuador

Since 1950, the Ecuadorian government has focused on achieving higher English proficiency levels, recognizing the opportunities this proficiency can provide across various societal sectors. However, due to diverse challenges, Ecuador was ranked as the country with the lowest English proficiency in Latin America in 2019 (El Universo, 2019). The deficit in English-speaking skills,

a topic that has not been the focus of recent pedagogical research in Ecuador, along with the prevailing linguistic landscape, one of the researchers' personal teaching experiences in this country, and pressing concerns within the field, prompted us to conduct this research.

Each year, pre-service English teachers express dissatisfaction with their English-speaking abilities (Uztosun, 2016), often entering the university at an A1 proficiency level as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020). According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, all students should ideally graduate high school at an A2 level, and all of them, from all the courses, should finish university with a B1 (Ministerio de Educacion del Ecuador, 2016); unless they are future English teachers, they need a B2. This lack of competence of the prospective teachers impacts their participation in oral activities. Vieira-Abrahão (2009) asserted that speaking skills are frequently challenging during undergraduate study, as these programs do not sufficiently concentrate on this skill. These students fear entering the classroom (practicum) with inadequate competence in this area, impeding their teaching efficacy.

In Ecuador, the English teachers training program offers the students two subjects (*Prácticas—Practicum* and *Vinculación—teaching placement*) to improve their pedagogical competencies: *Prácticas*, where students spend one semester observing a teacher/tutor, and *Vinculación*, where they take on the role of an English teacher and apply everything they have learned through observation and with their past teachers' experiences (Creamer Guillén, 2021). During this application phase, the pre-service teachers' speaking skills are implemented. Presumably, their beliefs on how to teach this skill affect their teaching strategies and efficacy.

Teachers' beliefs shape their pedagogical strategies for teaching and learning (Viana & Carazzai, 2010). Nevertheless, many language teachers remain unaware of their educational philosophies and how these beliefs are manifested—or indeed not reflected—in their teaching practices (Farrell, 2007). Consequently, research into teachers' beliefs is critical, as it may offer insights into teachers' thought processes and classroom planning strategies (Gonçalves, 2015). However, this issue becomes more significant regarding pre-service teachers' beliefs (Debreli, 2012), who start university programs with pre-established beliefs about teaching and learning that can affect their performance during the practicum (Qiu et al., 2021). Thus, the findings of this investigation aim to shed light on pre-service teachers' beliefs so that they can be addressed in the academic curriculum of the university training program.

Given the importance of the practicum in teacher training programs (Grudnoff, 2011) and of examining teachers' beliefs, one would expect abundant research on these areas. Despite the global increase of studies exploring teachers' beliefs (Santos et al., 2022), no published study in Ecuador has investigated

pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills from 2010 to 2020 (Santos et al., 2022). So, this study addresses this gap in the literature.

This paper is organized as follows: First, it presents the literature review on beliefs, EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs, and teaching speaking skills. Second, the research question is introduced, followed by the research methodology. Then, the findings are presented in the results section, followed by a discussion, and finally, a conclusion.

Literature Review

Teaching Speaking Skills

In today's globalized world, achieving fluency in English is a goal many students share (Hughes & Reed, 2017; Ushioda, 2017). This aspiration originated from the extensive recognition of English as a lingua franca, essential for international communication, academic success, and professional advancement. For that reason, in the scope of EFL, speaking skills have been considered a keystone of language proficiency (Burns & Seidlhofer, 2019) since this skill is what students will be most evaluated on in real-world scenarios (Garcia-Ponce & Tagg, 2020).

The definition of speaking varies among scholars. Harmer (2007) affirmed that speaking is the capacity to express oneself fluently, requiring a grasp of linguistic features and the skill to process information and language in real time. Hughes and Reed (2017, p. 17) characterized speaking as "transient, unplanned, context-dependent, oral/aural, and dynamic." Baron (2020), on the other hand, described speaking as an interactive process encompassing various stages: the production, reception, and processing of information, all contributing to the creation of meaning. A common thread in all these definitions is the emphasis on its significance for language learners, as it allows students to communicate effectively. However, improving this skill is more challenging than other skills because it is an active dynamic process in which the speaker needs to know about relevant world events to effectively keep up with the flow of the conversation (Hughes & Reed, 2017).

Given the importance of speaking English fluently, one of the core principles of the Ecuadorian EFL curriculum is the implementation of the communicative language approach (CLT) "because the goal of foreign language learning is not to turn learners into experts in linguistics who can conceptualize and decipher the various components of the language, but rather future citizens who are competent in the use of a second language for oral and written communication"

(Ministerio de Educacion del Ecuador, 2016, p. 3). The curriculum is based on developing Ecuadorian students' speaking skills to prepare them for the 21st-century globalized world. Despite its significance and the recognition of these characteristics, EFL Ecuadorian teachers encounter various challenges when teaching speaking skills.

Following Hughes and Reed (2017), these challenges included several issues: correctly producing the sounds (intonation, rhythm, stress), appropriate use of the grammatical structures, assessing the characteristics of the target audience, selecting appropriate vocabulary for the audience, knowing the strategies to enhance comprehensibility, using body language, and following the pace of the conversation.

EFL teachers face other challenges when teaching speaking skills, including: (a) big size of classes, hindering personalized instruction, and reducing individual practice opportunities (Chen & Goh, 2011); (b) different levels of student proficiency, impeding the design of activities appropriate for diverse learners (Alharbi, 2021). Additional difficulties include: (c) limited exposure to authentic language use/production and interaction, particularly outside class (Al Zoubi, 2018); (d) an insufficient number of classes per week, which are mainly devoted to other skills (Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2022); (e) students' emotions, which can hamper their participation (Santos et al., 2020); and (f) teachers' beliefs, which determine how speaking skills are considered in the classroom (Garcia-Ponce & Tagg, 2020). These beliefs are formed through their past experiences learning the skill and their participation in teacher training programs (Tsunemoto et al., 2023). Understanding these beliefs is crucial for effectively implementing CLT strategies and overcoming the challenges in teaching speaking skills in EFL contexts.

Beliefs

The term *belief* has been researched in Sociology, Cognitive Psychology, Education, and Applied Linguistics (AL) (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). In psychology, Uso-Domenech and Nescolarde-Selva (2016) defined beliefs as a group of principles held to be true by someone that shapes their actions. Within AL, Wenden (1986) said beliefs are opinions that have their basis in experience and the points of view of others and that impact how someone behaves. Miller and Ginsberg (1995), on the other hand, defined this construct as “ideas that students have about language and language learning” (p. 294). Richards (2000) complemented this notion, adding that the belief system becomes the primary source of teachers' classroom practices. This study adopted the definition of Lundberg and Brandt (2023), which encompassed a broad spectrum of concepts, including “ideologies, attitudes, views, perspectives, perceptions,

dispositions, judgments, conceptions, or preconceptions” (p. 2). This interpretation allowed pre-service teachers’ beliefs to be considered psychological conceptions, providing a framework for analyzing their impact on educational practices.

Different beliefs have been studied within the context of language learning and teaching. For example, Ke and Cahyani (2014) investigated students’ beliefs about the importance of speaking English nowadays, highlighting how these beliefs influence their motivation and learning strategies. Shabir (2017) and Tan (2017) explored teachers’ beliefs about the use of first language (L1) during English class. Zhu and Wang (2019) researched learners’ beliefs about correcting speaking errors, which is crucial for understanding their preferences and reactions in language learning environments. Additionally, Hussain (2017), Spawa and Hassan (2013), and Yang (1999) explored beliefs about methodologies to teach speaking. These studies show how beliefs affect instructional choices and classroom dynamics. Namely, they contributed to understanding how beliefs about teaching methodologies influence pedagogical practices and the development of speaking competencies in language learners.

Beliefs about Speaking Skills

In recent decades, there has been a significant surge in studies focusing on the beliefs of EFL pre-service teachers about teaching speaking skills such as English immersion strategy (Kayaoğlu, 2012), repetition to teach pronunciation (Buss, 2016), games to practice speaking (Gozcu & Caganaga, 2016), use of technology (Fauzi et al., 2017), and timing during speaking error correction (Değirmenci Uysal & Aydin, 2017). This increase can be attributed to the recognition of the substantial influence of their beliefs on classroom practices (Peacock, 2001; Suárez et al., 2017), the enhancement of programs for teacher education that might strengthen beliefs in favor of instructional strategies (İnceçay, 2011) and the fact that this skill is frequently seen as one of the most challenging skills to teach and learn, due to its immediate, interactive, and improvisational nature. However, as Santos et al. (2022) asserted, there has been no published study in the last decade in Ecuador regarding pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teaching speaking skills, a gap this study aims to address.

Based on this conceptual framework, the discussion of EFL pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teaching speaking skills deserves particular attention. Table 1 compiles various studies conducted worldwide, showcasing the different contexts, objectives, participants, and data collection methods used in examining these beliefs. It offers insights into how these beliefs vary across different cultural and educational settings. Additionally, it illustrates how beliefs are formed within specific contexts and result from enculturation and social construction (Pajares, 1992).

Table 1
Studies on Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs about Speaking

Author/Year	Objective	Participants	Context	Data collection
Chun (2014)	To understand Korean EFL university students' beliefs about native English-speaking teachers and Korean English teachers	125	Korean	Questionnaire
Gandeel (2016)	To explore five Saudi English language teachers' beliefs and practices regarding their teaching of speaking	5	Saudi Arabia	Interview/ observation
Tleuov (2016)	To explore language teachers' belief-practice consistency about teaching speaking	4	Kazakhstan	Observation/ interview
Emaliana et al. (2020)	To uncover the relationship between EFL students' speaking score achievement and their epistemic beliefs	63	Indonesia	Questionnaire/ test
Garcia-Ponce and Tagg (2020)	No objective is presented	3	Mexico	Observation/ interview
Phisutthangkoon (2021)	To investigate Thai EFL university teachers' beliefs regarding the teaching of speaking skills and to explore their classroom practices in speaking instruction	6	Thailand	Observation/ interview
Boté (2022)	To explore what elements are fundamental, from the learners' viewpoint, in order to have positive and enjoyable experiences in the classroom	–	Spain	Open-ended questionnaire/ semi-structured interviews/focus groups
Eticha et al. (2023)	To investigate EFL teachers' and first-year students' beliefs in teaching and learning English speaking skills in the multilingual classroom	290	Ethiopia	Questionnaire

Source: own research.

These studies highlight the diversity of beliefs regarding speaking skills, influenced by their cultural, educational, and linguistic backgrounds. Gandeel (2016), for example, investigated the congruence between Saudi English language teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. The author identified several beliefs, such as the importance of grammar, the perceived role of speaking in language learning, controlled practice, corrective feedback, and using L1. These beliefs influenced their instructional strategies and the integration

of speaking activities within their teaching, reflecting a complex relationship between their beliefs and the practical realities of classroom management. Tleuov (2016) explored the complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in Kazakhstani EFL classrooms. The study revealed that teachers hold significant beliefs about the necessity of error correction, using students' first language, and the effectiveness of group work in teaching speaking. These beliefs influence their classroom behaviors, although the teaching practices often diverge due to various contextual constraints and practical limitations.

On the other hand, Eticha et al. (2023) discovered that teachers and students hold positive beliefs about the feasibility of teaching and learning English in multilingual settings. Teachers preferred monolingual over multilingual classrooms but acknowledged the potential benefits of multilingual environments if supported by effective pedagogical strategies. These studies demonstrate the multifaceted nature of beliefs and emphasize the need for a comprehensive understanding of how these beliefs translate into classroom practices.

Research Question

What are Ecuadorian EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills?

Methodology

Method

This study is characterized by qualitative research and follows the procedures of a case study. According to Wellington (2015), this approach is "strong on reality" (p. 174), so it can capture the interaction between phenomena, context, and people. Additionally, it can identify the phenomenon's intricacy and uniqueness (Cohen et al., 2018).

Context and Participants

The study population consisted of five students enrolled in the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages career at an Ecuadorian public university in the Los Ríos province, Ecuador. The sample included three girls and two

boys. Their participation was voluntary and not rewarded in any way. They could withdraw at any time for any or no reason, and their identity would be protected using pseudonyms. They were purposefully selected, corresponding to qualitative case studies that most frequently utilized sampling techniques (Merriam, 1988). This process of purposive sampling selection was based on several inclusion criteria to ensure a rich and diverse array of experiences and perspectives: (a) pre-service students enrolled in the fourth semester; (b) students with no teaching experience; (c) voluntary participants; (d) Ecuadorian; (e) aged between 18 and 24. We selected students from this semester because the program spans nine semesters, typically beginning practical experiences in the fifth semester. To provide deeper insights, we present the profiles of the participants for whom pseudonyms were used.

Malena is 20 years old. She has been studying English for 16 years. She has never traveled abroad and has never taken a private academy. For her, learning English is difficult, especially regarding her improvement in speaking and writing skills. Francesco is 19 years old. He has been studying English for two years. He has never traveled abroad and has never taken an English course. He reports that learning English is easy for him. He feels he needs to improve his reading and writing skills. Rafaela is 20 years old. She has been studying English for five years. She has never traveled abroad and has never taken private English courses. She believes learning English is relatively easy but needs help improving her speaking and writing skills. Pepe is 21 years old and the oldest participant. He has been studying English for five years and has never traveled abroad or taken a private English course. He reports that learning English is difficult for him, especially regarding listening and writing skills. Violet is 19 years old and has been studying English since she was five. She is the only participant who studied in a private elementary school, although her high school was public. She has never traveled abroad and has never taken an English course. She reports learning English is slightly difficult, particularly concerning listening and writing.

Data Collection Instruments

A multi-method design was used in this study, following Creswell (2015). This ensured the data triangulation by validating results and improving their robustness and trustworthiness. Furthermore, it allowed for delineating distinctive aspects, leading to richer information (Tierney et al., 2019).

The different instruments used in this study were designed by the authors following previous literature (Cohen et al., 2018; Mattar & Ramos, 2021; Paiva, 2019) and validated by three experts, who provided corrections and feedback, which were then incorporated. After the validation, these instruments were

piloted with other students to evaluate the data collection's feasibility and usefulness. These instruments include a written narrative, a visual narrative, a focus group interview, and a reflective journal. All of them were aimed at identifying and comprehending students' beliefs. The data collection process was conducted over five months.

Written Narrative

Written narrative (WN) comprehends or represents complex situations and settings (Silva, 2018), describing or presenting a proposed topic. By sharing life narratives, including personal or professional journeys, participants can examine their beliefs, actions, knowledge, and the significance of learning moments throughout their development (Silva, 2018). In this study, participants were requested to narrate their English learning history, focusing on the following: their first contact with the English language, highlighting possible positive and negative points, the classes during school time, the role of the teacher, moments of class interaction, methods/approaches/activities used to teach oral skills, and, finally, ways in which teachers used to correct their pronunciation errors (Appendix 1). The document was emailed to them, and they had two weeks to hand in the written narrative.

Visual Narrative

Visual narrative (VN) efficiently identifies students' emotions and beliefs in the learning/teaching context (Paiva, 2008). VN represents a specific situation using photographs, collages, and drawings (Kalaja et al., 2008) and is used to illustrate students' beliefs. Participants in this study were invited to portray a typical day of speaking activities in an English class (Appendix 2). They could draw, use collages, or any application. They had to deliver the visual narrative with a small description within two weeks. The visual-grounded theory relies on the comparative method. Researchers can develop theoretical codes or connections by comparing images with other data sources (Suchar, 1997). Using pictures and their sequences provides a comparative view of empirical data, aligning with the comparative analysis approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Some image sequences capture stages of action, forming natural sequences. Analyzing these sequences helps identify patterns, enhancing the conceptual understanding of the investigated phenomena (Konecki, 2009, p. 89).

Focus Group Interview

Focus group interviews (FGI) are structured discussions created to gather participants' viewpoints on a subject (Krueger, 2014). This instrument aims

to understand the psychological and sociocultural processes within the group that share specific characteristics. For this study, one of the researchers worked as the focus group moderator. During the data collection stage, four interviews were conducted. They were conducted in Spanish to facilitate participants' interactions and oral production (Appendix 3). The interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed, and analyzed. The interviews were sent to the participants to confirm validation.

Reflective Journal

A reflective journal (RJ) is a written document in which students reflect on their learning process (Tahmasbi et al., 2022). It provides a means to explore representations and views about pedagogical endeavors, fostering introspection and professional growth for educators (Perez, 2013). Participants were required to keep a reflexive journal of their practicum following the four steps proposed by Liberali (1999): (a) describe concrete events experienced in the classroom; (b) inform the principles and theories that guide the teaching and learning process, which underpin the teacher's behaviors; (c) confront through the connection of actions to the broader cultural, political, and economic influences that extend outside the classroom setting, and finally, (d) reconstruct the practices thinking about how they would act differently. They all had to send the journals to the tutor (researcher) monthly to be checked and receive feedback (Appendix 4).

Data Analysis

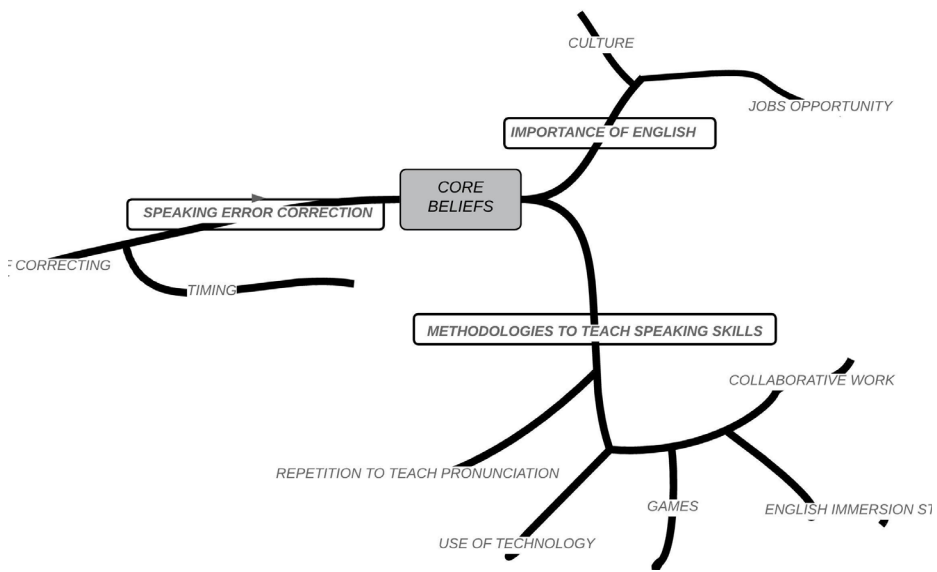
The collected data (interview transcripts, written and visual narratives, and reflective journals) were analyzed thematically using grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). First and foremost, during the open coding, the data gathered were read thoroughly many times and broken down. Subsequently, in the axial coding stage, they were grouped according to their similarities to make connections and categorize. Thirdly, the codes were meticulously crafted around several core themes paramount to the study's objectives: (a) the importance of speaking English, (b) methodologies to teach speaking, and (c) speaking error correction. Finally, a comprehensive review was undertaken to ensure consistency and accuracy in data representation. All the data were collected in Spanish, and after the analysis, they were translated into English.

This study adheres to the principles of ethical research conduct, operating under the permission granted by the University of Jaén (Reference: FEB.23/15. PRY), with precise attention to the welfare and rights of the participants involved.

Results

This qualitative study explores the beliefs about teaching speaking skills held by five Ecuadorian EFL pre-service teachers. The results of the data collection instruments indicated a complex interaction of personal experiences, educational theories, and cultural influences. These factors shape their perspectives on teaching speaking skills to English language learners during the practicum. While each participant carried a distinct standpoint to the discussion, several similar themes, outlined in the literature review, emerged, offering insights into the collective mindset of this cohort. Figure I shows a summary of the participants’ beliefs.

Figure 1
Summary of the Participants’ Beliefs



The following section presents and develops the five common beliefs expressed by the participants, which arose during the data collection process and throughout all the instruments.

Importance of Speaking English

A noticeable unanimity emerged among the participants around the importance of learning English nowadays, although each participant held different

opinions about this issue. Malena believed that English is a global language, and she reported that one of its benefits could be applying for scholarships in other countries. During the focus group interview, she said: “I think it is important to learn English because it is a global language, and with that, I can apply for scholarships or study abroad” (Malena, FGI).

Both Francesco and Rafaela articulated a common belief underscoring the instrumental role of English language proficiency in enhancing employability. Francesco remarked: “Acquiring a new language can benefit individuals, with an emphasis on the professional field” (Francesco, FGI). Rafaela highlighted: “I think it is important to learn English because it opens many doors to job opportunities” (Rafaela, FGI).

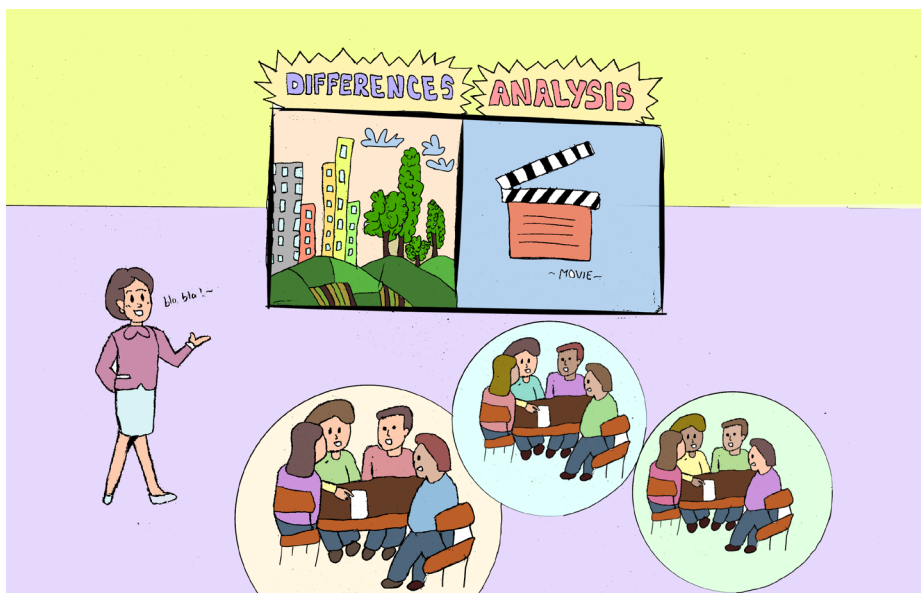
Pepe and Violet also share similarities in their beliefs. They saw learning English as a gateway to intrinsic values of cultural exchange and understanding. Pepe claimed that “[l]earning English is important for understanding another culture” (Pepe, FGI), and Violet asserted that “[l]earning English is important for discovering new cultures because it is practically an international and global language” (Violet, FGI).

Methodologies to Teach Speaking Skills

This section portrays the many ways the participants think are beneficial and effective in teaching English speaking skills, representing their viewpoints on how academic knowledge concerning language acquisition should be converted into practical implementation in the teaching setting.

Collaborative Work

One methodology that is particularly emphasized is the use of collaborative work. Malena asserted the significance of cooperative work in teaching speaking skills: “In English classes, it is also very important to encourage collaborative work to practice speaking” (Malena, FGI). Rafaela agrees with this information: “Collaborative work allows students to learn from each other and helps promote the development of social and oral skills” (Rafaela, RJ). Rafaela confirms this belief in her visual narrative (see Figure 2) when asked to portray a typical day of a speaking class.

Figure 2*Rafaela's Visual Narrative*

As can be visualized during the class, the students are working cooperatively. They seem happy, and all of them are talking. Thus, they are practicing their speaking skills. The number of students is compatible with what she declared during the focus group: “The ideal English class would be with around 20 to 25 students, but the reality is that there are many students, so one must adapt and be creative.” In Ecuador, the number of 20–25 students is not realistic in public schools. The average number of students is 50. Malena wrote: “I think that to feel more comfortable speaking in front of the whole class, it is important to start speaking in small groups first” (Malena, WN). This belief shows her comprehension of some of the affective factors involved in speaking a foreign language.

Games

The use of games was another belief that emerged among the participants. When this aims to help improve oral skills, Francesco believes “that the teaching-learning process occurs effectively” (Francesco, RJ). Violet advocated the effectiveness of games in teaching speaking skills to encourage students to speak and engage with the language. She affirmed: “A very good material would be games, implementing more games so that people can understand that games are also material for getting students to talk” (Violet, FGI). She

complemented this idea, saying that learning English cannot be limited to rigid grammar study. Instead, she highlights the role of games and interactive activities in making the learning process more enjoyable and effective, especially in promoting speaking practice: “One cannot learn English just with grammar and by being so rigid, but also through games, interactive activities, and that is very fun” (Violet, FGI).

Rafaela shares the same belief; she recalls a memory from elementary school about using games to practice her speaking: “In school, the best years of language learning were in ninth grade at a private school because the teacher was very dynamic and taught with games, and I think that is the best way to practice the English language” (Rafaela, WN).

Technology

Pepe and Francesco’s beliefs highlight the integral role of technology in teaching speaking skills. Pepe asserted that “using technology is necessary because it offers many different ways to teach speaking English” (Pepe, FGI). Francesco also believes technology is vital to improving speaking skills: “For me, the use of technological tools was very necessary because I was interested in improving my oral skills in this language autonomously, seeking to reinforce topics covered in class” (Francesco, WN).

English Immersion Strategy

Malena notes that constant speaking practice is the key to being aware of the language. Her belief is embedded in the idea that students should speak only in English to practice this skill. “I think that when we speak and practice the language, we can become more aware of the difficult words to pronounce, the tenses we should use in specific cases, and other aspects that we can improve but that we would only realize through constant practice. That is why it is important to use English 100% in the class” (Malena, FGI).

Rafaela articulates the same idea; she recognizes the classroom as the exclusive place where students can practice their oral skills. “I can say it is essential because the English class is the only space where students can learn about the language. They can correct mistakes, learn vocabulary, and above all, improve their skills” (Rafaela, FGI).

According to Violet, the classroom offers the foremost opportunity to practice the language, which contributes to improving students’ fluency, pronunciation, and overall language comprehension. For that reason, English should be maintained throughout the entire class. “It is very important for students to make an effort only to speak English during class because, by speaking English in class, students can practice their oral communication skills, which

will help them improve their fluency, pronunciation, and understanding of the language” (Violet, FGI).

Pepe reflects on the importance of creating an immersive educational setting that aims to replicate a natural environment: “By integrating these topics into the classroom, meaningful learning is promoted, and students are allowed to apply the language in contexts that are relevant to their lives” (Pepe, RJ). He also suggests that “emotional obstacles to speaking decrease when students feel at ease in an atmosphere where English is the primary language.” “A class should be conducted entirely in English because it makes them feel the adaptation around them, making them comfortable speaking the language” (Pepe, FGI).

Contrastingly, Francesco’s position recognizes the possible drawbacks of an English-only policy, particularly regarding students’ comprehension. He said: “I believe it is not necessary because in formulating sentences when we speak, we might not know some words. So, I can say that in certain exceptions, the first language can be used so that the information can be fully understood, thereby respecting each students level” (Francesco, FGI).

Repetition to Teach Pronunciation

Violet claims that pronunciation activities should be repetitive and, at the same time, funny. She asserted: “An effective activity for teaching pronunciation should be fun, creative, and repetitive” (Violet, FGI). Repetitions should not be tedious to capture students’ interests.

Malena and Pepe punctuate the effectiveness of shadowing, a technique that helps students improve their pronunciation, in which learners repeat language immediately after hearing it. According to Malena, “[p]racticing shadowing is associating the word with the sound that is heard” (Malena, FGI). Likewise, Pepe indicates: “I consider the shadowing technique to be an excellent way to teach pronunciation, assimilate grammatical structures, and consolidate vocabulary knowledge since it involves the constant repetition of words and phrases, among others” (Pepe, FGI). He also mentions that “[i]t is fundamental for the development of student’s oral language skills to teach how to construct sentences with both regular and irregular verbs and their pronunciation in the classroom” (Pepe, RJ).

Francesco also emphasizes the role of imitating sounds for pronunciation accuracy. “Imitating the sounds of words is important because, when the teacher says a word like ‘uninhabitable,’ students will analyze various aspects such as tongue movements, lip shapes, and intonation. This way, the student begins to repeat what the teacher did, and in this manner, they can achieve correct pronunciation” (Francesco, FGI).

Speaking Error Correction

Ways of Correction

Malena and Rafaela argued that teachers should be cautious about correcting their students' speaking mistakes. This feedback should be constructive and non-threatening to the student. Malena declared that the correct way to correct mistakes is by repeating mispronounced words. "If we mispronounce or incorrectly conjugate a verb while speaking, the teacher repeats it, but correctly. This way, we realize our mistakes without feeling singled out. It is not about being called out but learning from the correction" (Malena, FGI). She further confirms the effectiveness of this approach in her written narrative: "Even when I made pronunciation mistakes, the teacher would correct them subtly by repeating the word or phrase I had said incorrectly in the correct manner. I believe this approach is ideal" (Malena, WN).

Rafaela has the same belief, stating that the teacher should accurately repeat the wrong word. She argued: "If I say something wrong, or if I see something wrong, or if I write something wrong, the teacher can repeat it but correct it kindly" (Rafaela, FGI). Rafaela narrates her high school experience, where her teacher used online dictionaries to model pronunciation and repeating words. She comments: "My teacher taught pronunciation by placing the word in an online dictionary and repeating it so we could listen and practice. He corrected kindly, pronouncing slowly over and over so that the students could understand" (Rafaela, WN).

Timing

Pepe and Rafaela advocate for immediate correction but present as recommendations rather than criticisms: "I think that when a mistake is made, it should be addressed in the form of a suggestion" (Pepe, FGI). Rafaela supports the same idea and adds that giving students immediate correction might increase their self-confidence: "It is beneficial to do it at the moment the student is making the error to help them gain confidence and continue with their performance/presentation" (Rafaela, FGI).

On the other hand, Francesco, Violet, and Malena recommend correction at the end of an activity. Francesco is concerned that immediate correction might be embarrassing and discourage further participation, especially if it is done in front of the whole class. Francesco claimed: "If I mispronounce a word and the teacher corrects me right then in front of my classmates, it is a great embarrassment. It makes me not want to read aloud or participate anymore; I think

I do not want to try again. So, I believe corrections should not be immediate in such cases” (Francesco, FGI).

Violet adds that doing this at the end avoids student frustration or embarrassment. “The best moment to correct students’ speaking errors is after they have had the opportunity to express themselves. Students might feel frustrated and embarrassed if corrected during a conversation or in front of a classroom” (Violet, FGI). Pepe agrees and says that the feedback should be motivating and explanatory. “At the end of the activity, pointing out the mistake while also motivating, that is, by explaining in a better way so that the student does not feel singled out” (Pepe, FGI).

Malena also supports delayed correction but is more worried about not interrupting students during the speaking activity. “I believe that, after the student has finished expressing their idea completely, it is necessary to correct the error, as this way, they are not interrupted, and, in the end, they will know what they got wrong” (Malena, FGI). Table 2 summarizes each student’s belief regarding the mentioned areas, which were obtained/gathered using a written narrative, a visual narrative, a focus group interview, and a reflective journal.

Table 2
Summary of Each Student’s Belief

	Beliefs	Malena	Francesco	Rafaela	Pepe	Violet
Importance of Speaking English	English as a global language	FGI				
	English to enhance employability		FGI	FGI		
	English for cultural exchange				FGI	FGI
Methodologies to Teach Speaking Skills	Collaborative work	FGI/VN/WN		RJ/VN/FGI		
	Games to teach		RJ	WN		FGI
	Technology		WN		FGI	
	English immersion strategy	FGI		FGI	FGI/RJ	FGI
	Repetition to teach pronunciation	FGI	FGI		FGI/RJ	FGI
Speaking Error Correction	Ways of correction	FGI/WN		FGI/WN		
	Timing	FGI	FGI	FGI	FGI	FGI

Source: own research.

The beliefs were identified in different instruments. Some beliefs were repeated in various instruments, suggesting the strength of these stated beliefs in each participant. For instance, the importance of speaking English was prominently discussed in FGIs. Methodologies to teach speaking skills, such as collaborative work and the use of games, were identified across FGIs, RJs, VNs, and WNs, though the emphasis varied.

Regarding speaking error correction, the ways of correction were discussed across FGIs and WNs. In contrast, the timing of corrections was noted in all FGIs, indicating a unanimous agreement on its importance across all group discussions. This comparative analysis, using different tools, illustrates how triangulation can grow our understanding by revealing shared beliefs and individual variations, thus enhancing the validity of our conclusions regarding teaching English speaking skills.

Discussion

The findings of this study (see Table 2) highlight the importance of identifying pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills in EFL settings. This research offers further evidence that questions pedagogical approaches to teaching this skill in Ecuador. It shows that these pre-service teachers' beliefs were shaped by their educational experiences. Many reported during the interviews that their approaches to teaching are influenced by the methodologies and techniques they encountered as students. Such reflections on past academic experiences influencing their current teaching ideologies indicate a cyclical pattern that forms students' beliefs (Lortie, 1975). This issue underscores the need for English teacher training programs in the country to address this theme more often to help students (re)interpret their beliefs through their experiences (Vibulphol, 2004). Educators from these programs "need to be aware of the challenge of training teachers who are theoretically competent and sufficiently reflective to bridge theory and practice" (Marchesan, 2015, p. 19).

Therefore, the practicum (*Prácticas y vinculación*) is the adequate moment in these programs to broach this topic (Gebhard, 2009) because it provides pre-service teachers with the necessary practice to deal with the classroom realities in the future (Grudnoff, 2011). Pre-service teachers can improve their teaching skills by engaging in classroom activities and teaching under the guidance of experienced mentors/teachers. This process also enables them to examine and reflect upon their embedded values and beliefs, facilitating their cognitive learning and development (Cheng et al., 2010; Gebhard, 2009). The sociocultural perspective supports this view by asserting that pre-service teachers often undergo significant

transformations during their practicum, facilitated by their interactions and practical experiences (Borg, 2009; Ng, Nicholas, & Williams, 2010).

The participants recognize the increasing significance of English proficiency in today's global context. Their beliefs represent English as a bridge to cross geographical and linguistic borders. Consequently, they visualize the English language's worldwide status and globally interconnected mentality, which might motivate them to learn it. This language is seen as a professional asset that provides a competitive edge, which can help them find job opportunities beyond their local spot and surpass the global job market. Their beliefs identify English as more than a communication tool; it is a door to new career landscapes. For them, the importance of the language is more than just a set of expressions and rules; it is a means of understanding cultures other than their own. This view is aligned with the study by Ke and Cahyani (2014), which accentuates how learners' experiences with English as a Lingua Franca expand their perceptions of the language as a bridge across linguistic and geographical borders.

Regarding the beliefs held by these pre-service teachers, they mentioned that specific methodologies such as games, use of technology, English immersion strategy, and repetition to teach pronunciation play the most critical role in attaining/achieving positive results when teaching speaking skills. These beliefs are consistent with those previously identified in the studies conducted by Buss (2016), Değirmenci Uysal and Aydin (2017), Fauzi et al. (2017), Gozcu and Caganaga (2016), and Kayaoğlu (2012). On the other hand, Stevick (1980, p. 4) opposes this idea by stating that "success depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom." This disagreement of views emphasizes the complexity of teaching methodologies in EFL contexts, suggesting that while methodologies are imperative, success in teaching speaking skills may also rely on interpersonal dynamics and practical engagement within the classroom environment. Hence, an adaptable approach that considers theoretical outlines and the practical realities of student interactions could be the most effective in fostering meaningful language acquisition, particularly regarding oral skills.

One of those methodologies, regarding the role of collaborative work, was referred to only by two participants. Tleuov (2016) identified the same core belief with his participants. This belief, grounded in social-constructivist theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1997), demonstrates that social interaction is crucial for students to improve their speaking skills. Faeza and Zena (2022), who investigated the role of collaborative work in enhancing the speaking skills of 100 undergraduate Arabic native speakers, concluded that collaborative learning positively correlates with the development of speaking skills among Iraqi EFL learners. Thus, these two students see the importance of interaction among peers. However, based on the advantages of using this type of methodology, such as allowing students to share knowledge, feel comfortable, and

develop communication skills, there is a need to foster this type of work or to make pre-service teachers more aware of its role for speaking skill development since only two believed in that.

Some students mentioned additional methodological resources, such as using technologies and games. Participants did not consider them just as a tool for engagement or enjoyment but as a strategic method to enhance the effectiveness of language learning, particularly in developing speaking skills. However, there is a contradiction between past/present methodologies since most students perceive repetition as a central component in teaching pronunciation (Yang, 1999), which they consider essential within the speaking skill.

Likewise, most participants (four) advocated for an English immersion approach in which students should be encouraged to speak only in English. Their beliefs are coherent with immersion education (Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton, 2021), which holds that exposure to and actively using a language in situations that mimic real-world language usage is the most effective way to build oral language competence. However, their beliefs go against Tan's (2017) study. Her participants believed in the pedagogical benefits of using L1, particularly at lower proficiency levels. Both studies recognize teachers' challenges when using this approach in class. Nevertheless, this continuous practice might strengthen the speaking abilities.

Providing oral feedback was also mentioned by most of the participants, who emphasized the idea that it is critical to balance the necessity of correcting while maintaining a positive atmosphere. In the same vein, the appropriate time to correct the students' oral mistakes was a belief that caused some disagreement among the participants. The contrasting perspectives on the proper timing (immediate vs. delayed) reflect comprehension of the complex nature of language learning and error correction. Whereas immediate correction is favored by several authors (Dawood, 2014), delayed correction is preferred by numerous others (Gharaghanipour et al., 2015). Zhu and Wang (2019) found the same results in their investigation. Their participants demonstrated preferences for error correction, particularly the timing and type of feedback. They suggested that a balance between the two kinds of correction should be used because their effectiveness depends on the learner's level, context, and preferences.

Thus, this study adds to the growing body of literature indicating that beliefs like English immersion strategy, repetition to teach pronunciation, and timing during speaking error correction emerged as the most frequent pre-service teacher beliefs regarding learning oral skills. This prevalence might be due to their direct impact on the effectiveness of language acquisition, or it may reflect their past experiences as learners. However, beliefs such as English as a global language and collaborative work were mentioned less frequently. This could be because these areas, while important, might be viewed as more theoretical or less directly related to the immediate challenges of teaching the speaking skill.

Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This qualitative case study aimed to identify the pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching speaking skills during their practicum. Research into teachers' beliefs is critical, as it may offer insights into teachers' thought processes and classroom planning strategies. Data was collected through four different instruments, which permitted the validity and trustworthiness of the results.

The findings suggest that pre-service teachers might prioritize practical, immediately applicable strategies like immersion and repetition, supporting Peacock's discoveries (2001) and contradicting Suárez Flórez and Basto Basto (2017) study, over more abstract or systemic considerations like the global role of English or collaborative learning methodologies. These beliefs reflect a combination of traditional and innovative educational practices. Interestingly, while some participants emphasized the effectiveness of immersive environments and repetitive practices for pronunciation, others highlighted the potential of collaborative learning. Moreover, the study illuminates the critical role of feedback in language learning, with opinions diverging on the ideal timing for corrections.

Considering these findings, it is vital to recognize the role of practicum experiences in complementing and shaping pre-service teachers' beliefs. This experience provides a realistic context for these students to test and refine their beliefs, aligning theoretical knowledge with real-world classroom dynamics. In a micro way, this study contributes to the literature review. In a macro way, it suggests that teachers' training programs should emphasize reflective practices, enabling educators to continually reassess and evolve their beliefs in response to changing classroom environments and students' needs.

However, while providing valuable insights, it has two main limitations. Firstly, we cannot make general assumptions about Ecuadorian pre-service teachers, as only five students participated in this research. However, we consider that this study's findings may help to understand the Ecuadorian context. Secondly, the participants' limited experience in reflective practices might have led to misunderstanding some valuable insights. Thus, based on the concept that beliefs are dynamic and can be changed through our lives (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Yoshida, 2013), and following Basturkmen et al.'s (2004) point of view about classroom practices and stated beliefs contradictions, further research is still necessary to see how these beliefs affect their future teaching practices.

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Appendix 1

Written Narrative

SCRIPT FOR THE NARRATIVE OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Write a text describing your story of learning the English language. Below, you will find some questions that you should use to guide the writing of your narrative. Remember that you must write a coherent text in the form of a narrative addressing all the following topics.

- Write about your first contact with the English language, highlighting possible positive and negative aspects.
- Write about what your English classes were like in school and college.
- Write about the role of the student in learning the English language.
- Write about the role of the teacher in learning the English language.
- Write about how your English teacher approached oral expression (speaking) activities.
- Write about which oral expression activities were most used by your English teacher.
- Describe the moments when there was interaction/dialogue entirely in English during the class.
- Describe how your teacher taught pronunciation in class and how they corrected pronunciation errors.

Appendix 2

Visual Narrative

A visual narrative is a drawing/collage... about a specific topic. Please follow the instructions to do your visual narrative.

1. Draw a typical day of speaking class
2. Write a description/interpretation of your drawing.
3. The drawing should be made on white paper with no lines.
4. You can draw by hand or use any computer program to do it.

Appendix 3

Some Focus group interview questions

1. What is the importance of learning English nowadays?
2. How can you describe an English class?
3. What methodologies should be used in an English class?
4. What do you think a teacher should do to get the students to speak in the classroom?
5. What do you think is the best way to promote/encourage speaking in the classroom?
6. How do you think teachers should work with students they deem to be weak/strong in speaking?
7. What other skills do you think should be taught with speaking? Why?


Appendix 4

Reflective Journal

8. Write one reflection about each day of your practicum. Relate this reflection with the theory learned during the classes.



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Corpus-Assisted Analysis of Discourses on EFL Teaching Approaches

Abstract

This study explicates the lexico-semantic features of the discourses constructed by EFL student teachers regarding language teaching approaches and methods. Utilizing corpus linguistics methods, the research explores a specialized corpus comprised of reflective essays produced by forty-one EFL student teachers in the context of Ukrainian teacher education. Techniques such as keyword analysis, n-grams, collocations, and KWIK (key word in context) were sequentially applied to complement the data.

The keyword profile of the corpus enabled the extraction of the main semantic fields, including approaches and methods, education and instructional processes, agents, linguistic aspects, language skills, and techniques. The n-grams analysis further detailed that the participants were familiar with a repertoire of approaches and methods. Evidence garnered from collocations and concordance analyses substantiated that the respondents self-identified with current language teaching approaches and believed in the utility of principled eclecticism. Nevertheless, a minor segment of respondents gave precedence to traditional language teaching. Despite a lexically rich representation of the semantic field of EFL approaches and methods, the related semantic field of techniques was underrepresented in the corpus, indicating challenges associated with the procedures underlying specific approaches in the instructional process. This highlights the need for guided training in the application of contemporary language teaching principles.

Keywords: corpus linguistics, discourse, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), approach, method, semantic field

Language teaching has been framed through the lens of approaches and methods for a substantial part of its existence (Drożdźiał-Szelest, 2013; Richards, 2001). Given this, the extent and variety of discourses about their nature and

place in language education are unsurprising (Arikan, 2006; Bastidas, 2022; Bell, 2007; Hall, 2019; Ur, 2013). For Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), a method represents “a coherent set of links between the actions of a teacher in a classroom and the thoughts that underlie the actions” (p. 20). Richards and Rodgers (2014) further conceptualize a language teaching method in relation to an approach, where the former is determined by a design, and practically realized in procedure (p. 22).

Spanning the periods from the search for a universal method to post-method thinking, their role has seen dramatic transformations (Hall, 2019; Kumaradivelu, 2006). The notion of methods came under attack owing to its weak theoretical validity and practical utility. Disappointment with methods eventually gave rise to the post-method condition, construed as “a search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method (Kumaradivelu, 1994, p. 29). However, those making the case for it did so more for political reasons than language pedagogy, attempting to “liberate teachers and learners from the tyranny of methods” (Curtis, 2017, p. 219). Parallelly, in response to the above criticisms, the concepts of eclecticism (Prahbu, 1990) or principled eclecticism (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) emerged as a pluralistic approach to language teaching, advocating the use of diverse language learning activities with varying characteristics to meet the specific needs of learners (Alharbi, 2017; Cushing-Leubner & Bigelow, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

While some scholars go so far as to proclaim the demise of methods (Brown, 2002), others argue that they persist under the guise of related terminology and classroom practices (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Tarnopolsky, 2018). Research has evinced that teachers continue to think in terms of methods as available tools to attain instructional objectives (Bell, 2007; Curtis, 2017; Lőrincz, 2023; Weseley et al., 2021). Indeed, without a sound understanding of the theories informing teaching practice, eclecticism—whereby the choice from the available alternative methods occurs—risks turning into “a methodology without orientation, unsystematic and uncritical, practiced by teachers with precarious or poor professional training, incapable of creating an informed eclecticism and who only compile a package of techniques originating in various Methods that do not make sense together” (Cehan, 2014, p. 28). Bastidas (2022) cautions against devaluing the construct of methods for language teachers who might mistakenly infer that knowledge of methods and the ability to implement them in language courses and lessons are irrelevant. Therefore, research into language teaching approaches is as pertinent as ever, since contemporary methodology still relies on the notion of methods, even if viewed pragmatically as options in addressing context-bound instructional needs (Bell, 2007; Tarnopolsky, 2018).

Previous studies into teachers’ views about language teaching approaches primarily utilized surveys to elicit and analyze data, including questionnaires, interviews, observations, diary studies (e.g., Farrell & Guz, 2019; Golombek,

2015; Weseley et al., 2021), or discourse analysis (e.g., Kapranov, 2020; Clarke, 2008). Steering away from the mainstream research tradition, this study employs methods associated with corpus linguistics to analyze the discourses related to language teaching approaches and methods. In this text, the term discourse is used to denote “different types of language use or topics” (Baker, 2023, p. 3). Since corpus analysis has been widely applied in the study of discourse (Baker, 2023; Flowerdew, 2013; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019), it is believed to be a robust methodology capable of revealing the prevalent themes in EFL teachers’ professional discussions.

Guided by these considerations, the present study aims to analyze the lexico-semantic features of discourses related to language teaching approaches and methods constructed by EFL practicing teachers. The analysis is based on a corpus of reflective essays (17,454 tokens) written by 41 EFL student teachers. In particular, the study attempts to answer the following research question: How do the lexico-semantic features of discourses mirror EFL student teachers’ views on language teaching approaches and methods?

Literature Review

Research into language teaching approaches and methods has a long-standing tradition, shaped by its eventful history of a quest to devise a universal method, a kind of magic wand capable of catering the best possible teaching and learning experiences (Curtis, 2017; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Inspired by this belief, researchers conducted experimental studies to prove the viability of methods proclaimed as revolutionary (Hall, 2019; Drożdżał-Szelest, 2013; Ur, 2013). For instance, there were attempts to establish the superiority of the cognitive approach over audiolingualism (Smith, 1970; Chastain, 1970). However, the like investigations were to only one effect: consistently failing to “demonstrate clear, lasting superiority in terms of student performance” (Swaffar et al., 1982, p. 28). In fact, the differences in implementing various methods were not always observable in actual practice. Teaching that adhered to one method often resembled teaching with another, making it difficult for observers to identify the method applied in any given instance (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Richards, 2001).

Unwittingly, this preoccupation with the idea of the universal method fed on the negative attitude toward language teachers’ ability to guarantee effective instruction. Driven by this distrust in teachers’ competence, researchers periodically came up with new methods (Bell, 2007; Richards, 2001). Nevertheless, these individual methods fell short in addressing the contextualized needs of language

instruction, nor could they prove their superiority in experimental settings (Bastidas, 2022; Andon & Leung, 2014). Disillusioned, some researchers hastily concluded that methods were irrelevant to language teachers and teacher education, leading literature to largely shun their discussion (Thornbury, 2017).

To make amendments, the research focus shifted to the role of language teachers as active decision-makers, which assumed the recognition of their own “contextually-based reflections and understanding for their professional development” (Hall, 2019, p. 2). This cognitive turn placed language teachers’ own perspectives in the spotlight. Basic frameworks for investigating teacher cognitions concern their beliefs, knowledge of language teaching approaches (pedagogical content knowledge) (Bell, 2007; Lőrincz, 2022), and attitudes towards them (Sun et al., 2020). Comparative studies also emerged, looking into the alignment between language teachers’ beliefs and practices (Berger et al., 2018; Farrell & Guz, 2019; Lőrincz, 2023; Weseley et al., 2021).

Within the first framework, discussions principally focus on the underlying reasons for language teachers’ instructional practices. A frequent target is EFL teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards traditional and contemporary language teaching, which is especially prolific. Here, an additional explanation should be in situ. On its face value, the distinction between traditional and current language teaching is readily apparent. The underlying belief is that the former relies mainly on language analysis, while the latter favors language use. Indeed, throughout their history, the newly sprung methods gravitated alternatively between the opposite sides, likened by Celce-Murcia (2001) to a swinging pendulum. However, around the 1970s, with the spread of the communicative approach, the tenet that language is a means of communication laid a solid foundation for all subsequent developments in language teaching.

The communicative approach remained surprisingly stalwart due to its loose interpretation. Compared to its strong or classical version of its earlier period (1970–1990), its present-day weak version is open to wide construal by educators ascribing to different traditions (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Richards, 2005). Curtis (2017) concludes that this flexibility is one of the key strengths and the main reasons for the widespread popularity of communicative language teaching (CLT). At the same time, it has also become one of its caveats, “as it has created situations in which almost anything that is not explicit grammar teaching, or anything that involves speaking, can be and has been referred to as CLT” (Curtis, 2017, p. 75). Advocates of CLT “may weigh the value of fluency and accuracy in different ways” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 81). It is at the discretion of those implementing CLT to provide or not to provide learners with explicit instruction in form, rely on translation when deemed necessary, or on drilling, as long as communicative competence remains central to the instructional process. If so, the difference between current and more traditional

language teaching grows less distinct and is best viewed as a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

As summarized by Richards (2005), “communicative language teaching today refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals [...]” (p. 22). In a similar vein, Dörnyei (2013) introduces the term principled communicative approach on the ground that different variants of CLT are loosely related to each other and are open to broad interpretation. Recent extensions of CLT based on its core principles include task-based learning, content-based instruction, or content and language integrated learning, among others (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), referenced by some as post-communicative language teaching (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014; Nagy, 2019).

It leads us to the point when disambiguating the terms communicative, post-communicative language teaching, eclecticism, or even post-method pedagogy is no longer straightforward. The reasoning behind each rests on understanding the dynamic nature of language teaching, the complexity of the instructional process, language teachers’ professional expertise and empowerment, contextual factors, and learner-centeredness. Moreover, communicative competence is the overarching tenet of the above (Scholl, 2017). A question arises whether they are disparate phenomena to the degree of incompatibility or a case of terminological overlap.

Overall, studies reveal positive attitudes towards contemporary approaches across various national contexts. Thus, Weseley et al. (2021) conducted a survey to uncover world language teachers’ beliefs about language teaching methods in the USA. They found that language teachers “identified as adhering to one main teaching approach” (p. 1). Their participants predominantly used such methods as comprehensible input and teaching proficiency through reading and storytelling. The authors concluded that because teachers regularly reflected on and reexamined the applied methods based on the instructional context, they could be characterized by post-method thinking.

In the study by Sun et al. (2022), Chinese EFL teachers’ preferences for CLT over traditional language teaching (TLT) were observed using an implicit association test. Their principal finding was the disparity between language teachers’ explicit and implicit attitudes, that is, what the participants openly stated did not always coincide with their actual thoughts. Nikian (2014) also found that Iranian EFL teachers advocated for CLT and demonstrated awareness of its underlying principles. Nevertheless, the participants reported struggling with several challenges hindering the implementation of CLT, such as language proficiency, time and curriculum constraints, lack of resources, overcrowded classes, and low learner motivation. As a result, learners and teachers encountered difficulties in terms of language teaching and acquisition.

In their study, Rahimi (2014) showed that language teachers in Iran held favorable views about CLT, particularly group-work. While the participants did not consider the implementation of this approach in language classes overly difficult, they pointed out that the educational system created obstacles to organizing lessons according to CLT principles, such as grammar-based entrance examinations. The results of this correlational investigation revealed that teachers with positive attitudes towards CLT experienced fewer problems caused by learners' low language proficiency, lack of motivation to participate in class discussions and develop language competence. Likewise, they did not think that reluctant learners hindered the implementation of CLT. Nevertheless, a note of caution is warranted due to the inferences made on low effect sizes.

The second research framework is best epitomized by Basturkmen's (2012) assertion that what teachers believe (implicit beliefs) does not immediately translate into what they do (espoused beliefs) (p. 283). As a corollary, there tends to be a mismatch between teachers' beliefs and instructional practices (Berger et al., 2018; Fajaro, 2013). Several studies have focused on comparing language teachers' beliefs about teaching approaches and their implementation in the classroom (Coskun, 2011; Lörincz, 2023; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Tang et al., 2012). Notably, most studies to date have evinced that despite language teachers' explicit advocacy for CLT, their performance often fails to consistently follow its principles.

Lörincz (2023) found that EFL student teachers self-identified with contemporary language teaching across several categories, including instructional orientation and language focus, target language use, group work organization, and language education goals. In contrast, there was no statistically significant difference between classroom procedures and techniques characteristic of traditional or contemporary teaching, nor a preference for student-centered over teacher-centered instruction. The participants reported utilizing current approaches and methods, demonstrating cognizance with their repertoire. Yet, a comparison between self-reported data and observation of their performance in the classroom revealed only a partial alignment.

A longitudinal study into EFL teachers' beliefs and practices was conducted by Tang et al. (2012), aiming to uncover how preservice teachers experimented with recent language teaching approaches and methods learned at the university. Interestingly, in their first year at the university, the students expressed a preference for CLT. However, after exposure to long hours of methodological input in the teacher education program, they did not hold a strong conviction in the effectiveness of CLT. Moreover, during their classroom placements, they began teaching using traditional approaches. Even though the preservice teachers' beliefs differed regarding the expediency of language teaching approaches, their performance was comparable and failed to reflect their actual beliefs.

In this respect, Farrel and Bennis (2013) found that less experienced language teachers demonstrated a greater discrepancy between their beliefs and practices about language teaching approaches than their more experienced counterparts. The latter tended to base their beliefs on the experience gained over the years in the profession. By contrast, novice language teachers experimented with approaches and techniques, adjusted their beliefs accordingly. While both experienced and less experienced participants advocated for communicative approach to teaching grammar, their classroom practices diverged. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) rightfully remark that in order for teachers to change their language teaching methods and improve language learning outcomes, they should regularly engage in examining and questioning their beliefs.

A concomitant recent scholarship looks into the utility of current language teaching approaches and methods. In contrast to its forerunner, it does not aim to experimentally establish the superiority of one approach or method over the other. Instead, such studies spell out their effectiveness within a specific context. The case for content-based instruction (CBI) is made in the volume edited by Cammarata et al. (2016), including a collection of pertinent studies. The researchers explored the potential of CBI in providing effective language learning experiences, produced empirical evidence of improvements in instructional quality, and suggested strategies for organizing language programs using CBI. In addition, the authors included the description and illustrations from language programs that experimented with this approach. Task-based learning (TBL) has also garnered copious attention, with Plonsky and Kim (2016) reviewing 85 empirical studies to synthesize their foci and methodological features. Their analysis highlighted that there was a preference for examining aspects like “grammar, vocabulary, accuracy, and features of L2 interaction” (p. 73). An overview of empirical research into storytelling was undertaken by Lucarevchi (2016). The researcher noted that most studies attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of storytelling in enhancing learners’ language proficiency and motivation. However, the analyzed articles often lacked clarity in specifying how the impact of storytelling was measured. Interest in computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has surged recently, making it cumbersome for individual researchers to analyze its main trends and impact. To address this challenge, Chen et al. (2021) conducted a bibliographic study using a topic modeling analysis on 1295 articles published until 2020. The most widely discussed areas in this respect were mobile-assisted language learning, project-based learning (involving technology), and blended learning. The authors concluded that language teachers are integrating diverse technologies into various educational settings.

Even from these selected publications, it is obvious that EFL teaching has grown highly sophisticated. Common are the observations that as methodologies continue to be refined, so do the demands placed on language teachers’ competence (Bacus, 2021; Lőrincz, 2022), who are tasked with the need to navigate

a range of methodological solutions to address contextual and learner-specific exigencies. In order to understand how language teachers juggle the demands of implementing contemporary language teaching approaches and classroom realities, it is worthwhile exploring the discourses constructed by them regarding their teaching preferences. Existing scholarship obviates that the problem of implementing language teaching approaches is amply represented in the studies based on survey and experimental research designs. However, there remains a gap in the analysis of the discourses on language teaching approaches using corpus linguistics methods, particularly among EFL teachers. Moreover, little is known about how Ukrainian EFL practicing teachers articulate their views about language teaching approaches and methods in academic writing. Hence, the novelty of this study resides in uncovering lexico-semantic features typical of discourses taken up by EFL student teachers who have undergone teaching practicum.

The Present Study

Context and Participants

The investigation is contextualized in a university program in English language and literature in Ukraine's western part. It runs on the BA and MA levels, offering extensive theoretical and practical preparation in EFL pedagogy. Concerning the course content, students are trained in the principles of contemporary approaches, which encompass a variety of methodologies, including but not limited to CLT, task-based learning, content-based instruction, eclecticism, to name a few. The BA program targets the problems of teaching EFL in schools in Ukraine from grades 1 to 11, while the MA program offers preparation in English linguistics. Therefore, the students enrolled in these programs undergo teaching practicum at different educational levels, working with young and adolescent language learners.

In total, 41 student teachers consented to participate in this study. Of these, 31 individuals were in their final year of the BA program, and 10—in the MA program at the time of research. Among the MA students, four entered this program with prior teaching experience ranging from one to five years. When the study occurred, the BA students had completed the main phase of their teaching practicum in the current academic year, lasting four weeks. Before this, they had several sessions of observation and guided teaching practicum of varying duration each year (one session at the end of the first year and two sessions in the second and third years each semester). The participants were

non-native speakers of English, with their native languages being Ukrainian, Hungarian, or both. Many were compound bilinguals who acquired two languages simultaneously as children (Saville-Troike, 2016). The respondents were assigned codes ranging from S1 to S41.

Method

This study adopts a corpus-assisted methodology to examine the discourses of language teaching approaches represented in a corpus of reflective essays written by EFL student teachers. Corpus linguistics is the empirical investigation of natural language use utilizing corpora, which are typically large digitalized collections of texts. Though both quantitative and qualitative approaches come with their respective limitations, one advantage of corpus-assisted discourse analysis is its ability to reduce some of the methodological weaknesses associated with qualitative content analysis. By reducing the subjectivity of human findings, corpus analysis lends more rigor to discourse interpretation owing to computerized procedures of data analysis (Baker, 2012; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019). Traditionally, discourse analysis involved “the close-reading (that is, qualitative analysis) of single texts or a small number of texts in an attempt to highlight both textual structures and also how meanings are conveyed” (Partington et al., 2013, p. 216). However, it has lately begun to draw extensively on corpus linguistics (Baker, 2023; Flowerdew, 2013; Friginal & Hardy, 2020; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019).

There is ample evidence in the literature suggesting that linguistic features of texts can reveal speakers’ understanding and perceptions concerning a given communication domain (Brezina et al., 2015). Specifically, identifying keywords, collocations, and n-grams with their further analysis in concordance lines is crucial in semantic research and discourse analysis (Brezina, 2018). In this study, the lexico-semantic features of the specialized corpus of essays were examined through corpus techniques. The LancsBox X software package was used for data analysis. Techniques such as keywords, collocations, and n-grams were utilized to analyze the quantitative characteristics of the corpus. Subsequently, the KWIK tool was applied to look into the data qualitatively.

Keyword and collocation analyses are standard procedures to reveal the aboutness of a corpus or prevalent themes (Gabrielatos, 2018). Keywords refer to lexical items salient in a corpus of interest compared to a larger reference corpus. Collocations are defined as “combinations of words that habitually co-occur in texts and corpora” (Brezina, 2018, p. 67). Collocation analysis is applied to expand the results of keyword analysis. N-grams are syntagmatic lexical units whose analysis can disclose lexico-grammatical units, as well as multiword expressions appearing in a corpus (Friginal & Hardy, 2020).

Procedure

The procedure followed these steps. First, the participants were requested to write a reflective essay with the following instructions: Write a reflective essay of approximately 300 words: “My favorite language teaching approach(es)/ methods.” Consider addressing the following questions: What language teaching approach(es)/methods do you favor and why? Which of them do you base your teaching on? What activities do you use in teaching?

The participants were assured that their names and provided information would remain confidential and only be used for research purposes. The assignment was not grade-bearing, and the opinions expressed would not influence their future grades in any way. The desired writing style was academic English. Essays could be typewritten or handwritten and were to be prepared at home at a time convenient for the students. The collected essays were compiled into a corpus comprised of 17,454 tokens. The average length of the essays was 425.7 words.

The analysis of the essays commenced with the identification of keywords. The reference corpus used was BNC 2014, specifically the sub-corpus of academic prose. The choice of the given reference corpus was justified by the availability of a sub-corpus in the same genre as the target corpus. The Word technique in the LancsBox provided data on the relative frequency of lemmas per one million words in the target and reference corpora, SMP (simple maths parameter), Log Likelihood, percentage difference between the target and reference corpora, and Log Ratio. No minimum frequency cut-off points were set. The top fifty keywords were then subjected to further analysis.

The collocation parameters were set as follows: span: 5–5, statistic name—Log Dice and MI, statistic value threshold—5.0, minimum collocate frequency—5, minimum collocation frequency—5. The n-grams were extracted following the procedure identical to the keyword analysis. The top twenty-five 3-grams were included in the analysis. This specific number was chosen because many names of approaches and methods include a combination of three words (e.g., task-based learning, content-based instruction, total physical response).

Finally, the KWIK technique was applied to analyze the keywords and most frequent adjectives in context since it can reveal respondents’ positive or negative attitudes to the mentioned language teaching approaches and methods. Looking at keywords and n-grams out of context is ambiguous for several reasons. Participants might discuss either the benefits or caveats of particular approaches or techniques. However, out of context, it is unclear whether they endorse or disapprove of specific methods. As a result, their statistical values can be high for disparate reasons.

Results

Table 1 showcases the results of the keyword analysis, ordered by their statistical significance. After extraction, the keywords were clustered into semantic fields, taking into account their semantic relatedness rather than their denotative meaning (see Table 2). The term “semantic field” refers to a cohesive relationship among words with shared meanings belonging to a specific domain. Lexemes can be grouped into a semantic/lexical field based on their thematic relatedness, conceptual similarity, or even usage patterns (Lőrincz, 2025; Reimer, 2016).

Table 1
Results of the Keyword Analysis

Rank	Word	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014: academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
1	teaching	11 229.02	105.43	55.15	1 452.75	10 551.09	6.73
2	language	15 496.04	292.68	39.72	1 636.96	5 194.62	5.73
3	communicative	3 817.87	13.65	34.47	614.85	27 861.29	8.13
4	students	12 127.34	287.45	31.56	1 187.11	4 118.98	5.40
5	lessons	3 817.87	26.95	30.86	530.38	14 064.95	7.15
6	grammar	3 200.27	22.59	26.92	444.61	14 068.22	7.15
7	lesson	2 751.11	22.99	23.18	366.67	11 864.61	6.90
8	learning	7 579.59	268.82	20.82	637.98	2 719.59	4.82
9	tasks	3 424.85	97.15	17.88	314.27	3 425.24	5.14
10	eclectic	1 628.21	2.64	16.84	300.98	61 587.22	9.27
11	learners	2 021.22	41.67	14.97	207.47	4 750.20	5.60
12	skills	3 256.41	129.43	14.63	261.53	2 415.87	4.65
13	method	6 961.99	400.33	14.11	472.81	1 639.04	4.12
14	clt	1 347.48	2.64	14.10	241.76	50 951.49	9.00
15	tried	1 684.35	31.37	13.58	178.74	5 269.49	5.75
16	teacher	2 414.24	85.58	13.55	203.25	2 721.05	4.82
17	classes	2 133.51	76.54	12.65	178.75	2 687.29	4.80

Table 1 continued

Rank	Word	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014: academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
18	try	1 796.64	54.72	12.26	160.52	3 183.46	5.04
19	speaking	1 684.35	45.99	12.22	156.76	3 562.63	5.19
20	translation	2 133.51	100.50	11.14	159.13	2 022.85	4.41
21	exercises	1 179.05	14.87	11.13	140.76	7 827.79	6.31
22	audiolingualism	1 010.61	0	11.11	252.34	Infinity	46.52
23	grade	1 403.63	36.14	11.04	133.43	3 783.83	5.28
24	classroom	1 347.48	31.83	10.98	132.06	4 133.94	5.40
25	english	3 031.83	188.01	10.87	198.29	1 512.59	4.01
26	communication	2 245.80	129.38	10.23	152.38	1 635.76	4.12
27	vocabulary	1 122.90	20.15	10.18	120.58	5 472.37	5.80
28	approach	6 007.52	544.69	9.47	318.24	1 002.92	3.46
29	reading	2 133.51	137.81	9.39	136.66	1 448.15	3.95
30	approaches	2 470.38	181.72	9.12	147.66	1 259.47	3.76
31	learn	1 347.48	62.13	8.93	101.47	2 068.85	4.44
32	listening	1 066.76	35.48	8.61	92.11	2 906.61	4.91
33	methods	4 098.59	393.48	8.51	209.59	941.62	3.38
34	activities	2 526.53	224.66	8.09	135.43	1 024.61	3.49
35	topics	954.47	31.01	8.05	83.18	2 977.57	4.94
36	grades	786.03	12.39	7.88	87.89	6 246.57	5.99
37	games	898.32	26.85	7.87	80.83	3 245.53	5.06
38	interactive	842.18	21.27	7.77	80.62	3 859.84	5.31
39	student	1 628.21	125.27	7.67	94.93	1 199.73	3.70
40	teach	786.03	20.46	7.36	74.44	3 742.98	5.27
41	practice	3 098.59	463.66	6.68	145.75	668.03	2.74
42	audiolingual	674.59	15.38	6.58	69.23	4 285.76	5.51
43	behaviourist	731.46	18.48	6.57	70.98	3 857.48	5.30
44	role	1 734.50	141.58	6.38	68.35	1 124.13	3.63
45	skills-based	618.45	15.25	6.33	64.35	3 955.74	5.33

Table 1 continued

Rank	Word	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014: academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
46	fluency	730.74	21.47	5.66	60.36	3 302.84	5.04
47	behaviors	562.30	16.52	5.35	51.80	3 303.51	5.04
48	community	1 291.62	146.52	5.18	50.52	781.69	2.95
49	context	1 066.76	148.64	4.38	39.06	617.65	2.69
50	errors	674.59	94.98	4.32	34.63	610.15	2.68

Table 2
Grouping of Keywords into Semantic Fields

Semantic Field	Lemma
Approaches/methods	communicative, eclectic, method, CLT, audiolingualism, approach, interactive, audiolingual, behaviourist, skills-based
Education and instructional processes	teaching, lessons, learning, classes, grade, classroom, learn, grades, teach, practice, role, behaviors, community
Agents	students, learners, teacher
Language skills	grammar, skills, speaking, vocabulary, reading, listening, topics, fluency, errors
Linguistic aspects	language, english, communication, context
Techniques	tasks, translation, exercises, activities, games

The outputted statistical values signal that participants frequently reference language teaching approaches and methods, the instructional process, and its agents. As evident from the data in Tables 1 and 2, the most salient lemmas in the semantic field of approaches and methods include “communicative,” “eclectic,” “method,” “CLT,” “audiolingualism.” This suggests that the participants give precedence to CLT and eclecticism, a hypothesis that requires further verification through additional analysis.

Regarding language aspects and skills, the student teachers discussed “grammar,” “speaking,” “vocabulary,” “reading,” and “listening.” Notably, writing and pronunciation do not appear to be prioritized. Additionally, lemma “fluency” is more prominent than “errors.” At the same time, lemma “grammar” is also highly significant and appears more frequently than “speaking.” These lexical choices will be examined further in the subsequent section of this paper.

The findings of the n-grams analysis, presented in Table 3, not only corroborate, but further elaborate on the results obtained through keyword analysis. Moreover, the n-grams results are more revealing in the sense that they shed light on a broader range of language teaching approaches and methods taken up by student teachers in their essays.

Table 3*Results of 3-grams Analysis*

Key n-grams	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014-academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
communicative language teaching	2,021.22	0	21.21	504.68	Infinity	47.52
I tried to	898.32	1.17	9.87	171.54	76 847.18	9.59
grammar translation method	673.74	0	7.74	168.23	Infinity	45.94
computer assisted language	617.60	0	7.18	154.21	Infinity	45.81
task based language	561.45	0	6.61	140.19	Infinity	45.67
an eclectic approach	505.31	0	6.05	126.17	Infinity	45.52
I try to	505.31	1.52	5.96	84.09	33 083.47	8.37
I had to	505.31	3.76	5.83	69.33	13 352.76	7.07
the communicative approach	449.16	0	5.49	112.15	Infinity	45.35
a foreign language	449.16	0.86	5.44	80.84	51 952.50	9.02
in the future	561.45	30.35	5.07	39.28	1 749.69	4.21
language teaching CLT	393.02	0	4.93	98.13	Infinity	45.16
total physical response	393.02	0	4.93	98.13	Infinity	45.16
the eclectic method	336.87	0	4.37	84.11	Infinity	44.94
real life communication	336.87	0	4.37	84.11	Infinity	44.94
affective humanistic approach	336.87	0	4.37	84.11	Infinity	44.94

Table 3 continued

Key n-grams	Focus rel. freq. (a: whole corpus)	Reference rel. freq. (BNC2014-academic prose)	Simple maths	Log likelihood	% difference	Log ratio
group discussions and	336.87	0.46	4.35	63.94	73 641.05	9.53
the diverse needs	280.73	0.25	3.80	56.24	110 511.57	10.11
the direct method	280.73	1.02	3.77	45.11	27 552.89	8.11
from various methods	224.58	0	3.25	56.08	Infinity	44.35
interactive learning environment	224.58	0	3.25	56.08	Infinity	44.35
language teaching TBLT	224.58	0	3.25	56.08	Infinity	44.35
reading and storytelling	224.58	0	3.25	56.08	Infinity	44.35
direct and situational	168.44	0	2.68	42.06	Infinity	43.94
fluency and accuracy	168.44	0	2.68	42.06	Infinity	43.94

As displayed in Table 3, the most salient n-grams related to approaches are “communicative language teaching” and “grammar-translation method.” Similar to the preceding findings, eclecticism also features strongly, as evidenced by n-grams “an eclectic approach,” and “the eclectic method.” Among the frequently referenced approaches are the computer-assisted language learning, task-based language learning, total physical response, affective-humanistic approach, the direct method, reading and storytelling, and situational approach. N-grams like “I tried to,” “I try to,” and “I had to” reflect the participants’ efforts to examine their teaching experiences and experiment with language teaching approaches. However, the n-gram “I had to” also suggests some constraints or challenges caused by their implementation.

Additionally, high values for the n-grams “real life communication,” “group discussions” and “interactive learning environment” highlight the participants’ emphasis on communication and engaging students in communicative tasks. The n-gram “from various methods” could signal that students consider making instructional choices rather than relying on a single method.

To complement the previously derived data, the lemmas “approach” and “method” were subjected to collocation analysis, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

As seen in Figure 2, among the strongest and most frequent collocates of the node “method” are “grammar,” “translation,” “teaching,” “direct,” “communicative,” “language,” “approach,” “audiolingualism,” “eclectic,” “reading,” and “best.” It appears that student teachers often consider the “grammar-translation” and “communicative language teaching” as the main options. As such, they deserve further qualitative analysis, which was performed by means of a KWIK technique.

Figure 3 sets out the concordance lines produced for the search term “communicative language teaching.”

Figure 3
Communicative Language Teaching: Concordance Lines

Left	Node	Right
communication and application. I utilize	communicative language	teaching methods that prioritize meaningful
the classroom I prefer using	communicative language	teaching, because I believe that
grammar-translation for foundational understanding,	communicative language	teaching for real-world application,
methods. From grammar-translation to	communicative language	teaching, and from total physical
the students. When using the	communicative language	teaching method, the teacher creates
my heart leans towards the	communicative language	teaching approach. Still, I recognize
journey, I lean towards the	communicative language	teaching approach. It focuses on
find myself drawn to the	communicative language	teaching (CLT) approach, which places
language teaching I prefer the	communicative language	teaching method over other. The
definitely in favour of the	communicative language	teaching. Based on my experiences,
resonates with me is the	Communicative Language	Teaching (CLT) method, emphasizing communication
a genuine affinity for the	communicative language	teaching approach. This methodology resonates
on the set goals, so	communicative language	teaching, reading aloud and short
and experience. Personally, a prefer	Communicative Language	Teaching (CLT) that aims to
to base my teaching on	communicative language	teaching because it promotes active
I base my teaching on	communicative language	teaching, incorporating activities such as
predominantly based my methods on	communicative language	teaching. This approach emphasizes real-
I tried to focus on	communicative language	teaching. The students were flexible.
put as much emphasis on	communicative language	teaching as possible. I integrated
worked best for learners of	Communicative language	teaching. The best teaching methods

The analysis yielded 36 hits in the target corpus. Of these, 35 lines indicated positive evaluation, with one line remaining unclear. Therefore, it can be inferred that the participants strongly favored CLT.

Figure 4
Grammar-Translation: Concordance Lines

Left	Node	Right
accustomed to traditional methods like	grammar-translation.	The method posed difficulties, as
unique strengths. A balance between	grammar-translation	for foundational understanding, communicative language
example, I was inspired by	grammar translation,	cognitive approach and affective- humanist
this. I partially use the	grammar-translation	approach, audiolingualism, reading, and story-
relied on most was the	grammar-translation	method, we were mostly speaking
methods, I focused on the	grammar-translation	method, but not too much –
I've planned. I used	grammar-translation	method in my teaching because
language use and collaborative learning.	Grammar-Translation	Approach: Revisited foundational grammar concepts
involved a flexible integration of	Grammar-Translation,	Reading Method, Audiolingual Method, Affective-
words and grammar. I used	grammar-translation,	reading-story-telling, and also
I have used mostly the “	grammar-translation”	method. When teaching students, we
despite my personal disapproval of	Grammar-Translation	Method, I have incorporated some
for children, those approaches are:	Grammar-Translation	method: Introduced basic grammatical concepts
sufficient results. Mostly I used	grammar-translation	technique while teaching students. This
learners, you can add the	grammar-translation	method, because they are can
elements from various methods. From	grammar-translation	to communicative language teaching, and
communication. Take the old-school	grammar-translation	method, for instance. It's like
Recognizing the limitations of the	Grammar-Translation	Method, I shifted towards a
the best method was the	grammar translation	method, because it was easier
was good with them the	grammar-translation.	They also liked games, so
based learning, the communicative method,	grammar-translation,	and the audio-lingual approach.

As shown in Figure 4, there were 26 hits comprising “grammar-translation” as a node. Qualitative analysis of the concordance lines revealed that the attitudes to this method were more reserved. Nevertheless, 12 participants endorsed it, while four expressed criticism. Even among those in favor of grammar-translation, some viewed it as an alternative rather than the only viable method. To further understand what descriptors the participants applied in reflecting on the approaches and methods, the most frequent adjectives appearing in the target corpus were extracted (Table 4).

Table 4
Adjectives Ordered by Frequencies

Adjective	Value Hits
communicative	57
different	52
real	30
eclectic	28
effective	22
new	22

Table 4 continued

Adjective	Value Hits
best	22
good	21
various	20
difficult	19
important	19
possible	17
practical	17
english	17
diverse	16
direct	15
interactive	15
meaningful	14

Among the adjectives, “communicative” topped the list, with “eclectic” as the runner-up, emerging as a significant descriptor. Both adjectives refer to respective teaching approaches. The data’s further examination revealed that the student teachers frequently employed the lemmas “different,” “various,” and “diverse.” Their contextualized usage showed that the participants applied them in relation to learners, classes, age categories, approaches, methods, and techniques. Below are some examples:

- Each learner and each class is different. There are no universal methods or approaches that can be equally beneficial to everyone (S1).
- I have been able to try my hand at teaching different age groups, so I have been able to use a variety of methods (S35).
- I have used several different approaches to be able to conduct the best lessons I could manage (S19).
- I tried using different methods in the lessons, but I didn’t stick to one in particular. Such flexibility allows me to adapt lessons to diverse learning styles and combine the strong points of different methods (S24).
- I believe that a combination of approaches is necessary to meet the diverse needs of learners (S9).

Additionally, adjectives such as “effective,” “new,” “best,” and “good” primarily appeared in the context of instructional choices made by the student teachers to provide effective learning experiences, as illustrated below:

Their communication skills are good, so I favored communicative language teaching. Story-telling was also a good method for them (S39).

If an approach does not work for our learners, we should try something else till we find the best and the most effective one (S7).

As no two classes are the same, different approaches should be considered to use everywhere, one that would suit both the teacher and the students the most effectively (S14).

The lemma “difficult” featured prominently in the context of implementing approaches and methods, dealing with low learner motivation and discipline issues, engaging students with instructional material and in communication, for example,

However, I encountered challenges in the application of CLT, particularly in classrooms where students were more accustomed to traditional methods like grammar-translation. The method posed difficulties, as some students initially struggled with the shift from rote memorization to spontaneous communication (S23).

It can sometimes be difficult to ensure that all students are actively participating and using the target language effectively (S30).

Students are growing up with technology, I think technology is the best way to engage and reach them. Of course, this is a very difficult and tiring task (S36).

The adjectives “real,” “interactive,” and “meaningful” often appeared in contexts showing the participants’ emphasis on engaging learners in authentic communication. This concern is illustrated in the following examples:

Personally, I prefer the Communicative approach because its major purpose is to become a tool for real-life communication (S10).

Our studies are meaningless unless we learn how to apply vocabulary or grammatical structures in real-life circumstances (S4).

Role-playing, group discussions, and interactive tasks were prominent features of my lessons (S13).

Discussion

The study explored the lexico-semantic features of discourses on EFL teaching approaches and methods constructed by student teachers in Ukraine. Methodologically, the study was guided by the premises of corpus linguistics. A specialized corpus comprised 41 reflective essays of EFL student teachers was compiled. The research procedure included quantitative and qualitative phases to ensure data triangulation.

The keyword profile of the corpus exposed its prevalent semantic fields. Expectedly, the participants constructed narratives related to language teaching approaches and methods, education and instructional processes, its agents, language skills, linguistic aspects, and techniques used by them in teaching EFL. While the semantic field of approaches and methods was lexically dense, the related field of techniques was somewhat underrepresented. The participants indicated endorsing a variety of approaches and methods; however, only three keywords (“tasks,” “translation,” and “games”) specified these. The semantic field of language skills was also lexically rich, with student teachers regularly discussing the issues of “grammar,” “speaking,” “vocabulary,” “reading,” and “listening.” Commendably, the high statistical value of the lemma “fluency” reflects the participants’ focus on their learners’ communicative competence, aligning with contemporary language teaching principles.

The findings of the n-grams analysis enabled further clarification of the referenced semantic fields. In particular, it generated a detailed list of approaches and methods appearing in the corpus. It also provided additional evidence of the participants’ endorsement of the premises of recent approaches by placing communication in the limelight. Moreover, the results unveiled a preference for eclecticism among student teachers.

The results of the collocation analysis of the lemmas “approach” and “method,” complemented by the KWIK technique, yielded concordance lines with their contextualized use, revealing the participants’ overall preference for CLT over TLT. Nevertheless, the thinking underlying TLT featured strongly in the narratives, as indicated by the frequent reference to the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods. Accordingly, the respondents consider both CLT and TLT approaches as viable alternatives, with many not excluding the possibility of applying more traditional approaches and techniques. By analyzing the salient adjectives, the descriptors utilized by the participants were uncovered. Their choices predominantly mirrored student teachers’ contemplating on effective language teaching practices and an emphasis on communication.

Overall, the obtained findings align with the available research in many respects. Thus, the participants in this study predominantly identified with recent methodology. They demonstrated both a positive attitude towards and

an awareness of its basic principles, including the role of communication and the necessity to organize authentic speaking tasks, echoing the findings by Althagafi (2023), Lőrincz (2023), Rahimi (2014), Sun et al. (2022).

When reflecting on language teaching approaches and methods, the participants referenced a plethora of such, including CLT, grammar-translation, TBL, audiolingualism, direct method, CALL, among others. Nevertheless, the associated techniques were not detailed enough. This suggests that while the participants were conversant with the disciplinary knowledge, its practical implementation posed a serious challenge for prospective teachers who were just learning to teach. As previously observed, knowledge about language teaching does not translate immediately into an ability to apply it in practice (Levrints, 2022; Richards, 2011). Lőrincz (2023) similarly documented discrepancies between EFL student teachers' beliefs about approaches and practices, attributing them to a lack of knowledge of practical application.

The study also disclosed that EFL teachers in Ukraine, like their counterparts in other national contexts, think in terms of methods when planning and organizing instruction (e.g., Arikan, 2006; Bell, 2007; Weseley et al., 2021). Therefore, it would be premature to dismiss the study of methods as irrelevant content in EFL teacher education (Bastidas, 2022; Hall, 2019). Instead, the programs offered to EFL student teachers should provide adequate preparation in both theory and more enhanced training in the practical aspects of organizing instruction based on contemporary approaches. Thus, the ubiquitous gap between theory and practice plaguing teacher education worldwide is present in the context of methodological preparation of EFL teachers in Ukraine.

Importantly, the participants demonstrated a genuine concern for providing effective language teaching experiences personalized to learners' characteristics and needs, as signaled by their lexical choices. Specifically, they considered the selection of appropriate approaches and methods and reported experimenting with them, expressing a strong belief in eclecticism. The salience of lemmas such as "eclecticism," "different," "effective," "best," and "good" underscores the respondents' embrace of post-method thinking, which reprises previous research (Arikan, 2006; Bell, 2007; Weseley et al., 2021).

At the same time, while the participants predominantly supported recent approaches, a minority still preferred traditional teaching, as referenced by the lemmas "grammar-translation," "audiolingualism," "reading" (method). Concomitant research suggests that, despite exposure to modern language teaching approaches in teacher education programs, many prospective teachers tend to revert to the methodologies they experienced as language learners (Tang et al., 2012). Even highly proficient students are no exception, with some viewing grammar-translation as the most effective method (Lőrincz, 2023). Yet, certain elements of a traditional language classroom have seen renewed recognition for their utility (Scheffler, 2012). Explicit grammar instruction, translation,

and meaningful drills have recently seen a comeback as instructional tools within a balanced teaching approach. Scheffler (2013) found that Polish learners of English described translation and language analysis as a welcome alternative to “communicatively-oriented consciousness raising” (p. 24). That said, while incorporating some aspects of TLT can be beneficial, fully replacing current approaches with these methods is not advisable. Overreliance on traditional teaching principles may point to gaps in initial teacher preparation, calling for increased awareness of the benefits of selecting methodologies in a complementary and context-sensitive manner.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to uncover the principal discourses surrounding EFL teaching approaches by examining the lexico-semantic features of a corpus of reflective essays. The study was positioned at the intersection of corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, and language pedagogy, whose amalgam could offer a new vantage point on the researched issue.

To analyze the target corpus, several techniques associated with corpus linguistics were employed sequentially and complementarily. Each technique produced comparable findings that built upon the data outputted in the preceding phases of the research. As a result, the main semantic fields were exposed based on the keyword profile of the corpus and provided a detailed list of the approaches and methods discussed by the participants through n-grams analysis. Further analysis of collocations, adjectives, and concordance lines revealed the participants’ attitudes towards the given approaches and methods.

In all, the findings indicate that Ukrainian EFL student teachers self-identify with current methodological thinking and embrace the notion of principled eclecticism. Even though they mostly advocated for contemporary approaches, some participants also valued more traditional teaching approaches. A precarious result of the analysis was the participants’ familiarity with a wide array of language teaching approaches and methods but limited knowledge of their practical implementation, a common situation in most teacher education contexts (Lőrincz, 2023).

Though the study is insightful in many respects, it is not without limitations. One such limitation is the small scope of the corpus, which restricts the possibility to generalize the findings to the entire country. Another issue is the study’s being based on self-reported data provided by the participants. Unfortunately, the explicitly expressed opinions do not always reflect their actual opinion, increasing the risk of bias. However, the researcher addressed this

by ensuring the anonymity of the respondents and clarifying that the essays would not affect their academic records or have other consequences.

Arguably, an implication this research holds for teacher education consists in the need to provide prospective language teachers with extended training to align knowledge about language teaching principles with knowledge of their application in actual classrooms. Furthermore, the utilization of the corpus linguistics methods in the like investigations of discourses has proven to be a sound methodology. Hence, this approach deserves wider adoption alongside mainstream research methods targeting respondents' views.

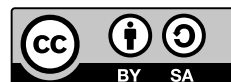
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The Lexicon of Emotions in the Corpus of L2 Learners: Exploring the Effect of Lexical Anisomorphism, Word Frequency, and L2 Proficiency

Abstract

This study explores the use of English emotion vocabulary by learners of English with L1 Moroccan Arabic (MA). Just as with color terms, languages carve up the emotional spectrum differently. Cross-linguistic comparison of emotion lexicons may, therefore, reveal varying degrees of lexical equivalence. In addition to this lexical anisomorphism, the study investigates the effects of word frequency and L2 proficiency on the use of English emotion vocabulary. To examine these factors, intermediate and advanced learners of English, as well as a group of native English speakers, watched two concise films and described the actors' emotions during specific scenes. The data was analyzed listing the most frequently used emotion terms for each group. Chi-square tests were then performed to compare the significance of the lexical choices made by native speakers to those provided by each learner group. The results indicate that advanced learners managed to describe the suggested scenes using nearly the same emotion words as native speakers. However, some culture-specific emotion terms posed problems for them. L2 proficiency demonstrated a strong effect, as intermediate learners often deviated from native usage. The implications drawn from these results suggest that culturally specific emotion terms, which lead to lexical inequivalence, should be considered alongside factors, namely word type and word frequency, that can challenge learners in acquiring L2 vocabulary. The study also highlights the importance of context-rich instruction of L2 emotion vocabulary and opens avenues for further research that would contribute to the understanding of the intersection between second language acquisition, culture, and emotions.

Keywords: emotion, culture, lexical equivalence, word frequency

¹ The following abbreviations are used in this paper: ALs (advanced learners), EFL (English as a foreign language) ILs (intermediate learners), L1 (first language), L2 (second language), MA (Moroccan Arabic), NSM (Natural Semantic Metalanguage), NSs (native speakers), SLA (second language acquisition).

The study of human emotions has intrigued scholars from various disciplines, including philosophy (e.g., Plutchik, 1980; Ben-Ze'ev, 2000), anthropology (e.g., Ekman, Sorenson, & Friesen, 1969), and cultural psychology (e.g., Matsumoto, 1990; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Nevertheless, as noted by Dewaele (2008, p. 29), "the study of emotion within the broad field of Applied Linguistics, language teaching research, and cognitive linguistics is much more limited." Recently, there has been a surge in the study of emotions in these fields, focusing on the role of emotions in foreign language teaching (e.g., Dewaele, 2011; Gökmen & Yarici, 2018), the language of emotions in migration contexts (e.g., Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2012; Mavrou, Bustos & Chao, 2023), and bilinguals' emotions (e.g., Pavlenko, 2011; Dewaele, 2013).

Research in the area of L2 vocabulary reveals that languages are characterized by lexical anisomorphism. That is, words in one language may have different degrees of equivalence when translated into another language, including near equivalence, partial equivalence, and no equivalence (Šipka, 2015). Emotions add another layer of complexity because culture influences how such concepts are lexicalized in a society. Unawareness of the precise meaning of emotion words may result in miscommunications, especially among people from distant linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, emotional vocabulary is crucial for enhancing L2 users' communicative competence. Along these lines, Mavrou et al. (2023, p. 1) emphasize that "emotional vocabulary is an important element in daily conversations, and knowledge and teaching of this vocabulary in a second language (L2) should be a primary goal in migration contexts." However, emotional vocabulary should not only be prioritized in migration contexts but also in EFL contexts due to technological advancements that have facilitated global interactions.

This study attempts to explore the emotional vocabulary of L2 learners through three main factors: word frequency, L2 proficiency, and lexical anisomorphism, which has received little attention in L2 vocabulary research, as mentioned by Pavlenko (2008, p. 92): "the relationship between the degree of translation equivalence and the linking and re-linking processes in the L2 vocabulary learning has remained relatively unexplored until now... [and] little attention has also been paid to words that lack L1 translation equivalents." Apart from contributing to SLA research, particularly in the area of L2 emotion vocabulary, this study suggests pedagogical implications for teaching emotional vocabulary to second language learners.

Literature Review

Cross-linguistic research investigating linguistic categories that involve a continuum, such as color and kinship terms, highlights that languages categorize emotions differently. Along these lines, Wierzbicka (1999, p. 15) asserts that every language “has lexically encoded some scenarios involving both thoughts and feelings and serving as a reference point for identifying what speakers of this language see as distinct kinds of feelings.” Differences in how emotions are lexicalized across languages are evident in various emotional aspects, namely appraisals, regulation, intensity, causal antecedents, and display rules. These multi-componential patterns thus allow for various lexicalizations (Zammuner & Frijda, 1994). In other words, emotion terms in different languages may focus on different elements constituting phases of emotional feeling. For example, in English, anger implies that something unpleasant has been done by someone, and the intense mode of this emotion is rage. Conversely, the state of not showing anger may not be lexicalized in some languages, as in English, while in other languages there might be words indicating “unexpressed anger,” such as the MA word ‘fagʃan’ (Elasri, 2018). Consequently, emotion words in one language may not have translational equivalents in another.

Most studies examining emotion concepts across cultures involve a contrastive analysis between English emotion terms and those of various languages. The results show that equivalence between emotion terms across languages ranges from near equivalence to complete non-equivalence (Russell, 1991; Wierzbicka, 1999; Parkinson et al., 2005; Pavlenko, 2005; Goddard, 2010). Put differently, an emotion expressed by a single word in one language might be described by several terms in another. For example, the English word “surprise” has two translational equivalents in Ifaluk: ‘ker’ meaning “pleasant surprise,” and ‘rus’ meaning “unpleasant surprise” (Lutz, 1980). Additionally, some culture-specific emotion terms in one language may not have equivalents in other languages. For instance, there is no equivalent for the Polish word “przykro,” which describes the feeling of pain caused by not showing warmth to another person (Wierzbicka, 1999).

This list of such examples can be extended almost indefinitely. Nevertheless, the absence of a word denoting an emotional state in a language does not mean that the emotion is not felt by its speakers; rather, the existence of certain specific emotion terms in some cultures suggests that the events giving rise to these emotions are highly salient and prevalent in those cultures. As Wierzbicka (1995, p. 19) explains, “the presence of a word proves that in that society the concept in question is a salient one—sufficiently to merit lexicalization. Correspondingly, the absence of a word indicates that a given concept is not salient in that society.” Similarly, Parkinson et al. (2005, p. 53) add that

“societies develop words for the issues that are important and need to be communicated, but not for the issues that are unimportant, or irrelevant.”

Besides influencing the lexicalization of emotions, culture also shapes how emotions are represented in language. Studies in this line of research often explore the individualistic-collectivistic dimensions of culture (Frijda, 1993; Oatley, Keltner, & Jenkins, 2014). According to Oatley et al. (2014), the conceptualization of emotions in individualist cultures emerges from the interaction of individuals' bodies and minds; therefore, socially engaging emotions are less prevalent in these cultures. By contrast, in collectivist cultures, emotions are constructed through social interactions and occur among people rather than within an individual's mind. Several studies have explored the linguistic outcomes of these cultural dimensions, particularly regarding the use of emotional vocabulary in a second language (Semin et al., 2002; Pavlenko & Driagina, 2007; Pavlenko, 2008). Findings show that in English, adjectives are the dominant morpho-syntactic categories for expressing emotions. In particular, emotions “are most commonly expressed through copular constructions with adjectives and pseudo-participles that present emotions as passive inner states (to be upset, happy, excited). Only a few emotions are expressed primarily through intransitive verbs (to rejoice, to worry)” (Pavlenko, 2005, p. 87). On the other hand, studies on languages related to collectivist cultures reveal the influence of this cultural dimension on the linguistic representation of emotions. For example, the analysis of some narratives by MA speakers shows that emotions are mostly expressed with verbs, and even when nouns are used, they typically collocate with verbs (e.g., ‘hes bi- l-farha’ meaning ‘felt-he DEF-happiness’) (Elasri, 2021).

The differing linguistic expressions of emotions, both conceptually and structurally, have led researchers to investigate whether this anisomorphism can have cognitive consequences on the acquisition of L2 emotions terms (Pavlenko, 2002; 2005; Stepanova & Coley, 2006; Pavlenko, 2008). L2 lexical acquisition involves various cognitive processes, depending on the degree of lexical equivalence between the L1 and L2 terms. The overall patterns of the results indicate that L1 semantic and grammatical categories can affect the use of L2 emotion terms. When there is conceptual equivalence, L2 learners may learn the target word through positive transfer from L1. However, when the L2 word is only partially equivalent to the L1 term, learners may acquire the word via positive transfer but may also encounter negative transfer by assuming total equivalence. In cases of non-equivalence, learners need to develop new categories.

Despite this interest in L2 emotion vocabulary, it remains under-researched, with limited studies available (e.g., Rintell, 1990; Stepanova & Coley 2006; Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko & Driagina, 2007; Pavlenko, 2008). For instance, Pavlenko and Driagina (2007) examined the use of Russian emotions through narratives by learners of Russian with L1 English. The participants

watched a 3-minute film and then were asked to describe the character's emotions. The study found that American learners could describe the characters' feelings like native speakers when the scenes required using emotion words that had lexical equivalents in English. However, they encountered difficulties in describing scenes that required words with partial or no equivalents in English.

In another study, Pavlenko (2008) analyzed 206 narratives told by Russian and English native speakers and L2 learners of Russian and English after watching two video clips. The results showed that L1 English speakers used adjective constructions with the verb *to be* or *to get* and emotion words such as *afraid*, *frightened*, or *terrified*. In contrast, L1 Russian speakers in the same context preferred reflexive emotion verbs like *to get scared*. Regarding bilinguals, they generally adhered to the structural patterns of native speakers. They "internalized new structural patterns of emotion description, verbs in the case of L2 Russian and adjectives in the case of L2 English" (Pavlenko 2009, p. 134).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Although informative, the studies mentioned above have mostly focused on two languages: English and Russian, as they involve Russian and American bilinguals. Given the need to explore this research area with a broader range of languages and participants with different mother tongues, this study is carried out with two groups of Moroccan learners of English—intermediate and advanced—to detect the effect of L2 proficiency on the use of emotion words. Furthermore, this study investigates the roles of two other factors, lexical anisomorphism, and word frequency, in describing emotions using English terms. Accordingly, the following questions are addressed:

1. Does lexical anisomorphism between MA and English affect learners' use of emotion terms in describing emotional scenes compared to native English speakers?
2. Do low-frequency emotion terms influence learners' lexical choices in describing emotional scenes compared to native English speakers?
3. Is there any effect of proficiency level on using English emotion terms to describe emotional scenes like native English speakers?

Answers to these questions will either confirm or refute the following hypotheses: first, based on previous studies (e.g., Pavlenko & Driagina, 2007), advanced learners would approximate native speakers in describing emotions, but they may encounter problems with L2 emotion concepts lacking equivalence in their L1. Second, advanced learners are more likely to use both frequent and less frequent emotion terms, as they have a broader and deeper vocabulary

that enables them to use nuanced emotion terms like native speakers. Finally, advanced learners are expected to outperform intermediate learners, as the former group is likely to have developed a rich lexicon that allows them to use emotion vocabulary appropriately in context.

Method

Population and Sample of Participants

A total of 180 subjects participated in this study: 60 native speakers (NSs), 60 advanced learners (ALs), and 60 intermediate learners (ILs). Responses from ILs were collected from two groups of students enrolled in intermediate-level English courses at the American Language Center in Marrakech. Based on the pedagogical system of this language center, each group included 30 students. Group membership was determined by scores on a proficiency test administered at the beginning of the academic year. The first group (B1 level) included 17 females and 13 males, and the second group (B2 level) included 19 females and 11 males. The age range for each group was 17–21. To ensure a similar number of participants, responses from ALs (ages 21–25) were collected from 26 males and 34 females studying for a master's degree in English at the Faculty of Educational Sciences in Rabat and the Faculty of Letters and Humanities in Marrakech. The recruitment of native English speakers was done using convenience sampling. A request titled "For native speakers of English only" was posted on the website www.linguist-list.com with a link to a Google Form, which allowed the possibility of integrating visual material. Besides the specified emotional scenes, the form included filter questions related to age and gender. The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 46 years, and their educational backgrounds ranged from high school to PhD, but they all declared English as their native language.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study consisted of two video clips from YouTube. The first video clip (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQjMGv3CoPk>) is a segment from the film *Mr. Bean in the swimming pool*. There are no verbal exchanges in the clip, only sound effects, including laughter and music. In this segment, Mr. Bean goes to a public swimming pool. Realizing there is much fun in the children's pool, he runs to join them but is stopped by the lifeguard,

who orders him to go to the adults' pool. There, he sees people diving off a super-high board and runs towards it. Reaching the board and looking down, he finds himself scared to death. While making attempts to jump, two boys who have just climbed up the platform push him down. Upon landing, Mr. Bean loses his swimming trunks and is unable to retrieve them. He tries to get back to the changing room unseen just as everyone is told to leave the pool, but he ends up face to face with female swimmers, who start screaming.

The second video clip (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVrQqWIs6ZE-&t=32s>) includes verbal exchanges accompanied by music and English subtitles. The clip tells the story of a boy who steals medicine from a pharmacy but is caught by the pharmacist, who starts shouting at him and attempts to beat him, despite his pleas that the medicine is for his sick mother. A man from a nearby fast-food shop intervenes, asking her to forgive the boy and offering to pay for the medicine. Thirty years later, while the man is working in his shop, he collapses and is immediately taken to the hospital by his worried daughter. Although he feels better, the large sum on the hospital bill adds to his daughter's distress. The next day, she discovers that the bill has been paid. The doctor explains that the expenses were covered thirty years ago when her father gave him food and bought medicine for a sick mother. She then remembers the boy, who has become a doctor.

Data Collection Procedure

The first video clip was previously used by Pavlenko (2008) to examine the effect of structural and conceptual equivalence on the use of emotions by learners of Russian and learners of English. Pavlenko elicited data by interviewing the participants, allowing for the spontaneous analysis of structural and lexical choices. In the current study, a different methodology was followed. Since the focus was only on emotion terms, participants were asked to watch the segment and describe the emotions felt by the actors in each video clip. This method allowed participants to describe the same stimulus simultaneously, without the need for individual interviews, which might not help in evaluating the same pattern of emotion vocabulary used by all participants.

Data Analysis Procedure

Several steps were taken in analyzing the responses of the participating groups to derive results for each variable. First, rarely used emotion terms from each group were eliminated, and only the most frequently used emotion terms were listed, with frequencies and percentages calculated (see Table 1). Next, the

most frequently used emotion terms by NSs were compared to those used by ILs and ALs in terms of frequency and percentage (see Table 2). To confirm the significance of these frequencies and percentages, pairwise Chi-square tests were performed for each emotion category between each pair of groups. The results of these pairwise chi-square tests, along with effect size information, are shown in Table 3. Comparing learners’ lexical choices to those of native speakers addressed the first and third research questions related to lexical anisomorphism and language proficiency, respectively. For the word frequency factor, emotion words used by NSs were categorized into ‘frequent’ and ‘less frequent’ based on the 2000 most frequent words in the Oxford list of word frequency (see Table 4). This categorization allowed for examining whether low-frequency emotion words affected the learners’ performance in describing emotions like NSs by comparing the lexical choices of each learner group with those of NSs.

Results

The Most Frequently Used Emotion Terms by Participants in Each Group

The lexical choices provided by participants in each group are presented according to the main emotional scenes that were pointed out for description. Table 1 displays the emotion terms most frequently used by ILs, ALs, and NSs for each of the eight scenes. Other emotion terms, being less frequently used and therefore less representative, are excluded from the analysis.

Table 1
The Most Frequently Used Emotion Terms by Participants in Each Group

Scenes	NSs	N	%	ALs	N	%	ILs	N	%
1	confused	22	36.7	surprised	20	33.3	angry	17	28.3
	annoyed	12	20.0	angry	13	21.7	surprised	13	21.7
	angry	7	11.7	shocked	7	11.7	confused	11	18.3
	surprised	4	6.7	confused	6	10.0	shocked	9	15.0
2	excited	50	83.4	excited	37	61.2	excited	31	51.7
	elated	2	3.3	enthusiastic	5	8.3	happy	11	18.3

Table 1 continued

Scenes	NSs	N	%	ALs	N	%	ILs	N	%
3	terrified	25	41.7	terrified	20	33.4	scared	23	38.3
	scared	23	38.4	scared	17	28.4	afraid	11	18.3
	afraid	5	8.4	afraid	14	23.4	terrified	7	11.7
4	embarrassed	43	71.7	embarrassed	33	55.0	embarrassed	30	50.0
	ashamed	8	13.3	ashamed	20	33.4	ashamed	22	36.7
5	angry	44	73.4	angry	42	70.0	angry	45	75.0
	furious	8	13.4	furious	5	8.4	furious	10	16.7
6	ashamed	40	66.7	ashamed	20	33.3	ashamed	20	33.3
	embarrassed	7	11.7	embarrassed	15	25.0	embarrassed	17	28.3
	humiliated	4	6.7	humiliated	8	13.4	sad	5	8.3
7	compassionate	20	33.4	compassionate	20	33.4	pitiful	24	40.0
	sympathetic	19	31.7	sympathetic	16	26.7	merciful	11	18.3
	empathetic	9	15.0	pitiful	13	21.7	compassionate	9	15.0
8	sad	14	23.4	sad	21	35.0	sad	23	38.3
	worried	11	18.4	worried	10	16.7	scared	19	31.7
	scared	11	18.4	scared	4	6.7	afraid	5	8.3

As shown in Table 1, different emotions are used in the first scene since it involves a sequence of two emotional reactions from the lifeguard who noticed something unusual (Mr. Bean swimming in the children’s area) and frowned; as a result, participants used emotion terms that describe different feelings of the lifeguard. The most frequently used terms are *confused* and *annoyed* by NSs, and *surprised*, *angry*, and *shocked* by ALs and ILs. The second scene refers to when Mr. Bean saw two boys enjoying themselves by jumping off a super diving board and ran towards them. Most NSs and ALs used *excited*, but most ILs used both *excited* and *happy*. The third scene involves Mr. Bean going up to the super diving board and being terrified when he looks down. Participants in each group used the same terms (*scared*, *afraid*, and *terrified*), but in a different order for ILs. Likewise, participants used the same terms (*embarrassed* and *ashamed*) to describe Mr. Bean’s feelings when exited the pool without trunks and faced female swimmers. The same terms were used by participants in each group for the sixth scene, showing a woman reproaching a boy in public. Participants also did not differ in their lexical choices for the

fifth scene, with most using *angry* and *furious* to describe the woman’s feelings when reacting violently against the boy. In the seventh scene, most NSs used *compassionate*, *sympathetic*, and *empathetic* to describe the feeling of a man offering to pay for stolen medicine and providing food for the boy. ALs approximated NSs by using *compassionate* and *sympathetic*, but very few used *empathetic*. ILs’ choices were *pitiful*, *merciful*, and *compassionate*. Moreover, most NSs and ALs used *sad*, *worried*, and *scared*, while ILs used *sad*, *scared*, and *afraid* for the last scene, which involved a sequence of two brief events: a girl watching her father fall in pain and then waiting near the emergency room.

As a preliminary analysis, it seems that ALs often managed to use the same emotion words as NSs for most of the emotional scenes. ILs also approximated the native speakers’ lexical choices but with less accuracy compared to ALs. To assess the significance of differences or similarities in lexical selections between each group of learners and native speakers, further statistical tests are needed for comparison.

The Most Frequently Used Emotion Terms by NSs Compared to ILs and ALs

Since the aim of this study is to explore MA learners’ performance in describing emotional scenes using English emotion terms, the responses provided by native speakers will be considered a reference. After all, acquiring a second language entails developing a native-like competence in the target language. Therefore, only emotion terms used by more than 15% of the participants in the NSs group are considered for analysis: *confused*, *annoyed*, *excited*, *terrified*, *scared*, *embarrassed*, *angry*, *ashamed*, *compassionate*, *sympathetic*, *empathetic*, *sad*, and *worried*. ALs and ILs used the same emotions except for *annoyed* and *empathetic*. Relevant statistics for each of these words are taken from the corpus. Table 2 displays the most frequently used emotion terms by NSs compared to ILs and ALs in terms of frequency and percentage.

To compare the significance of the lexical selections provided by NSs with those of each learner group, pairwise chi-square tests were conducted for each emotion term. Table 3 presents these tests for each emotion category between each pair of groups, along with effect size information.

Table 2*The Most Frequently Used Emotion Terms by NSs Compared to ILs and Als*

NSs	N	%	ALs	N	%	ILs	N	%
confused	22	36.7	confused	6	10.0	confused	11	18.3
annoyed	12	20.0	annoyed	5	8.3	annoyed	1	1.7
excited	50	83.4	excited	37	61.2	excited	31	51.7
terrified	25	41.7	terrified	20	33.4	terrified	7	11.7
scared	23	38.4	scared	17	28.4	scared	23	38.3
embarrassed	43	71.7	embarrassed	33	55.0	embarrassed	30	50.0
angry	44	73.4	angry	42	70.0	angry	45	75.0
ashamed	40	66.7	ashamed	20	33.3	ashamed	20	33.3
compassionate	20	33.4	compassionate	20	33.4	compassionate	9	15.0
sympathetic	19	31.7	sympathetic	16	26.7	sympathetic	6	10.0
empathetic	9	15.0	empathetic	1	1.7	empathetic	1	1.7
sad	14	23.4	sad	21	35.0	sad	23	38.3
worried	11	18.4	worried	10	16.7	worried	2	3.3

Table 3*The Results of the Pairwise chi-square Tests for Each Emotion Category between Each Pair of Groups*

Emotions	NSs vs ALs	Effect Size	NSs vs ILs	Effect Size	ALs vs ILs	Effect Size
confused	$\chi = 11.898^*$ $p = 0.0006$	$d = 0.70$	$\chi = 4.742^*$ $p = 0.0294$	$d = 0.50$	$\chi = 1.012$ $p = 0.3146$	$d = 0.10$
annoyed	$\chi = 2.291$ $p = 0.1301$	$d = 0.20$	$\chi = 8.194^*$ $p = 0.0042$	$d = 0.60$	$\chi = 1.862$ $p = 0.1723$	$d = 0.25$
excited	$\chi = 8.616^*$ $p = 0.0033$	$d = 0.60$	$\chi = 14.818^*$ $p < 0.0001$	$d = 0.80$	$\chi = 1.505$ $p = 0.2197$	$d = 0.15$
terrified	$\chi = 0.476$ $p = 0.4901$	$d = 0.05$	$\chi = 9.114^*$ $p = 0.0025$	$d = 0.65$	$\chi = 3.992^*$ $p = 0.0458$	$d = 0.40$
scared	$\chi = 1.473$ $p = 0.2247$	$d = 0.10$	$\chi = 0.0$ $p = 1.0$	$d = 0.00$	$\chi = 1.473$ $p = 0.2247$	$d = 0.10$
embarrassed	$\chi = 3.751$ $p = 0.0527$	$d = 0.35$	$\chi = 7.492^*$ $p = 0.0062$	$d = 0.55$	$\chi = 0.282$ $p = 0.5952$	$d = 0.05$
angry	$\chi = 0.086$ $p = 0.7691$	$d = 0.05$	$\chi = 0.021$ $p = 0.8844$	$d = 0.02$	$\chi = 0.154$ $p = 0.6948$	$d = 0.03$

Table 3 continued

Emotions	NSs vs ALs	Effect Size	NSs vs ILs	Effect Size	ALs vs ILs	Effect Size
ashamed	$\chi = 10.0^*$ $p = 0.0016$	$d = 0.70$	$\chi = 10.0^*$ $p = 0.0016$	$d = 0.70$	$\chi = 0.0$ $p = 1.0$	$d = 0.00$
compassionate	$\chi = 0.0$ $p = 1.0$	$d = 0.00$	$\chi = 5.542^*$ $p = 0.0185$	$d = 0.50$	$\chi = 5.542^*$ $p = 0.0185$	$d = 0.50$
sympathetic	$\chi = 0.423$ $p = 0.5155$	$d = 0.05$	$\chi = 8.694^*$ $p = 0.0032$	$d = 0.60$	$\chi = 4.712^*$ $p = 0.0300$	$d = 0.45$
empathetic	$\chi = 10.533^*$ $p = 0.0012$	$d = 0.75$	$\chi = 10.533^*$ $p = 0.0012$	$d = 0.75$	$\chi = 0.0$ $p = 1.0$	$d = 0.00$
sad	$\chi = 1.767$ $p = 0.1836$	$d = 0.15$	$\chi = 4.713^*$ $p = 0.0300$	$d = 0.40$	$\chi = 0.079$ $p = 0.7792$	$d = 0.05$
worried	$\chi = 0.073$ $p = 0.7865$	$d = 0.05$	$\chi = 6.536^*$ $p = 0.0106$	$d = 0.55$	$\chi = 5.712^*$ $p = 0.0168$	$d = 0.50$

Note: *Significant differences are marked with asterisks.

The Frequent and Less Frequent Emotion Terms Used by NSs

Emotion words used by NSs were categorized into “frequent” and “less frequent” based on the most 2,000 frequent words in the Oxford list of word frequency, which mainly involves words that are common in everyday usage. These words served as a reference to pinpoint the impact of word frequency on the use of L2 emotion vocabulary by learners in each group. Table 4 provides a detailed breakdown of these frequent and less frequent terms.

Table 4

Frequent and Less Frequent Terms Based on the Oxford 2000-Word List

Frequent Terms	Less Frequent Terms
confused	annoyed
excited	terrified
scared	ashamed
embarrassed	compassionate
angry	sympathetic
sad	empathetic
worried	

Discussion

The results indicate that lexical anisomorphism and L2 proficiency significantly affect learners’ use of English emotion terms. The discussion of the results begins with an analysis of the lexical choices by comparing the responses

of ALS and NSS to identify instances of equivalence and non-equivalence. This comparison may reveal cases of positive transfer from L1 as well as negative transfer. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) is adopted to analyze the emotion terms used by NSs and their translational equivalents in MA. NSM was developed by Wierzbicka (1996) and other scholars (e.g., Goddard, 2010). It addresses ethnocentrism in linguistic research, particularly in cross-cultural studies of emotions. The discussion then highlights the effect of word frequency on the use of emotion terms by both groups of learners. Finally, the effect of language proficiency is explored by comparing the performance of ALs and ILs in approximating the lexical choices of NSs.

Lexical Anisomorphism

Emotions are deeply intertwined with culture, and each language community has its own set of terms to express them, leading to lexical anisomorphism across languages. In other words, a language may exhibit different degrees of lexical equivalence, ranging from near equivalence to no equivalence when its emotion lexicon is compared to that of another language. English emotion terms denoting general emotions (*sad*, *angry*, and *scared*) do not seem to pose problems for advanced participants, as they performed quite similarly to NSs. Likewise, emotions with direct lexical equivalents in MA, namely *compassionate* and *sympathetic*, show no significant differences between ALs and NSs, although each language includes several terms denoting emotional reactions to other people's plights. Nevertheless, significant differences between ALs and NSs are observed for emotion terms with different cultural connotations in MA, and therefore lacking direct lexical equivalents, such as *ashamed*, *excited*, *empathetic*, and *confused* (see Table 3 which displays the significance and non-significance of the lexical choices provided by each learner group compared to NSs).

While NSs distinguished between embarrassment and shame in the sixth scene, ALs used both terms interchangeably, as these concepts are subsumed under the single term 'hšem' in MA, meaning "got embarrassed" or "ashamed." In NSM terms, shame implies that "people can know something bad about me; I don't want people to know this; if people know this, they can't think something bad about me" (Wierzbicka 1999, p. 110). Embarrassment is related to shame, but the latter is culture-specific since it is oriented to individualistic self-image. According to Wierzbicka (1999, p. 115), embarrassment has emerged concerning one's image and it implies that: "something is happening to me now not because I want it; someone knows about it; this person is thinking about me; I don't want people to think about me like this." Thus, ALs could not distinguish between the two English terms since the only equivalent, *hšem*, describes the

same causal antecedents for both shame and embarrassment. It is important to note that many words associated with shame in MA carry positive meanings, while in English, they convey negative ones.

Other emotion terms that lack lexical equivalence and reveal acquisitional problems for ALs are *excited* and *empathetic*. While *excited* is the first choice for ALs, it is statistically significant from NSs, and *empathetic* hardly appeared among the lexical choices of ALs. These two terms are salient within Anglo-Saxon cultures and emphasize individual expression. Specifically, *excited* conveys that “something good will happen” (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014). Similar to excitement, enthusiasm also denotes a future orientation; however, excitement is typically triggered by external factors, while enthusiasm arises from internal and personal motivations. The only MA word that can indicate “something good will happen” is ‘methammes,’ which means enthusiastic, and it is the only word that fits contexts of excitement. The use of a translational equivalent and general terms denoting happiness affected ALs’ frequency of using *excited*, leading to significant differences from native-like usage. *Empathy*, which involves imagining oneself to be the person who is suffering, exists in MA but is expressed through paraphrasing: ‘kajbqa fia’ meaning “he keeps within me.” The lack of a direct lexical equivalence, therefore, explains why only very few ALs used the target term. Moreover, ALs also differed significantly from NSs in using *confused*. Its individualistic connotation is revealed when defining it using NSM primes: “I don’t know what is happening. I don’t know what to think about it. Because of this, I feel something bad.” The reason for not using *confused* as a first choice for Moroccan learners seems to be due to the fact that the MA words ‘metfaje?’, meaning surprised, and ‘tesdem’, meaning shocked are expressed approximately with the same facial expressions as *confused*. The use of these words, therefore, constitutes a case of L1 negative transfer.

ALs managed to perform like NSs in using *annoyed*, *embarrassed*, *terrified*, and *worried*, which do not have lexical equivalents in MA. As mentioned earlier, embarrassment is a specific cultural concept relevant to individualistic cultures. The MA emotion lexicon contains several words related to shame, but embarrassment is not one of them. *Annoyed* is also included among terms specific to Anglo-Saxon cultures. Despite the universal sensation of experiencing this emotion, its specific triggers and tolerance levels are deeply influenced by cultural norms and values. In NSM terms, *annoyed* means: “this person (Y) did something; I didn’t want this, I would want: this person; didn’t do it” (Wierzbicka, 1994, pp. 443–444). There is no lexical equivalent of *annoyed* in MA; the closely related term that subsumes annoyance is ‘fagʕan’, which can be explained in semantic primes as follows: “this person did something; I would want: this person didn’t do it. I don’t want to do anything.” The difference lies in display rules, which result in “unexpressed anger” in MA and

a slight feeling of anger in the English term *annoyed*, manifested in “I don’t want this.” Thus, the MA concept of ‘fagʃan’ reflects a collectivist culture that values connection to others and often promotes hiding conflict.

Terrified implies the thought that “something very bad is happening [...] something very bad can happen to me now because of this” (Wierzbicka, 1999, p. 77). *Horried* is closely related to *terrified*, but unlike *terrified*, which focuses on the feeling of the experiencer (happened to me), *horried* can refer to what happened to someone else: “Something very bad has happened now; I didn’t think that something like this could happen; I want to do something because of this if I can; I can’t do anything” (Wierzbicka, 1999, p. 79). Both concepts are subsumed into one word in MA, ruʃb, which indicates “something very bad has been happening, and because of this something bad can happen to me.” Thus, Anglo-Saxon cultures, which tend to emphasize individual expression, display a more explicit articulation in differentiating between emotions experienced individually and collectively. This difference is blurred by the MA terms since Moroccan culture is influenced by collectivistic values. The same explanation holds for *worried* and *concerned*. *Worried* involves the following cognitive scenario: “Something is happening now; something bad can happen because of this; I don’t want it to happen; because of this I want to do something; I don’t know what I will do” (Wierzbicka, 1999, p. 85). Its closest equivalent in MA is ‘mʃalleq’, meaning concerned. Unlike *worried*, which is typically associated with thoughts about oneself, feeling concerned is often linked with thoughts about someone else: “Something bad can happen to this person; I don’t want this to happen; I want good things to happen to this person; because of this I want to do something if I can” (Wierzbicka, 1999, p. 86). This indicates that MA, influenced by a collectivistic orientation, tends to focus more on emotions felt concerning others. Despite the cultural-specificity of *worried* and *terrified*, ALs managed to make finer-grained distinctions in using these terms, showing no significant differences from NSs.

Thus, cultural norms shape emotional expression and interpretation within a given community, leading to the lexicalization of salient emotions. This can result in lexical anisomorphism when comparing the emotion lexicons of different languages, especially if they belong to distant language families, as in the case of MA and English. ALs managed to overcome cultural differences by demonstrating a native-like performance in describing some situations using terms specific to Anglo-Saxon cultures. Other culture-specific terms, however, posed problems for them, resulting in L1 negative transfer. The fact that L2 learners may struggle with emotion terms that do not have direct equivalents in their native language has been reported by several scholars (e.g., Pavlenko, 2008; Dewaele, 2010; and Altarriba & Basnight-Brown, 2011). This is because each emotion involves several elements, including antecedent, appraisal, and display rules. Culture influences each of these elements, resulting in culturally

embedded lexical terms. When faced with the complexity of emotion terms specific to a certain culture, learners resort to transferring cultural conceptualization from their L1 to the target language (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012). Hence, advanced learners in the current study showed significant differences with NSs in using *confused*, *excited*, *ashamed*, and *empathetic*, as these terms might carry deep cultural connotations in the English language.

Word Frequency

In their descriptions of the specified emotional scenes, NSs used both high-frequency and low-frequency words (see Table 4). The frequent emotion terms in NSs' corpus, which are within Oxford's first 2,000 words, include *angry*, *scared*, and *sad*. Participants in both groups of learners did not differ from NSs in using these common terms. However, NSs also used words like *compassionate*, *sympathetic*, *terrified*, and *embarrassed*, which do not appear within the 2,000 words of the Oxford list and are thus considered low-frequency. ILs differed significantly from NSs in using these words, while ALs showed hardly any significant difference from NSs. This suggests that at an intermediate level, learners manage their emotional expression in L2 by relying on generic, high-frequency terms. In contrast, at an advanced level, learners' emotion lexicon develops, enabling them to use nuanced, complex L2 terms that might have infrequent usage in the target language. This finding supports the second hypothesis, which posits that advanced learners use both frequent and less frequent emotion terms similarly to NSs. The increased exposure to the target language allows learners to have a broader and deeper vocabulary, allowing them to describe emotions more appropriately, akin to native speakers. This is consistent with previous research, such as Nation (2001), which emphasizes the priority of high-frequency words in early acquisition, as well as Laufer and Goldstein (2004), who note that low-frequency words are less likely to be known and correctly used by learners.

Language Proficiency

It is well-established that language proficiency level exerts a strong effect on L2 learners' performance. In other words, as learners advance in their language proficiency, their performance approximates that of native speakers more closely. ALs demonstrate lexical choices closer to those of native speakers by providing nine similar emotion terms out of thirteen, indicating a higher degree of native-like usage, but still show some differences related to specific emotion terms. On the other hand, ILs managed to perform like

NSs in using only emotion terms that have lexical equivalents in MA, indicating significant L1 negative transfer. They seem to compensate for emotion terms lacking equivalence in their L1 by using words that have translational equivalents, such as *merciful* and *pitiful*, or terms denoting general emotions like *happy*, *sad*, *afraid*, *angry*, and *surprised* instead of *excited*, *worried*, *terrified*, *annoyed*, and *confused*, respectively.

The use of high-frequency and low-frequency emotion words highlights the effect of language proficiency in emotional description. Intermediate learners tend to use frequent words more often because their vocabulary is more limited, whereas advanced learners, with a broader vocabulary, can use both frequent and less frequent emotion terms. This indicates that learners' understanding of less frequent words becomes more aligned with that of native speakers as proficiency increases. Consequently, the third hypothesis is confirmed as ALs outperformed ILs.

Several studies demonstrate such a developmental progression in achieving a native-like competency in describing the emotions of others using emotion terms of the target language (e.g., Altarriba et al., 2004; Grosjean, 2010; Dewaele, 2013). Nevertheless, having an advanced level of proficiency might sometimes not be sufficient for using appropriate emotion terms, as was the case with ALs in the current study. According to Dewaele and Pavlenko (2002), even at an advanced level, L2 learners would often have gaps in using L2 emotion terms appropriately. This gap might be related to cultural variability, especially since language is closely tied to culture.

Conclusion

Summary of the Findings

This study aimed to determine whether Moroccan EFL learners could achieve native-like proficiency in describing emotions based on visual material. The result of comparing the emotion vocabulary of native English speakers with that of intermediate and advanced learners unveiled that L2 emotion description can be influenced by lexical anisomorphism and language proficiency. ILs matched NSs using only two emotion terms, particularly those with lexical equivalents in MA. Advanced learners, on the other hand, demonstrated greater competency in describing most video scenes with emotion terms similar to those used by NSs. This suggests that as language proficiency increases, the impact of lexical anisomorphism on using L2 emotion vocabulary diminishes. However, ALs differed from native speakers in their use of emotions without

direct equivalents in their L1, namely *confused*, *excited*, *ashamed*, and *empathetic*. This implies that an advanced level of language proficiency may not ensure the internalization of new concepts lexicalized in L2. Regarding word frequency, it had minimal impact, as ALs used nearly the same frequent and non-frequent emotion terms in similar contexts to NSs.

Implications

Based on the findings of this study, several implications emerge for research on L2 vocabulary acquisition, pedagogical instruction, and curriculum development. At the research level, the results show that lexically differentiated emotion terms, or those lacking equivalence in MA, pose significant challenges for ILs and, to a lesser extent, for ALs. This suggests that culturally specific emotion terms, leading to lexical inequivalence, should be considered a key factor in the difficulties L2 learners face in acquiring vocabulary, alongside word type and frequency (De Groot & Van Hell, 2005). Furthermore, the challenges learners face with some culturally specific emotion terms emphasize the importance of raising awareness among language educators and learners about differences in how emotional terms are conceptualized differently in the target language and culture. Being aware of cultural sensitivity can only be effective when emotion vocabulary is contextualized within its cultural framework. This would not only contribute to the development of L2 learners' pragmatic competence, as pointed out by Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor (2003) but also help them manage cultural conflict and foster successful interpersonal relationships (Altarriba & Bauer, 2004; Fisher & Shapiro, 2005).

The non-contextual, explicit instruction of emotion vocabulary explains why advanced learners did not always provide appropriate emotion terms for some emotional scenes. In the Moroccan context of teaching English, emotion vocabulary is rarely taught and seldom represented in the syllabus. This is evident from an analysis of English textbooks in Morocco at all levels. Emotion vocabulary is explicitly presented in only two EFL textbooks: *Ticket to English* and *Gateway to English*. Although emotion terms are incorporated in these two textbooks, they are presented as if they were unproblematic with regard to the semantic differences between MA and English emotion lexicons. This oversight may lead to discrepancies from the native speakers' preferred lexical patterns through facilitating negative transfer from L1, as observed in the learners' corpus. Therefore, curriculum designers should include thematic units related to emotional expression in English to help learners develop effective emotional communication in the target language.

Limitations and Future Research

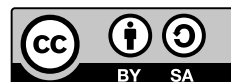
This study did not consider additional languages prevalent in the Moroccan linguistic landscape, including French, which is introduced at earlier educational levels; Amazigh, the mother tongue of about half of the country's population; and Standard Arabic, the high variety used in media and formal instruction. Investigating the effect of these additional languages on the acquisition of English emotions would enrich the field of SLA. Moreover, conducting cross-linguistic research on the emotion lexicons of these languages could provide insights into the universality and variability of expressing emotions across multiple languages. Another important variable unexplored due to the limited scope of the present study is motivation, particularly extrinsic motivation, which involves the use of authentic materials outside the classroom, such as English movies, literature, and media. These materials offer learners direct exposure to the target language and can significantly affect the learning of emotion vocabulary. Exploring the effect of learners' motivation on the acquisition of English emotion vocabulary would contribute to the literature, especially since motivation and L2 vocabulary acquisition might correlate. Finally, the study's methodology did not include qualitative data, such as interviews with learners and practitioners, which could have supported the results. Future research incorporating these methods would yield important insights into the learning strategies adopted by learners in learning emotion vocabulary as well as the techniques used by teachers in teaching emotion vocabulary.

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Enhancing L2 Perceptive Skills of Very Young Learners: The Results of Introducing a Mediation Program to a Bilingual Curriculum in Brazil

Abstract

Phonetic input is considered one of the main factors determining the perception and production of sounds in second language (L2) sound acquisition. The learner's accurate perception and intelligible oral production are claimed to depend on the quality and quantity of the received input. This study presents a mediation program that enriches phonetic input in an early bilingual education context by working with L2 acoustic cues through games. The program was applied to twelve 3- to 4-year-old children in a Brazilian school to observe its effects on the participants' perception of L2 sounds throughout a school year. Perception values were collected with a pre-test at the beginning of the year and a post-test after the program at the end of the year. The collected data showed the participants' difficulty in perceiving the distinction between voiced and unvoiced English plosives and the /ε-æ, i-i, u-u/ vowel contrasts. The results also indicated that the program positively impacted children's L2 perception. Moreover, the participants' engagement with the mediation program demonstrated how L2 sound perception through acoustic cues can be developed in bilingual schools from a very young age.

Keywords: phonetic input, mediation program, perception, acoustic cues, bilingual education

With the advances in empirical research, new evidence has emerged in the area of L2 acquisition, such as the importance of phonetic input for L2 sound acquisition (Flege, 1995; Flege & Bohn, 2021; Moyer, 2008), the focus on intelligibility (Alves, 2015; Munro & Derwing, 2015), and the light shed

on children's perception of sounds (Kuhl et al., 2008, 2011). A good number of studies (Flege, 2012, 2017; Flege & Mackay, 2011; Moyer, 2009) point to input as the main factor in L2 sound acquisition and suggest that the accuracy of the learner's oral production depends on the quality and quantity of the phonetic input received.

From the educational point of view, the successful acquisition of L2 sounds by children in a bilingual school context is a challenging endeavour. From the research point of view, articles on phonetic input and L2 sound acquisition that address a theoretical-practical integration in early childhood are scarce. This prompted motivation to verify whether enriching phonetic input through games can enhance L2 sound perception for Brazilian children, living in Brazil, who study in a bilingual school (Brazilian Portuguese, BP—L1/English—L2).

To foster successful L2 sound acquisition it is necessary to consider how L2 sounds are acquired. This entails exploring the links between production and perception, the assimilation process, and the role of acoustic cues. The theoretical framework in which this research is grounded is the Speech Learning Model by Flege (1995), revised by Flege and Bohn (2021). Fundamental to the conceptualization of this study are the studies on intelligibility and comprehensibility by Munro and Derwing (2015), and the research on sound perception and sensitive periods by Kuhl (2011).

Based on robust phonetics and language acquisition theory, a mediation program was created and applied to 12 participants from three to four years old in a Brazilian bilingual school, who spent a daily mean time of four hours immersed in English. One perceptual test was created and applied twice, that is, the pre-test at the beginning of the school year and the post-test at the end of the year. In between, the first semester focused on games which were adjusted to the students' age and interests and which were believed to tune into their overall sound awareness. The second semester concentrated on games to foster their perception of acoustic cues used to differentiate sounds in L2. The games were played every day in different formats, as further described in the method.

Our research questions were: "Do the majority of the participants have some of the L2 sounds assimilated to their L1 counterparts?" and "What are the effects of the mediation program on very young learners' perception of selected L2 sounds? Does the mediation program enhance their perception of the practiced sounds?" We hypothesized that most of the participants would have some L2 sounds assimilated to L1 counterparts, thus, the perception of minimal pairs would be challenging. Also, we hypothesized that the program would foster their perception, resulting in a higher percentage of correct answers in a perception test. The results obtained by the applied mediation program are presented in this paper and show a significant development in the participants' perceptions of L2 sounds.

As this research was conducted by an early childhood educator who works at the school where the test was applied and was the reference teacher of the group for a school year, issues related to school and children's bonds were not intervening. Nevertheless, due to ethical concerns, no control group was allowed. It is acknowledged that each type of research—conducted in a laboratory or the classroom will hold its pros and cons. Despite not having such a controlled environment as a lab-based data collection, classroom research is equally important to the field (Levis, 2016) as it may identify specific needs and give rise to future questions.

Review of Literature

The Speech Learning Model and the Speech Learning Model-Revised

For decades, the difficulty of L2 sound acquisition was claimed to be due to the maturation and lack of brain plasticity. With time, new theories have emerged, and research pointed to the influence of the L1 on the L2 as the main cause of unsuccessful acquisition. With the advance in technology and the possibility of more precise data collection, there was a significant increase in empirical studies, ergo, models to account for how languages are acquired emerged.

The Speech Learning Model (SLM) proposed by Flege (1995) and the revised Speech Learning Model (SLM-r) by Flege and Bohn (2021) contribute to the body of L2 sound acquisition studies as it enlightens the field by bringing concrete results to support Flege's conviction about the importance of input. Despite mentioning important internal factors for L2 sound acquisition, such as age, and the influence of L1 in L2; Flege claims that the external factor of input is the most important for a successful L2 sound acquisition.

To better understand the scope of the mediation program proposed in this work, it is paramount to look at some of the postulates and hypotheses presented in the SLM. Among the postulates, Flege (1995) suggests that "the mechanisms and processes used in learning the L1 sound system, including category formation, remain intact over the life span, and can be applied to L2 learning" (Flege, 1995, p. 239). This indicates that not only can children acquire L2 sounds without necessarily being exposed to the language since birth, but also that teachers may improve their sound perception and production to provide phonetic input of good quality.

One of the postulates of the SLM claims that L1 and L2 phonetic categories coexist in a common phonetic space. This perspective opened deeper

discussions on the inter-influence of L1 and L2, and the impact of the assimilation process. Assimilation, according to Flege (1995), is a process that blocks the formation of new phonetic categories since the new sound in the L2 tends to be produced a sound similar to the category in the L1. The assimilation process and its possible effects are relevant in this study as it explores Brazilian very young learners acquiring English as an L2. Due to the differences between English and BP phonetic inventories, Brazilian speakers are likely to have some L2 sounds assimilated into their L1 counterparts.

Another hypothesis raised by Flege (1995) proposes that the farthest an L2 sound is from an L1 sound, the easiest it is to be discerned; whereas close L2 and L1 sounds are the hardest to be distinguished. As proposed by the SLM, a bilingual can establish a new phonetic category for a similar L2 sound if some differences between both sounds are discerned. According to Flege (1991, 1995) and Flege and Bohn (2021), the assimilation process could be reverted or prevented, and new phonetic categories thus created as long as the speaker receives quality and quantity of phonetic input.

Flege and Bohn (2021) emphasize that one of the determining factors for the formation of phonetic categories is the degree of disparity between one category and another. That is, the better the child can perceive the dissimilarity between a phonetic category of L2 and its closest counterpart in L1, the easier it will be for the formation of the L2 category, and consequently, the acquisition of that sound. Working with the progression of the categories from the most distant to the closest one was an intentional and careful decision based on scientific criteria.

It has also been argued that when acquiring an L2 sound, children, based on the phonetic categories of the L2 input they received, form equivalence categories (Flege & Bohn, 2021). Through acoustic cues, sounds are perceived as belonging to the same phonetic category. Each category is mediated by a series of the best examples of sounds, the so-called prototypes, which best represent the set of properties of these sounds. Prototypes define how a given phonetic category is perceived and produced. Thus, the quality of the phonetic input is crucial for the phonetic categories to be acquired accurately.

The issue concerning our perspective of what phonetic input quality entails will be thoroughly explored further in this work. Although input is the main factor explored in this work, it is not the only variable of L2 sound acquisition. A conglomerate of other factors, such as age, psychological and motivational issues, and L1 influence also play essential roles in the acquisition of the L2 sound inventory.

The BP and English Vowel and Plosive Phonetic Inventories and the Difficulty in Perceiving L2 Sounds

To understand the mediation program presented in this study and its results, some constructs need to be explained. Essential to this work is the assumption that, as stated above, L1 influences L2 acquisition. Research shows that after a very sensitive period, children seem to gradually lose the ability to perceive L2 sounds (Flege, 1995; Kuhl, 2011). Theories have emerged to lend support to such a hypothesis over the past years (Pallier, 2003; Polivanov, 1978, Trubetzkoy, 1969). Even though they may differ slightly from each other, the core remains the same: L1 sounds exert influence on L2 sounds. Such influence may impede the formation of new L2 phonetic categories due to the assimilation process (Flege, 1995; Flege & Bohn, 2021), impacting pronunciation. For this reason, teachers must be mindful of both L1 and L2 phonetic inventories to understand students' needs and challenges, and better scaffold learning.

In this study, the participants are BP speakers who have contact with English mostly during school hours. Due to the BP inventory, some challenges in L2 perception arise, leading to specific assimilation processes. The BP and English vowel inventories differ in their number of vowels. In stressed syllable position, the BP vowel system comprises 7 oral vowels (/i, e, ε, a, o, ɔ, u/) (Barbosa & Madureira, 2015) as opposed to the 15 vowel sounds in the English system (Ladefoged & Disner, 2012). As the English oral vowel inventory is larger, there is a tendency for Brazilian learners of English to assimilate two distinctive vowel sounds in English to one in BP, blocking the formation of new vowel categories.

Due to the L1 inventory, Brazilian speakers commonly assimilate the English vowels /ε-æ/ into the BP counterpart /ε/, the vowel /ɪ/ into the BP counterpart /i/, and the vowel /ʊ/ into the BP counterpart /u/. Thus, minimal pairs such as pen-pan, sheep-ship, and suit-soot are often not discerned by Brazilians. According to Sacchi's (2018) research with BP speakers, the most challenging vowel pair to be distinguished by Brazilians was the /ε-æ/, followed by /i-ɪ/ and /u-ʊ/.

Concerning the plosives, in English the mean positive values of VOT in plosive consonants are reported as /p/ 42ms, /t/ 65ms, /k/ 62 ms, /b/ 15ms, /d/ 21ms, and /g/ 27 ms (Hewlett & Beck, 2013); while in BP positive VOT mean values are /p/ 11ms, /t/ 19ms, /k/ 32ms, and negative VOT values /b/ 90ms, /d/ 77ms, and /g/ 66ms (Madureira, Ficker, & Mendes, 2002). Pre-voicing and burst intensity are important features in distinguishing voiced and unvoiced plosive consonants in BP (Alves & Zimmer, 2015). This often leads Brazilian speakers to produce English unvoiced plosives /t-p-k/ similar to the voiced ones /d-b-g/. Both processes may impair the speaker's intelligibility and cause communication problems.

To avoid or reverse these processes, it seems that there needs to be meaningful and rich phonetic input that will guide students' attention to acoustic cues used to distinguish specific L1 and L2 sounds. The work with acoustic cues could not only improve children's perception of L2 sounds but likely improve their production.

Acoustic Cues and the Relation between the Production and Perception of Speech Sounds

In the literature on sound acquisition, there is a widespread idea that the production of sounds is directly linked to the speaker's perception of these sounds (Barry, 1989; Flege et al., 1997; Bradlow et al., 1997, 1999; Flege, 1988; Llisterri, 1995; Rochet, 1995; Whalen, 1995), that is, a faulty perception interferes in the L2 output. This connection has been examined in various studies and is still a matter of interest to numerous researchers (Grosjean & Byer-Heinlein, 2018; Flege & Bohn, 2021; Osborne, 2021).

There seems to be a common agreement that an accurate perception leads to an accurate production (Flege et al., 1997; Bradlow et al., 1999; Flege, 1988; Llisterri, 1995; Osborne, 2021; Rochet, 1995). To foster perception it matters to receive a good quality of phonetic input (Flege, 1991) and have opportunities to explore L2 sounds through intentional work designed by the mediators, formal learning settings (Llisterri, 2003; Henriques et al., 2020).

In the process of sound perception, acoustic cues are paramount to guide attention to the specificities and characteristics of each sound. Acoustic cues are physical products derived from the articulatory mechanisms used to discriminate the different sounds in the same language. It is through precise acoustic cues that a speaker will perceive, and then acquire an L2 sound (Flege, 1995). Thus, intentional work with sounds should focus on providing accurate acoustic cues to help the speaker perceive the differences between particular sounds in L2 and L1.

It is worth mentioning that despite the validation of the positive results that phonetic training has shown (Bradlow et al., 1997, 1999; Jamieson, 1995; Lee et al., 2015; Lively et al., 1994), there are many matters related to the explicit pronunciation practice that need to be taken into account. First of all, many researchers do not understand the dynamics in the classroom with the students, therefore, the published results are not necessarily useful and easy to apply taking into account the curriculum and the school routine. Secondly, several outcomes suggest some pronunciation training techniques that are not necessarily possible to be integrated into the curriculum. Thirdly, the proposed phonetic training offered to students in the classrooms often does not match their age group due to the researchers' lack of pedagogical knowledge.

Even though we share the opinion of the importance of working with L2 sounds and acoustic cues aiming at a more precise perception, we believe that this work should not be done separately from the pedagogical context, nor be a training. It should rather be a mediation carefully thought to respect the students' age and consider their personal factors to improve their perception of L2 sounds (Flege, 1988; Krashen, 1995; Saville-Troike, 2012). To us, the perception of sounds through accurate acoustic cues to guide the students' attention can be worked on by offering them a rich and planned phonetic environment, as will be shown in the further sections of the paper.

The Quality of Input and the Acquisition of L2 Sounds: A New Perspective

Since the 1980s, the discussions on input have encompassed both L1 and L2 acquisition (Chomsky, 1981; Flege, 1988, 2017; Grosjean & Byer-Heinlein, 2018; Krashen, 1995; Long, 1990; Moyer, 2009). Nowadays, researchers continue dedicating their studies to the importance of a robust linguistic environment, supporting the idea that rich input is beneficial and obligatory for infants in order to acquire an L2 (Dehaene, 2021; Marcelino, 2018, 2019).

In the course of research on input, Flege (1991, 2009, 2012, 2017) relates the success of speech sound acquisition and L2 proficiency to both the quantity and quality of input received. Concerning the latter, many researchers correlate the good quality of input with the input provided by L2 native speakers (Bohn & Bundgaard-Nielsen, 2008; Flege & Liu, 2001; Flege, 2009; Moyer, 2009; Steinlen, 2009). According to this perspective, the non-native speaker is generally not seen as capable of offering good-quality phonetic input to learners.

The present work focuses on Brazilian children who study in bilingual schools in Brazil, and whose teachers are, in general, non-native speakers of L2. Although the quality of input is generally related to native speakers of the target language, in this work we strongly believe that non-native speakers can also present quality input and accurate acoustic cues. This might be enhanced as mediators acquire linguistic knowledge of the differences between L1 and L2 phonetic inventories. In light of the SLM, we believe that the quality of the input depends on the accuracy of the acoustic cues that the L2 learner will receive. For this, the reference adults with whom the learners have contact must be able to offer a vast phonetic repertoire that contemplates the L2 sounds produced accurately, generating relevant acoustic cues. This is why, it is fundamental to have teachers with phonetic bases who can identify the learner's difficulties and scaffold learning.

Llisterri (2003) claims that some teachers tend to insist on L2 phonetic training methods in which the learner listens and repeats words aiming at

improving their production of L2 sounds. However, the author states that this practice ignores the fact that the learner commonly does not perceive the sounds accurately due to the L1 influence. That is, the speaker is repeating what they hear but normally do not hear the sounds accurately, not discerning the acoustic characteristics of sounds. We agree with Llisterri (2003) that teachers need to focus firstly on learner's perception and improve it by offering them rich phonetic input and meaningful learning experiences. From our perspective, offering a rich phonetic input encompasses reflecting upon aspects related to the link between the perception and production of sounds, the acoustic cues, and the intelligibility principle (Munro & Derwing, 2015).

We intend to take advantage of the sensitive periods of the children to L2 sounds and thoroughly think of ways to enrich the phonetic input, aiming at providing children with more opportunities to tune their perception through acoustic cues playfully and pleasantly, based on phonetics theory. The way we propose to link this theory with pedagogical practice will be explored in the following sections. We agree with the need for research that focuses both on theory and practice in the area of L2 sound acquisition. It is necessary for the benefit of science and education that more research is carried out within the classroom and that those studies focus on applicable issues to link the theory to pedagogical practices (Levis, 2015, 2017; Munro & Derwing, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2018). That is the reason why based on the results of the aforementioned research and aiming at enlightening the connection between theory and practice, we present an original mediation program, based on the SLM, in playful activities that are suitable and adaptable to fit in a daily pedagogical practice of bilingual schools.

Method

Research Questions

In the study described in this paper, we posed the following research questions:

1. Do the majority of the participants have some of the L2 sounds assimilated to their L1 counterparts?
2. What are the effects of the mediation program on very young learners' perception of selected L2 sounds? Does it enhance their perception of the practiced sounds?

Participants

This research analyzed the perception of the English plosives and the / ϵ - æ , i- ɪ , u- ʊ / vowel contrasts by twelve Brazilian children from three to four years old who were studying in a bilingual school in Brazil (BP/English). The participants spent around four hours at school daily and had contact with BP for 50 minutes every day. Throughout the year, all the participants attended the same group composed of 14 children. However, two of the participants were eliminated from the research—one child left the group in the middle of the year; the other revealed attention deficits that impeded the accomplishment of the pre-test. All the participants were advised to go through an audiometry exam as it is a school recommendation at this age. Moreover, there were no reports from the parents of any hearing problems.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

To observe the effects of the mediation program on the children's perception of the selected L2 sounds, the participants took part in a perceptual test. To collect information about the participants' linguistic background and control various variables, an online form was sent to parents. This form contained questions about the language(s) spoken at home, the language(s) exposed to the participant, how this exposure was (family members, songs, videos, etc.), and the age of first contact with English. Overall, the major contact the participants had with the English language was at school. Eleven of the participants were exposed also to English through videos and songs. One participant was exposed to English since birth and would only speak English to the mother. We decided to keep this participant to observe how the mediation program would impact simultaneous BP-English bilingual children.

To analyze the effects of these games within the mediation program on children's perception, the pre-test and the post-test were applied. The perceptual test was composed of minimal pairs with the elected sounds divided into four tasks which were age-appropriate and engaging. All participants demonstrated interest in the perceptual tests tasks and the data was collected throughout a week at school in a silent room. The stimuli for the perceptual test were recorded by a female North American English speaker and edited in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2016). The corpus of the test was composed of the following minimal pairs: tie-die, toe-doe, pea-bee, pear-bear, coat-goat, cold-gold, pen-pan, keys-kiss, sheep-ship, Luke-look, suit-soot. The test consisted of four tasks, specified below. After the mediation program, all the participants answered them with no difficulty.

1. “I spy”—in which the child would listen to a stimulus such as “I spy the doe” and had to choose the doe image among other options—such as toe, dot, and toy, containing the /t–d/ contrast not necessarily in minimal pairs;

2. “Choose the image”—in which the child heard an isolated word such as “pen” and needed to choose between two images with the minimal pair;

3. “What do you hear?”—in which the child heard a four-word chain with a minimal pair, for instance, “sheep–sheep–ship–sheep,” and needed to choose the images corresponding to the words heard;

4. “Sequencing cards,”—in which the child heard a sequence of three words and needed to organize the flashcards in the order heard.

A trial of the perceptual test, namely the pilot test, was created and applied with a familiar lexicon to the same participants to observe whether the format and duration of the pre-test would be feasible with these young participants. One initial task had to be modified for its complexity, and another task was added as the participants showed engagement and openness to a more extended test.

The pre-test and post-test were the same and consisted of slides on a tablet with the images and auditory stimuli, a sound box, printed flashcards for some of the tasks, and a table to keep track of the answers. The pre-test was conducted at the beginning of the school year, and the post-test at the end of the school year. Both tests were applied at school in a silent room. No feedback was given during the tests and each participant completed the test once. The scores were checked on a printed table by the researcher, who was their teacher for the school year.

After the pre-test, the mediation program began to be implemented. By the end of the school year, after all the steps of the program, the post-test data was collected, and the results were analyzed.

Teaching Procedures—Introduction to the Mediation Program

As previous works discussed, having more research conducted in the classroom that sheds light not only on teachers’ practices but also on how sounds can be worked and integrated into the pedagogical curriculum is paramount (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2015; Levis, 2015, 2016, 2017; O’Brien et al., 2018). At the same time, the challenges of such works are well-known. Along with the trusting relationship with the school directors, and the bond with the children, there is also the need to adhere to ethics requirements.

In this work, the data collection caused no disruption in the pedagogical curriculum nor interruption in the routine. To participate in the perceptual tests, each child was called individually while they were playing. During the months when the mediation program was applied, the games proposed were

either in collective moments, with the whole or small groups, or individually. During the school routine, there is an amount of time of approximately one hour in which children are encouraged to work with Montessori materials and explore books independently or investigate with one of the classroom teachers. In these moments, the mediation program games happened with one of the teachers. All the participants’ engagement with the games proposed was evident throughout the school year.

There was a control table to guarantee that all children had the opportunity to play with all the games in all the steps. After some weeks, the participants were already used to being invited to the games, and to play some of them collectively by the end of the day.

Sound Awareness

This program is divided into two parts, namely, Sound Awareness and Phonetic Awareness. Both parts consist of games that prioritize attention to sounds and L2 acoustic cues. The proposals for games that focus on sound awareness aim to improve the ability to listen attentively and selectively to the various sounds that surround the child. Sound awareness work, which precedes the phonetic awareness activities, is crucial, as it allows the young child to pay attention to sounds in isolation, sharpening auditory perception and facilitating the perception of acoustic cues later.

The activities proposed in this present work were planned to be carried out in fun moments in which the children are involved and engaged. Some activities presented were based on Adams et al. (1998), and others were based on teaching practices throughout the years of experience. Table 1 shows the suggested games to prepare children’s attention to sounds and guide their perception of acoustic cues later. The Sound Awareness games were part of daily moments throughout the first semester (beginning of April up to the end of June). Children were on vacation in July and returned in August when we began to implement the second part of the program, Phonetic Awareness.

Table 1
Sound Awareness Games Proposed to Foster Children’s Attention to Environmental Sounds

Category	Objective	Suggested Games	Description
Sound and Movement	Connect body exploration and attention to sound and silence	Freeze	Children are invited to dance to the music and freeze when it stops.
		Exploring rhythms	Different songs are played to allow children to dance accordingly, noticing different rhythms.

Table 1 continued

Category	Objective	Suggested Games	Description
<i>Sound Identification</i>	Encourage children to listen carefully and make connections between the sounds heard and their sound repertoire	What can you hear?	Children are invited to pay attention to the diverse sounds heard in various spaces around the school through a "sound walk."
		What sound is this?	Different sounds are played, one at a time, for children to hear and try to guess what makes that sound (animals, traffic, nature, objects). The corresponding image or video is shown later for children to make the connection.
		Guess the instrument	The sound of three different musical instruments is presented, and with them hidden, one of them is played for each child to guess the instrument that is making the sound.
		Who said that?	A child is blindfolded and invited to ask a question. Another child is chosen to answer it. The blindfolded child is encouraged to guess who answered by voice recognition.
<i>Sound Sequence</i>	Sharpen the child's listening skills involving memory, encouraging children to memorize a succession of sounds	Mystery box	Children are invited to guess which object is inside the box by its sound.
		Musical instrument sequence	Three different musical instruments with very different sounds are present. Children are encouraged to keep their eyes closed while the adult plays the instruments in a random sequence. Each child is invited to play the same sequence heard.
		Body sound sequence	Body sounds are explored and a sound sequence is presented for children to follow. Children are encouraged to keep their eyes closed and focus on the sound. They are invited to reproduce the sequence heard.
<i>Spatial</i>	Detect where a sound comes from and move spatially towards that sound.	Finding the alarm clock (Adams et al., 1998)	Children are invited to find an alarm clock hidden in the classroom by the sound of its ring.
	Stimulate the ability to detect sounds at a greater distance and to perceive that a sound becomes more evident the closer the child is to it.	Where are you? (Adams et al., 1998)	A blindfolded child is invited to find a friend who is playing a musical instrument amongst other peers by moving toward the sound. An extension to this game would be adding a different instrument to challenge the perception.

Table 1 continued

Category	Objective	Suggested Games	Description
<i>Sounds of Nature</i>	Stimulate the perception and reproduction of the sounds of nature is a work that involves sound symbolism. Sharpening this sensitivity to sound symbolism can have positive consequences for the child's language acquisition (Imai & Kita, 2014).	Reproducing sounds of Nature	Children are invited to guess which nature sound is being played, and later, encouraged to reproduce that same sound.
		Reproducing sounds of animals	Children are invited to guess which animal sound is being played, and later, encouraged to reproduce that same sound.

Phonetic Awareness

As previously discussed, this program aims to enrich phonetic input in bilingual schools through games, aiming at more accurate L2 sound perception. Sound awareness proposes a specific order to play with the chosen sounds based on sound perception studies (Flege, 1988; Llisterri, 1995; Grosjean & Byer-Heinlein, 2018; Rochet, 1995) and the SLM third hypothesis (Flege, 1995).

These orders consider that children are acquiring an L2 in bilingual schools and live in a country where the L1 is spoken. Thus, to better scaffold L2 sound perception and foster attention to acoustic cues, we argue that it is necessary to implement a progression: first, introduce more easily distinguishable pairs, and gradually introduce exercises containing pairs of sounds that cause more difficulty in discrimination, as they are not contrastive in the speakers' L1. Not considering this progression is expecting the child to produce a sound that they do not even perceive.

The games used in the classroom as part of phonetic awareness development (see Table 2) were ordered in the following way: (1) consonants of different phonetic categories; (2) consonants of similar phonetic categories; (3) vowels of different phonetic categories; (4) vowels of similar phonetic categories; and (5) minimal pairs. It is worth mentioning that this work with sounds is interconnected with storytelling, songs, and nursery rhymes, which are part of very young learners' routine. Thus, these elements pervaded the mediation program and enriched children's experiences with diverse aspects of oral language.

Table 2*Phonetic Awareness Games Proposed to Foster Children's Attention to L2 Acoustic Cues*

Suggested Games	Description
<i>Three-Period Lesson (Montessori, 1965)</i>	This game consists of three steps: naming, recognizing, and recalling. Although the original lesson was planned to account for vocabulary, this activity is here proposed to tune acoustic cues. Working with 2 to 4 flashcards, the first step is naming each one by saying "this is the..."; the second step is asking the child to show the flashcard: "show me the ... please"; and the third step is inviting the child to name them by asking: "what is this?".
<i>I Spy</i>	With some flashcards spread on the table, the child is invited to get the corresponding image according to the stimulus heard. Sentences such as "I spy with my little eye a goat" will be said by the teacher. The child will, then, reach for the flashcard with a goat. Using magnifying glasses or binoculars makes the game even more engaging and attractive.
<i>Up and Down</i>	The game Up and Down is a variation of a well-known Brazilian game called "Vivo ou Morto (Dead or Alive)," and was modified to privilege the work with sounds. In this game, two words are chosen, one for the movement of standing up (tiger, for instance), and another for getting down (doe, for instance). By telling which word represents what, children should follow the stimulus with their actions. When the word "tiger" is heard, children should stand up. When the word "doe" is heard, they should get down. The game gets more fun with the unexpected sequencing of words.
<i>Sequencing Cards</i>	This game consists of a four-word chain said by the teacher that should be reproduced with the flashcards with the corresponding images. For that, some flashcards are placed on the table and the sequence is produced by the teacher (Toe-toe-die-die, for instance). Children should hear the sequence, get two flashcards with the toe image, and two with the die image, and organize them in the same order heard.
<i>Odd one out</i>	In this game, the children must detect and odd the different words out of the heard sequence. This can be done by a gesture agreed upon by the group, such as touching their head, or clapping hands. A chain of words (Pan-pan-pan-boat-pan-pan-boat-pan...) is produced by the teacher and children clap their hands once whenever the odd word is heard.
<i>Scavenger Hunt</i>	For this game, some flashcards must be hidden and the teacher must tell the children which ones to find, one by one. During the last step of the Phonetic Awareness order, both flashcards of the minimal pair are to be found together ("Find the sheep and the ship, please").

Table 2 continued

Suggested Game	Description
<i>Where is it?</i>	This game is played with many flashcards facing down the table in an organized way. Each child, one at a time, will be asked to find one image by flipping only one card on the table ("Where is the dot?", for instance). If the child finds it, the flashcard remains facing up. If not, the following child is asked the same question and has the chance to find the image. The game continues until all flashcards are facing up.
<i>What's Missing?</i>	In this game, some flashcards are presented to the children and placed on the table. A child is asked to close her eyes while one of the cards is hidden by the teacher or another peer. When the child opens the eye, she is encouraged to say which flashcard is missing, which means, which flashcard the teacher/peer is holding.
<i>Creative Storytelling</i>	For this game, the child is encouraged to create a non-sense story by using the available flashcards or small objects. It can be played by having the child choose the cards to add to the story, or by facing the flashcards down and flipping them one by one randomly to be added to the story.

Table 3

Phonetic Awareness L2 Sound Category Order

Sound Category	Description	Suggested corpus
<i>Consonants of distinct phonetic categories</i>	/p – t – k – l – m/ /b – d – g – r – n/	Pea, chin, nose, ladder, fan, bee, mouth, rabbit, van, goat...
<i>Consonants of similar phonetic categories</i>	/p – b/ /t – d/ /k – g/	Parrot, paint, pot, ball, boat, boy... Tiger, turtle, tie, toe, doll, dear, dot, daisy... Cat, camera, cold, game, goat, girl...
<i>Vowels of distinct phonetic categories</i>	/ε – i – u/ /æ – ɪ – ʊ/	Elephant, egg, pen, sheep, keys, eagle, suit, boot... Ant, pan, anchor, ship, insect, kiss, soot, foot...
<i>Vowel of similar phonetic categories</i>	/ε – æ/ /i – ɪ/ /u – ʊ/	Elbow, anchor, pen, bat... Eel, iguana, kiss, ship... Luke, moon, soot, book...
<i>Minimal pairs</i>	/p – b/ /t – d/ /k – g/ /ε – æ/ /i – ɪ/ /u – ʊ/	Pee – bee Tie – die Coat – goat Pen – pan Sheep – ship Suit – soot

Results

In this section, we present the tables with the results comparing the pre-test and the post-test outcomes. The tables with the data suggest that the mediation program had a positive effect on the participants' perception of L2 sounds. The one simultaneous bilingual child had high scores in the pre-test compared to the other participants. The post-test results show that the mediation program enhanced his perceptive skills and was able to discriminate nearly all the stimuli. Table 4 shows the overall values and compares all the participants' (P) results displayed for each task separately. As observed, after the implementation of the playful mediation program, all participants' values were significantly higher in L2 consonant and vowel perception and discrimination.

Table 4
Percentage of Correct Answers Comparing the Pre- and Post-Tests with Vowels and Consonants

P	Task 1		Task 2		Task 3		Task 4	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
1	69%	94%	50%	83%	50%	100%	13%	75%
2	25%	81%	33%	83%	10%	80%	0%	63%
3	63%	100%	83%	100%	20%	90%	63%	75%
4	81%	100%	50%	100%	70%	100%	88%	88%
5	63%	88%	67%	100%	40%	90%	25%	88%
6	44%	94%	50%	100%	0%	100%	25%	88%
7	44%	75%	50%	83%	10%	80%	0%	63%
8	25%	75%	0%	83%	0%	70%	13%	75%
9	56%	94%	67%	100%	50%	90%	13%	75%
10	31%	63%	17%	100%	30%	90%	13%	50%
11	38%	81%	50%	83%	10%	100%	25%	75%
12	63%	94%	50%	100%	20%	70%	63%	100%

The following tables are divided into consonants and vowels. Table 5 shows the consonant results from tasks 1 and 2, in which the tokens were either presented in isolated words or in four-word chains where one of the words differs from the others. Table 6 evidences the results of tasks 3 and 4, in which the

tokens were part of a word chain. For the consonants, we expected that the voicing would be challenging, and the voiced plosives would be perceived as voiceless.

Table 5
Pre-Test and Post-Test Consonant Values—Tasks 1 and 2

		/t/ – /d/		/p/ – /b/		/k/ – /g/	
		pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test
Task 1 – I spy	Doe	54%	92%				
				Bee	92%	92%	Goat 46% 83%
	Die	69%	100%				
Task 2 – Choose the image	Doe	54%	92%	Bear	77%	100%	Goat 77% 100%

Table 6
Pre-Test and Post-Test Consonant Values—Tasks 3 and 4

		/t/ – /d/		/p/ – /b/		/k/ – /g/	
		pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test
Task 3 – What do you hear?	Toe– toe–toe– doe	8%	75%	Bee– pea– bee–bee	25% 75%	Gold– gold–cold– gold	17% 75%
Task 4 – Sequencing cards	Doe– toe–doe	31%	92%	Pea– bee–bee	15% 58%	Cold– gold–cold	23% 83%

Tables 5 and 6 indicate that there was a visible improvement comparing the pre-test with the post-test. The sounds /p–b/ had an overall result of 52% of perception in the pre-test, and 81% in the post-test. The results for the sounds /k–g/ were 41% in the pre-test, compared to 85% accuracy in the post-test. And for the sounds /t–d/, 43% of correct answers in the pre-test and 90% in the post-test. With regard to the word “bee” in Table 5, we observe that the results were the same both in the pre-test and the post-test when the word was isolated, which was not expected. We interpret this data as being due to the

familiarity children had with this word, which is present in many stories and everyday songs.

Tables 7 and 8 present the vowel results. The tables show the percentage of correct answers in each task. Table 7 shows how the vowel contrasts were perceived in tasks 1 and 2 in both the pre- and post-test. Table 8 shows the participants' discrimination of the vowel contrasts in tasks 3 and 4, both with word chain stimuli. For the vowels, we expected that the pair /æ-ε/ would be the most challenging, followed by the pairs /i-ɪ/ and /u-ʊ/.

Table 7
Pre-Test and Post-Test Vowel Values—Tasks 1 and 2

	/ε/ – /æ/			/i/ – /ɪ/			/u/ – /ʊ/		
		pre-test	post-test		pre-test	post-test		pre-test	post-test
Task 1 – I spy	Pan	23%	50%	Ship	39%	92%	Soot	62%	92%
	Pen	31%	67%	Sheep	69%	100%	Suit	23%	50%
Task 2 – Choose the image	Pan	31%	92%	Kiss	46%	100%	Suit	0%	75%

Table 8
Pre-Test and Post-Test Vowel Values—Tasks 3 and 4

	/ε/ – /æ/			/i/ – /ɪ/			/u/ – /ʊ/		
		pre-test	post-test		pre-test	post-test		pre-test	post-test
Task 3 – What do you hear?	Pan–pan–pen–pan	25%	83%	Sheep–sheep–sheep–ship	25%	100%	Look–Luke–look–look	17%	100%
Task 4 – Sequencing cards	Pan–pen–pen	0%	17%	Sheep–sheep–ship	31%	92%	Suit–suit–soot	8%	67%

Tables 7 and 8 also indicate improvement with the vowel sounds. Overall, the sounds /ε-æ/ went from 22% of perception in the pre-test to 62% in the post-test. The sounds /i-ɪ/ had 44% of correct answers on the pre-test, and

97% on the post-test. The perception of the sounds /u–ʊ/ improved from 22% on the pre-test to 77% on the post-test.

The tables presented in this section evidence that there was difficulty regarding the voicing in the consonants, and in differentiating the vowel contrasts in the pre-test. As observed in the post-test numbers, the participants’ perception was more accurate, suggesting that there was increased attention to the phonetic details that differentiate the sounds. In the section that follows, we further discuss the results.

Discussion

To show how the sounds were confused, we present the results of a confusion matrix of pre and post-tests for consonants and vowels.

Table 9
Pre-Test Confusion Matrix—Consonants

Stimulus	Perception						Total
	p	b	t	d	k	g	
p	25	11					36
b	13	23					36
t			27	9			36
d			15	21			36
k					25	11	36
g					20	16	36

Table 10
Post-Test Confusion Matrix—Consonants

Stimulus	Perception						Total
	p	b	t	d	k	g	
p	32	4					36
b	4	32					36
t			34	2			36
d			2	34			36
k					34	2	36
g					2	34	36

Table 11
Pre-Test Confusion Matrix—Vowels

Stimulus	Perception						Total
	i	ɪ	ɛ	æ	u	ʊ	
i	32	4					36
ɪ	24	12					36
ɛ			14	22			36
æ			15	21			36
u					12	24	36
ʊ					11	25	36

Table 12
Post-Test Confusion Matrix—Vowels

Stimulus	Perception						Total
	i	ɪ	ɛ	æ	u	ʊ	
p	35	1					36
b	2	34					36
t			25	11			36
d			8	28			36
k					27	9	36
g					4	32	36

The confusion matrix results of the pre-test as compared to the ones of the post-test show that children got better at discriminating between the voiced and voiceless consonants and the vowel contrasts. The results show that the pair /ɛ-æ/ was the most difficult to distinguish, which is in tandem with Sacchi’s (2018) results on Brazilian speakers. Following, in order of difficulty for Brazilian speakers to distinguish were the pairs /u-ʊ/ and /i-ɪ/. These results confirmed the hypothesis that L2 sounds were assimilated to L1 sounds (Flege, 1995).

There was no difficulty concerning the place of articulation of the stop consonants. Voicing discrimination in the pre-test was troublesome, though. According to the results of Madureira, Barzaghi, and Mendes (2002), Brazilian Portuguese positive VOT averages for stop consonants were 11 ms for /p/, 19 ms for /t/, and 32 ms for /k/, and voiced plosives were preceded by a voicing bar (negative VOT values). Average means for negative VOT values were /b/ 90, for /d/ 77, and for /g/ 66. Not one of the voiced plosives in the English test stimuli was preceded by a pre-voicing bar. Positive VOT intervals were found in the productions of /d/ and /g/ (3ms) in the test stimuli. These contrasting features between BP and English may explain the difficulties facing discrimination

between English-voiced and voiceless stops by Brazilian children. In stop consonant perception, aspiration is an important cue for English and pre-voicing for BP. The improved results obtained in the post-test may reflect attention to the aspiration cue discriminating between voiceless and voiced consonants in English.

Vowel discrimination is complex, especially between two high vowels and a mid-low and low vowel. The fact that there are two high front and two high back vowel phonemes in English and that there is only one high front vowel and one high back vowel in the BP phoneme inventory favours assimilation of two sounds into one. In the pre-test the high front vowels were assimilated to /i/ and the high back vowels to /u/. This difference in terms of assimilation to the member of the pair may be interpreted in terms of palatal versus velar articulatory features. It is expected that the tongue dorsum movement in the velar region is accompanied by lip protrusion and its lowering movement does not affect the position of the tongue on the horizontal axis as fronting does.

Pedagogical Implications

The mediation program presented in this paper can be integrated into the school's curriculum in different ways. All the games were thoroughly thought out, considering the learner's age and the available time the teacher could have to play them daily. As discussed in section Teaching Procedures—Introduction to the Mediation Program, the program was applied at a school in which teachers could work individually or in small groups on a daily basis. We understand that this might not be the case for all bilingual schools, and it may be a challenge to complete the program. In these cases, we recommend choosing the games that are feasible and still engaging, adjusted to the whole group setting. Another challenge might be playing the proposed games every day, due to logistics and unexpected situations that are likely to happen when working with very young children. During these moments, choosing a game that is fast to be played or leaving the planning for the following day is not likely to disrupt the effect of the long-term mediation program.

Two other aspects are worth highlighting, as they play important roles in the teachers' scaffolding process: game repetition and the learner's oral production. Firstly, repetition is fundamental for very young learners to learn (Montessori, 1967). Through repetition, children feel comfortable with the proposal presented and master more aspects worked on at each cycle. Thus, repeating the proposed

games sometimes is far from being repetitive for children, on the contrary, it brings benefits to their development (Montessori, 1967). Secondly, although this work focuses on perception, the moments proposed for the game activities are opportunities to encourage the child's production as well, targeting both the motor and articulatory skills necessary to produce L2 sounds. The child's oral production is also part of the phonetic input used to develop L2 (Flege, 2009). This is because there is a direct link between production and perception, causing feedback from articulation to hearing (Whalen, 1995). Considering this when mediating is likely to enhance the learner's L2 development.

Conclusion

This paper showed that working with attention to the acoustic cues may optimize very young learners' sound perception. To account for that, a mediation program was created and presented in this paper. The program aims to enhance perception by offering acoustic cues that help draw attention to them through game-like activities. To validate the program's effectiveness, the perceptive abilities of 12 very young Brazilian learners of English were measured before and after taking part in the mediation program. Even though the work presents some limitations, such as a small sample and the impossibility of having a control group, the data collected corroborates the studies of L2 sound acquisition and bilingual education as it proposes a connection between linguistic theory and pedagogical practice.

The article presented empirical results that show the benefits of the mediation program in the case of children's perception of selected L2 sounds. The pre-test results revealed that most children had some L2 sounds assimilated by their L1 counterparts, thus, they did not perceive the difference between the sounds in minimal pairs (/p-b/, /k-g/, /t-d/, /ε-æ/, /i-ı/, /u-υ/). After consistent and playful work with L2 sounds through games, the participants' perception of these sounds enhanced significantly, as observed by the higher values in the post-tests. This result leads to a hypothesis that at a very young age the assimilation process might be reverted, as suggested by Flege (1995) and Flege and Bohn (2021).

The games suggested and applied are age-appropriate and can be integrated into the pedagogical curriculum as they require few materials and are adaptable to suit the schedule. The results derive from a natural and comfortable environment, and present teaching techniques to work with sounds that are replicable and suitable to bilingual schools. Children engaged in the games proposed since the beginning of the year, and their play with sounds intensified

throughout the months. Furthermore, one semester after the completion of the program, in the following school year, there was positive feedback from some of the children's teachers concerning the interest of some students in sounds as well as their intelligible pronunciation.

The combined teaching and research experience gained from conducting this study opens further discussions in the area, as the effects of such perception work in the children's literacy process, and the role of the teacher in scaffolding the work with L2 sounds. We claim for more research carried out in classroom settings so further data is collected to support children's L2 sound acquisition in schools, and theory that supports teacher's needs.

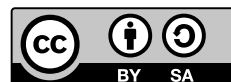
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An Investigation of the Impacts of Mnemonic Strategies on L2 Vocabulary Comprehension of Primary Students

Abstract

Effective vocabulary learning strategies play a fundamental role in the area of language learning and increase the vocabulary range and knowledge of students across various proficiency levels. Nowadays, students are eager to employ learning strategies which promote self-directed learning. Among the recommended vocabulary learning strategies, mnemonic strategies emerge as helpful and effective techniques for enlarging vocabulary. In this regard, the present study aims to examine the impacts of three mnemonic strategies, including the peg word, keyword, and loci techniques, on vocabulary comprehension among primary students. For this purpose, a total of 104 male elementary students in Iran participated in the study. The three experimental groups learned new words following the instructions of the chosen techniques, while the control group employed the memorization technique. A vocabulary comprehension post-test was administered, and the outcomes were assessed through a one-way ANOVA. The results revealed that the loci technique participants surpassed the performance of the remaining groups in the vocabulary comprehension test. The findings of this study offer valuable insights for syllabus designers, curriculum developers, institutions, and schools.

Keywords: vocabulary learning strategies, peg word technique, keyword technique, loci technique, memory strategies

Vocabulary and comprehension are related to understanding the meaning of text but operate on different scales. Vocabulary primarily focuses on understanding individual words, while comprehension most frequently involves grasping larger parts of the text. Achieving comprehension of these larger parts necessitates effective processing of the individual words (National Institute

of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000). Vocabulary plays a pivotal role in the domain of foreign language learning and the primary goal of vocabulary teaching is to enhance learners' comprehension (Nagy, 2005).

Researchers and language teaching programs emphasize the significance of vocabulary in the wider scope of language learning and teaching (Amiryousefi & Ketabi, 2011). The intricacy of vocabulary knowledge in the field of lexical understanding involves two primary notions: comprehension and production (Yalçın Tılfarlıoğlu & Bozgeyik, 2012). This intricacy causes a twofold challenge for learners. On the one hand, memorizing new words can be difficult, contributing to a struggle to retain foreign vocabulary (Amiryousefi & Ketabi, 2011). On the other hand, it leads to inadequate vocabulary knowledge among some EFL or ESL learners, which impacts their language skills (Boonkongsan, 2012).

Effective learning in foreign language environments and EFL contexts necessitates the acquisition of an extensive vocabulary range. As students face broad foreign word lists requiring memorization, using effective vocabulary learning strategies is essential for successful language learning (Ahour & Berenji, 2015). Despite years of research in language learning field, questions remain unanswered about the most efficient vocabulary strategies in learning a second language. The diverse and numerous strategies and techniques for learning vocabulary knowledge contribute to this uncertainty and indecisiveness (Nemat Tabrizi et al., 2018). Teachers and researchers should explore this area to find appropriate vocabulary learning strategies which motivate high-quality learning results (Ghalebi et al., 2020).

Given this background, the present study specifically focuses on exploring the effects of mnemonic strategies—namely, peg word, keyword, and loci mnemonic strategies—on enhancing L2 vocabulary comprehension among sixth-grade male students in an Iranian context. These mnemonic techniques were selected for their widely proven effectiveness in enhancing vocabulary learning across diverse educational settings. The peg word technique successfully aids in learning lists of unrelated items. This technique involves first memorizing pegs or concrete words and then associating them with the initial 20 numbers (Bower & Reitman, 1972). The keyword technique creates connections through the auditory similarity of a keyword to a foreign word, while also associating the keyword visually with the meaning of the foreign word (Raugh & Atkinson, 1974). In the loci mnemonic technique, new words are associated with visual images of specific places. When needed to recall the words later, these places are mentally envisioned in sequential order (Lindenberger et al., 1992).

While several studies have separately examined the impacts of these techniques in different fields and for learners with various proficiency levels, there is a limited body of research comparing the effectiveness of these techniques collectively on vocabulary comprehension, particularly among male elementary

students. This gap emphasizes the necessity of conducting a comparative analysis to identify which of the selected mnemonic strategies is most effective in this demographic. By investigating the impact of these mnemonic strategies, the current study aims to provide valuable insights into effective comprehension of L2 vocabulary, particularly among male learners in foreign language environments. This area of research may have been relatively understudied or might warrant further exploration among male learners in foreign language environments.

Review of Literature

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) and Typologies

Language Learning Strategies (LLS) are techniques that support the development of key language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A specific subset of these strategies is Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS), which contribute to the effective acquisition, retention, and application of new vocabulary. Most research in this field has primarily investigated different techniques for presenting vocabulary and assessing their effectiveness (Meara, 1980). By incorporating VLS, learners can not only enhance their vocabulary learning but also develop other crucial language skills. Furthermore, the value of VLSs is to aid learners in monitoring their own learning and assuming responsibility for their studies (Nation, 2001).

A definition of VLSs by Catalan (2003) describes it as “knowledge about the mechanisms (processes and strategies) used in order to learn vocabulary as well as steps or actions taken by students to (a) find out the meaning of unknown words, (b) to retain them in long-term memory, (c) to recall them at will, and (d) to use them in oral or written mode.” (p. 56)

Vocabulary learning stands as one of the formidable tasks for foreign language students throughout the language learning procedure. It is essential to enable language learners to become independent in second language learning, and employing effective VLSs may facilitate this independence. Teachers play a crucial role in this process by choosing strategies appropriate to learners' needs, learning styles, and language proficiency levels (Lotfi, 2007). In recent decades, there has been an increasing enthusiasm for VLS which simplifies the process of vocabulary learning and recall. The explicit teaching of VLS contributes to the progress of learners' skills by utilizing a broader range

of strategies. Focusing on these strategies emphasizes an active role of learners and learner-oriented perspective over a teaching-oriented one (Atay & Ozbulgan, 2007). This learner-centered approach aids in learning vocabulary knowledge and directs the attention of EFL or ESL learners toward self-directedness in vocabulary learning (Boonkongsan, 2012).

The learner-centered approach discussed here aligns with Oxford's (1990) typology of language learning strategies, which fosters learner autonomy and self-regulation. These strategies enable learners to take control of their learning, plan their approaches, and assess their progress, thus promoting independence. The typology is divided into two categories and each category consists of a number of subcategories:

A) Direct Strategies

1. Memory strategies: These strategies facilitate the transfer of incoming information into long-term memory and enhance the retrieval of information during communication. They include techniques such as grouping, associating, semantic mapping, and using mnemonic devices like the keyword technique, peg word technique, or loci technique. Mnemonic strategies are a crucial part of memory strategies and connect new vocabulary to existing knowledge through mental images and associations, significantly improving retention and recall.
2. Cognitive strategies: These strategies are utilized to create and modify internal mental frameworks and aid in understanding and producing texts in the target language. Relevant cognitive strategies for vocabulary learning include recognizing patterns, taking notes, summarizing, and highlighting.
3. Compensation strategies: These strategies help learners guess unfamiliar meanings during listening or reading. They involve using linguistic clues, adjusting messages, and using synonyms.

B) Indirect Strategies

1. Meta-cognitive strategies: These strategies enable students to practice "executive control" through processes like planning, organizing and evaluating their learning. In the context of vocabulary learning, meta-cognitive strategies assist learners in setting vocabulary goals and monitoring their progress.
2. Affective strategies: These strategies allow learners to control their emotions and motivations related to language learning. Examples include using music or writing a language learning diary, which can enhance vocabulary learning by creating a more positive learning environment.
3. Social strategies: These strategies simplify the interaction and communication process in discourse. They include asking for clarification, cooperating with peers, and engaging in discussions.

According to Gu and Johnson (1996), the following categories encompass a wide range VLS: Meta-cognitive strategies are composed of selective attention and self-initiation. By using selective attention strategies, students identify essential words necessary for learning and comprehension, while applying self-initiation strategies to clarify word meanings through various approaches.

Cognitive strategies include guessing strategies (utilizing background knowledge or wider context and exploiting linguistic cues or immediate context), dictionary strategies (comprehension and extended dictionary strategies as well as looking-up strategies), and note-taking strategies (meaning-oriented and usage-oriented note-taking strategies).

Memory strategies are divided into two main types: rehearsal-based (e.g., utilizing word lists, oral repetition, and visual repetition) and elaboration-based (e.g., association/elaboration, word-structure, imagery, visual, auditory, semantic, and contextual encodings).

Activation strategies involve reading widely to identify and apply new words, building sentences with newly learned words, and employing them in speech, writing, imagined situations, and concrete contexts.

Discovery strategies and consolidation strategies are considered two dimensions of VLSs. These dimensions help differentiate the strategies learners apply to identify the meanings of new words for the first time from those utilized to consolidate those meanings when they face the words later. Discovery strategies include determination strategies and social strategies, while consolidation strategies encompass memory, social, meta-cognitive, and cognitive strategies (Schmitt, 1997).

Given the importance of VLS, language learners use various strategies, including cognitive, determination, and meta-cognitive strategies (Letchumanan et al., 2016). These strategies help students organize their vocabulary studies and monitor their progress. In addition, teachers and learners also employ various common techniques, such as flashcards, dictionaries, notebooks, as well as synonyms and antonyms (Nemati, 2009; Ghalebi et al., 2020). Moreover, as vocabulary knowledge is a crucial research topic, extensive research has been conducted recently to investigate both memory strategies and vocabulary learning strategies (Al-Faris & Jasim, 2021).

Mnemonic Strategies in L2 Vocabulary Learning

Educational programs utilize mental images to represent knowledge purposefully. These mental images are systematically applied to aid the learning process and memory in various activities, such as foreign language acquisition (Paivio, 1980). Additionally, most memory aids depend on imagery instruction to students (Roediger, 1980). In this context, verbal and imagery

mnemonic devices are defined as techniques for transforming the new material into a form which facilitates its learning and remembering procedures (Cohen, 1987). It is worth mentioning that mnemonics are considered one of the numerous facets of vocabulary learning strategies (Gu & Johnson, 1996).

Moreover, mnemonics are viewed as instructional techniques to enhance memory, aiding students in connecting new information to previously known information (Amiryousefi & Ketabi, 2011). In language learning, mnemonics enable foreign or second-language students to remember better materials or words (Chekhab, 2016). Additionally, mnemonics encompass any strategy which helps improve and increase memory (Nemat Tabrizi et al., 2018). Thus, mnemonics are recognized as highly effective mental tools in vocabulary learning (Al-Faris & Jasim, 2021).

Mnemonic strategies are subdivided in various ways. These strategies, while frequently applied to vocabulary learning, are equally valuable in supporting the acquisition of other language skills. The rote technique is a widely used mnemonic strategy, while peg word, loci, and keyword techniques are less frequently employed. These three strategies are based on mental pictures and are contingent upon connections between images of to-be-recalled objects and images of physical locations and verbal mediators (Krinsky & Krinsky, 1996). Thompson (1987) classified mnemonic devices into five distinct groups: linguistic mnemonics (encompassing the peg word and keyword techniques), spatial mnemonics such as the loci technique, visual mnemonics, physical response techniques, and verbal techniques (Amiryousefi & Ketabi, 2011).

Therefore, mnemonic strategies, as discussed, are a subset of memory strategies, which fall under direct language learning strategies according to Oxford's (1990) framework. These strategies particularly focus on enhancing memory retention and recall by creating mental associations, and they are pivotal in vocabulary learning within language learning.

Linguistic Mnemonics

Peg Word Technique. A rhyming mnemonic scheme, known as the peg word mnemonic technique, signifies a vocabulary learning technique designed to teach individuals how to create mental images. Using these mental images aids in finding new words' meaning in a context and facilitates the recall of their meanings with greater ease. The rhyming mnemonic scheme is composed of sequences of ten or twenty peg words rhyming with numbers, such as 1—bun, 2—shoe, 3—tree, and 4—door. These sequences act as cues to remember new words by visualizing their referents or meanings interacting with the rhyming pegs. For instance, if the first word to be memorized is *pencil*, one can visualize a pencil within a hamburger bun. Subsequently, 1—bun shows the recombination of the image of the pencil along with the hamburger bun (Paivio,

1980). Using the peg word mnemonic technique allows one to memorize a sequence of new items through mental images and to recall them successively using the associated numbers as cues. For example, one can visualize the word *chair* within a big hamburger bun, and the number 1 prompts the recall of the image of the bun together with a chair (Paivio, 1969).

Continuing from the descriptions above, the peg word technique encodes items into mental images and creates clear associations between peg words and the memorized items. This technique builds links between peg words and numbers to retain new items in a numerical series (Hodges, 1982). To this end, the first step in learning the peg word technique involves memorizing ten rhyme pairs based on number-name associations, for instance, 1—bun, 2—shoe, 3—tree, and 4—door. In the next step, learners create mental images associating the rhyming words with images of objects to-be-recalled (Krinsky & Krinsky, 1996).

Experimental Studies on the Peg Word Technique. In a study by Krinsky and Krinsky (1996), fifth-grade male and female children were instructed the peg word technique and taught common nouns to assess self-paced study and immediate retention. The results revealed significant increases in both self-paced study and immediate retention. This study highlights the efficacy and value of the peg word technique instructions in enhancing study time and memory throughout the learning process.

Wang and Thomas (2000) examined the long-term efficacy of applying the peg word mnemonic strategy and the loci mnemonic strategy on serial recall, comparing their outcomes with visual-based techniques. A total of 202 students were divided into four groups for the experiment. The peg word strategy group received the peg word rhymes, along with specific instructions for memorizing 20 vocabulary items using this strategy. Additionally, the loci strategy subjects utilized instructions and examples of this technique to sequentially acquire 20 words. The study's findings indicated similar performance between both groups, suggesting that these special mnemonic strategies were as effective as visual-based strategies created by participants. Moreover, both mnemonic groups performed better than the rehearsal group. The results of this study highlighted the effectiveness of utilizing mnemonic strategies for students.

In another study, Nemat Tabrizi et al. (2018) compared the effects of two mnemonic techniques, namely the peg word technique and the loci technique, on vocabulary retention in Iranian EFL students. To this end, one hundred male and female learners participated in the study and were equally assigned to two groups. After applying research treatments, ANCOVA was conducted to analyze the students' scores. Based on the obtained results, both peg word and loci mnemonic techniques demonstrated positive effects, but the peg word technique exhibited a more substantial impact on vocabulary retention. This study suggests that the peg word technique may be beneficial for some Iranian EFL students.

In addition, Rahayuningsi (2020) conducted a study focusing on how the peg word mnemonic instructions improved the EFL vocabulary skills of seventh graders. Using a pre-test and post-test design, the investigation revealed statistically significant differences between the mean of the pre-test and the post-test. The outcomes also showed teaching the peg word mnemonic technique resulted in a significant improvement in the vocabulary of young learners.

The Keyword Technique. The peg word technique or the rhyme mnemonic is closely related to another mnemonic technique known as the keyword strategy. This technique is widely utilized in the realm of foreign language learning and encompasses two crucial components: the verbal acoustic part and the visual imagery part. The keyword strategy creates both an acoustic and imagery link between a new foreign word and its synonym in the native language. The acoustic connection facilitates the recall of the pertinent word, while the imagery connection provides a clue to the word's meaning. A native language word or keyword forms these connections by resembling a foreign word or at least a part of it (Paivio, 1980). Among mnemonic strategies, special emphasis is placed on the keyword strategy, which involves two associations. The first one is the acoustic association between native and second language words, and the second involves the interaction of mental images depicting the keyword with the native language word (Cohen, 1987). The first step in learning and retaining a new word is to select a keyword that possesses an acoustic resemblance to the new word. It is noteworthy that the selected keyword and the new word have independent meanings. The next step involves a visual connection between the keyword and the new word's meaning through the creation of a mental image (Brown & Perry, 1991).

For instance, when learning the new word *shear*, signifying the act of *cutting the wool off a sheep*, the student is provided with the Persian keyword شیر (*shir*), which means *lion in English*. The word *shear* displays an acoustic resemblance to the keyword شیر (*shir*). In the next step, the student links these words by creating a mental image, such as a lion shearing a sheep (Amiryousefi & Ketabi, 2011).

It is crucial to highlight that the keyword technique simplifies recall of definitions. This mnemonic technique also enhances vocabulary comprehension by facilitating deeper semantic associations between new words and familiar concepts and promotes the application of the same vocabulary in a new context (Pressley et al., 1981). Moreover, it is particularly beneficial for receptive learning, as it aids students in understanding and processing vocabulary (Ellis & Beaton, 1993). Furthermore, the keyword strategy is regarded as an efficient technique for teaching vocabulary and is placed among well-recognized and

broadly surveyed vocabulary teaching techniques (Rodríguez & Sadoski, 2000). The keyword mnemonic technique demonstrates more effectiveness than other memorization strategies in Shapiro & Waters (2005).

Numerous studies have examined the efficacy of the keyword mnemonic technique in different languages, such as French (Paivio, 1980), Russian (Raugh et al., 1977), and Spanish (Pressley, 1977; Sagarra & Alba, 2006), as well as for learners at various proficiency levels (Wei, 2015).

Experimental Studies on the Keyword Technique. Pressley (1977) examined the skills of second and fifth-grade children to employ the keyword strategy to learn simple foreign words. In this investigation, to memorize a foreign word, the keyword strategy involved connecting a foreign word (Spanish) to an English keyword that is acoustically similar to the foreign word, and then creating an interactive image of the keyword and its foreign translation. The results highlighted that children using the keyword strategy memorized more simple Spanish words with interactive images than the control group.

In a study conducted by Avila and Sadoski (1996), the keyword technique was used to assist learners with limited English proficiency in learning English vocabulary. Spanish keywords were utilized in this study to facilitate English vocabulary learning. The study involved sixty-three 5th-grade learners with limited English proficiency. In the experimental group, the participants were taught ten English words using the keyword technique, while the control group learned the words through the direct translation technique. The study employed a between-subjects experimental design to administer a cued-recall task, assessing memory retrieval, and a sentence-completion task, evaluating vocabulary comprehension. Participants then completed these tasks under two timing conditions (immediately or after a 1-week delay). Analysis of the test data illustrated that the keyword technique increased the comprehension and recall of elementary students with limited English proficiency in both immediate and delayed tests. Besides, the results showed the effectiveness of this mnemonic technique in ESL classrooms.

Zhang and Schumm (2000) conducted a study to compare the efficiency of the keyword strategy with the rehearsal technique on vocabulary recall and comprehension among sixty 5th-grade learners with limited English proficiency. The subjects were divided into three groups: two experimental groups (keyword Spanish group and keyword English group) and one control group (rehearsal). At the end of the instructional program, two tests (immediate and one-week delayed) were administered to assess vocabulary recall and sentence completion. The post hoc Scheffé test results emphasized that both keyword mnemonic groups exhibited superior performance compared to their peers in the rehearsal group in both vocabulary recall and sentence completion tests.

This suggests that the keyword technique not only aids in immediate recall but also strengthens long-term retention and understanding of vocabulary through its associative nature. Additionally, both keyword mnemonic groups showed insignificant differences in the related tests.

In a subsequent study conducted by Taheri and Davoudi (2016), the impact of the keyword technique on vocabulary learning and its retention in the long run was examined among female and male elementary students in an Iranian EFL setting. Fifty primary students participated and were assigned to the keyword group and the control group (memorization technique). The experimental group learned words using the instructions of the keyword strategy, while the control group learned identical terms utilizing the memorization method. Both groups took immediate and delayed post-tests, and t-tests were employed for data analysis. The findings indicated that the keyword strategy group performed better than the students of the memorization technique in vocabulary learning and retention. The study's findings further highlighted the crucial role of using a mnemonic technique to create mental connections and visual images in enhancing vocabulary learning and retention among primary EFL students.

Fasih et al. (2018) conducted a study to examine the impacts of keyword mnemonic teaching on learning and comprehension of content words in an EFL setting. The study included 256 male students in Zanjan, Iran, selected on the basis of a multistage cluster random sampling method using a placement test. Two male groups were randomly selected; one control group and one experimental group (the keyword strategy group). Utilizing covariance analysis, the educational outcomes revealed that the keyword strategy significantly promoted students' content vocabulary learning in the students. This implies that mnemonic techniques facilitate not only recall but also a deeper understanding of vocabulary by enabling learners to establish meaningful connections between words and their usages.

Spatial Mnemonics

The Loci Technique. The loci technique, a well-known form of imagery mnemonic strategy, shares principles similar to the peg system. However, a crucial distinction between these two techniques lies in the use of a set of locations as storage places in the loci technique, in contrast with a series of pegs or hooks memorized in the peg word system (Roediger, 1980). In the loci mnemonic technique, the memorizer chooses a sequence of familiar places and mentally traverses the chosen path, such as a daily route. The learner transforms each item, typically a word, into a mental image and situates that mental depiction at pertinent locations along the mental route. To recall, the learner re-travels the mental path, observes each place, and recalls the names of the associated items (Roediger, 1980).

In the loci technique, “loci” refers to locations, where the memorizer associates items or words with a known series of places. The high efficacy of this technique enables students to memorize any list of items (Hodges, 1982). For instance, according to Amiryousefi & Ketabi, (2011), to memorize words such as “era, artificial, mission, sample, mass, density, disturb, and distant,” students might select a known location, such as the moon. Subsequently, students may create a mental image and visualize the following scenario:

It is the robot *era*. There are some robots with *artificial* hands and legs. They are on a *mission* on the *moon*. They collect a *mass* of *sample* rocks to examine their features and *density*. No one can *disturb* them because they are in a *distant* area. (Amiryousefi & Ketabi, 2011, p. 179)

Beyond its use for spatial words, the loci mnemonic technique demonstrates effectiveness in encoding non-spatial word lists (Fellner et al., 2016). As a long-established mnemonic technique, it enhances the recall of items or words in a specific order (Kroneisen & Makerud, 2017). Furthermore, it relies on a spatial and navigational metaphor and the learner is required to visualize moving through a familiar location and situating words at specific loci. The memorizer then envisages navigating the same way and recalling words along the way (Caplan et al., 2019). As an ancient mnemonic strategy, the loci technique also benefits from highly structured encoding and recalling procedures (Blunt & VanArsdall, 2021).

Experimental Studies on the Loci Technique. Roediger (1980) investigated the efficiency of four mnemonic strategies in ordering recall: the imagery technique, the link technique, the peg word system, and the loci strategy. Compared with a control group, all mnemonic participants indicated an improvement in memorizing 20 word lists in an unordered recall. Using a strict positional criterion scoring method, subjects in the peg word system and loci strategy demonstrated the best performance on the immediate test, while subjects in the imagery technique and control exhibited the worst performance. Meanwhile, the scores showed the intermediate performance of the linking images technique. The results also emphasized that exploiting mnemonic strategies aids in a higher order of recall than recalling words without considering the order. Additionally, the link technique, peg word system, and loci technique helped to recall words in the correct order of input more effectively than the elaborative rehearsal technique and mental images in both immediate and delayed assessments. This outcome is attributed to the specific instructions that the subjects received to recall words using these strategies.

In a study conducted by Richmond et al. (2008), researchers investigated the transferability of the three mnemonic techniques (loci, peg word, and keyword

techniques) among 8th graders. The aim was to determine if participants could effectively transfer the utilization of a mnemonic technique under general and specific situations. For this objective, 108 students of the 8th grade took part in the study and were randomly allocated into four groups (three mnemonic groups and one control group). Over two weeks, students received instructions based on their selected mnemonic technique. Assessments were then carried out to evaluate their capacity to transfer the mnemonic technique in two different situations: a general transfer form related to a study of Revolutionary War battle events and a specific transfer form using a study of metal alloy uses. The results revealed that the keyword mnemonic technique group indicated greater success in transferring the application of a mnemonic technique in general and specific situations. Additionally, the groups using the peg word and loci techniques, along with the control group, demonstrated similar abilities and functions in distinguishing the uses of specific and general transfer activities.

In 2012, Garcia and Herrera conducted a study investigating the effects of memorization techniques on 5th graders' science words using mnemonic instructions. The objective was to evaluate the efficacy of chosen mnemonic instructions in comparison to the traditional recall technique. The memorization techniques used in the study included loci, peg word, and keyword techniques. After instructional sessions, four tests were administered, and the study's findings revealed the equal effectiveness of both memorization strategies and the traditional recall technique in learning science words.

Furthermore, Ahour and Berenji (2015) conducted a study comparing the impacts of loci mnemonic and rehearsal techniques on EFL students' vocabulary learning. The study aimed to ascertain which technique functioned better concerning word retention and recall. In this quasi-experimental design, 80 Iranian students were randomly allocated to the experimental group (loci technique) and the control group (rehearsal technique). At the end of the treatment sessions, a multiple-choice vocabulary test assessed students' ability to recall words from their short-term memory. Additionally, a delayed vocabulary post-test was conducted a month later to assess the students' long-term retention. Independent Samples of t-tests were used, and the study's outcomes revealed the superior performance of the loci technique group compared to the rehearsal group in retaining and recalling words in the immediate post-test. The findings further highlighted the effectiveness of the loci technique, specifically in the long-term retention of words, in comparison with the rehearsal technique.

Beyond the evaluation of mnemonic techniques on vocabulary learning, it is also important to explore additional factors which can influence vocabulary learning outcomes. The inclusion of the section on gender differences in vocabulary learning is based on a recommendation from a previous review. Understanding the role of gender differences in vocabulary learning is crucial for informing future studies and developing effective instructional strategies

that address the needs of both male and female learners. Although the current study focuses exclusively on male learners due to the single-gender policy in the Iranian educational context, acknowledging these gender differences provides a comprehensive context. This section sets a foundation for future exploration of these differences more extensively. Existing literature on gender differences in vocabulary learning offers a better understanding of how diverse factors affect language learning and creates more inclusive educational practices.

Gender Differences in Vocabulary Learning

Gender plays a crucial role in vocabulary learning and is among the most pertinent factors considered in SLA (Second Language Acquisition) research. While some studies have emphasized the dominance of males over females, others highlight girls' proficiency as superior language learners compared to boys. Additionally, some studies have demonstrated that gender is an insignificant variable in SLA (Llach & Gallego, 2012). Furthermore, diverse researches have revealed the effectiveness of explicit instruction of VLS, while other studies have suggested that the factor of gender plays a role in learners' utilization of language learning strategies, particularly those related to vocabulary learning strategies (Kobayashi & Little, 2020).

It is important to note that examinations of vocabulary learning strategies emphasize that female students make fewer errors in second language compositions, generate more words, and particularly utilize a larger number of language learning strategies compared to their male counterparts in classrooms (Catalán, 2003). Furthermore, numerous studies have verified that females tend to exploit a wider range of language learning strategies compared to males (Kobayashi & Little, 2020).

On the one hand, both male and female students employ similar strategies to discover meaning, such as using a bilingual dictionary and inferring meaning from contextual clues. On the other hand, both male and female students exhibit significantly different percentages in the number of vocabulary strategies they employ, including formal rule strategies and memory techniques, suggesting different learning styles and preferences influenced by gender (Catalán, 2003). Moreover, variations in language learning styles and different motivation levels between males and females contribute to gender differences in using vocabulary learning strategies (Catalán, 2003).

Additionally, there are gender differences in children's learning of new words, emphasizing that girls often perform better than boys in word learning activities, especially when learning familiar knowledge. Moreover, the influences of phonological and semantic familiarity appear to have a more significant impact on girls than on boys (Kaushanskaya et al., 2013). Furthermore, many male students may possess limited vocabulary skills as a result of their disinterest

in participating in language learning activities (Na, 2016). Consequently, an implication for teaching English is that teachers should recognize the potential need for male students to receive additional practice (Maulina, 2018).

Several factors contribute to gender differences, including physiological, psychological, social background, and personal life experiences, all of which can impact the language learning process. In terms of psychological factors, male students often demonstrate confidence and adventurousness but may also exhibit carelessness, while female students tend to be more reserved and delicate (Na, 2016). Additionally, individual factors can be categorized as internal or external. Internal factors encompass age, attitude, motivation, personality, intelligence, and language aptitude, while external factors include teaching methods, learning environment, social background, and evaluation methods (Na, 2016). Moreover, gender differences in language learning are influenced by several factors, including the psychological conditions of students, their cultural and social backgrounds, their interactions with native speakers, as well as their physical attributes and the instructional materials utilized by teachers (Omar Ali, 2016).

Furthermore, gender differences encompass diverse elements such as “motivation, self-regulation, cognitive load, and attitudes towards learning,” which may vary between males and females. These distinctions can impact both language learning experiences and eventual outcomes (Kheder & Rouabhia, 2023, p. 106). Recognizing these gender differences in language learning enables educators to develop more personalized teaching methodologies which address the distinct needs and preferences of male and female learners. Comprehension of these factors facilitates the development of more efficient strategies and interventions (Kheder & Rouabhia, 2023).

A study conducted by Catalán (2003) aimed to determine whether there were gender differences in the number and range of L2 vocabulary learning strategies. The study involved 581 male and female Spanish-students learning English. After administering a questionnaire, the findings indicated significant differences between male and female students in terms of the number of strategies employed. Specifically, female students exploited more formal rule strategies, including input elicitation strategies, rehearsal strategies, and planning strategies, while their male counterparts tended to rely more on image-based vocabulary learning strategies. Furthermore, the results revealed that female students exhibited higher percentages of total strategy usage compared to their male counterparts.

Llach and Gallego (2012) examined the significance of gender differences on developing L2 vocabulary knowledge in primary education, given various ages and instructional stages. The study investigated the role of gender in receptive vocabulary size learning and involved 176 young male and female EFL learners. The outcomes demonstrated that the understanding of English words among both male and female students improved across various grades. Additionally,

there were considerably meaningful differences in vocabulary size over the educational years. Students' vocabulary knowledge increased sequentially with a trend toward a significant rise in the final period. Moreover, in the initial three intervals, female students indicated greater vocabulary gains compared to males. However, male students included more words in their glossary than their female counterparts.

Barbu et al. (2015) investigated the interactions between children's gender and family socioeconomic status (SES) in language development during early childhood. The study examined the constancy of gender differences across SES and children's age by observing 262 children, aged 2 to 6, from two different social backgrounds, learning French liaison. A picture-naming task was used to elicit obligatory liaison. Consequently, the results showed significant gender differences among low SES compared to high SES children, who exhibited similar performances across gender. Boys in the low SES group performed the worst, while low SES girls outperformed boys in the same group. Additionally, the low SES girls demonstrated the poorest functions compared to both genders in the high SES group. Despite improvements in mastering obligatory liaisons with age, low SES considerably impeded progress, particularly for boys.

In another study conducted by Shadikah et al. (2017), the impact of VLS on vocabulary mastery among female and male EFL learners was investigated considering gender differences. This qualitative study involved 20 high-intermediate students, both male and female, at Lembaga Bahasa dan Pendidikan Professional LIA Solo (LBPP LIA Solo), a popular English institute in Surakarta. VLS questionnaires, interviews, and tests were administered to collect data. The outcomes revealed that females exhibited a higher tendency to employ VLS and were more successful in vocabulary mastery than males. Female students utilized dictionary strategies, activation strategies, guessing strategies, note-taking, and memory strategies (such as encoding and rehearsal) from most frequently used to least frequently used strategies. However, male students most often employed guessing strategies, followed by dictionary strategies, activation strategies, memory strategies (such as encoding and rehearsal), and note-taking, respectively. Additionally, a higher usage of VLS resulted in a greater effect on vocabulary mastery.

In another study, Kobayashi and Little (2020) investigated the impact of gender differences as a factor on explicit VLS instruction. The study involved 109 Japanese EFL students who completed a questionnaire on vocabulary learning behavior both before and after receiving explicit VLS instruction. The questionnaire comprised various vocabulary learning categories, including meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive and memory strategies, and overall use of VLS. The VLS instructions emphasized four memory strategies: imagery, association, affixation, and grouping. The study's findings indicated the effectiveness of VLS instruction in increasing the use of meta-cognitive strategies,

writing rehearsal, and grouping strategy. Significant gender differences were noted in the utilization of writing and grouping strategies, as well as in the overall use of strategies. Male students reported a greater use of grouping strategies, while their female counterparts' use of grouping strategies stayed consistent. Additionally, female students exhibited statistically higher usage of the writing rehearsal strategy.

The objective of the current study is to address the following research question:

(1) Are there significant differences in the impacts of mnemonic strategies (the peg word, keyword, and loci techniques) on the L2 vocabulary comprehension of male sixth graders?

Methodology

Participants

A sample of 120 male Iranian students from a nongovernmental primary school in Paveh, Kermanshah, participated in this study. These students, all at the elementary level, constituted four classes of sixth-graders, with each class holding 30 students. To investigate effective mnemonic techniques, they were assigned to four groups, including three experimental groups and one control group. Then, the experimental groups were randomly allocated one of the chosen techniques, such as the peg word, keyword, and loci techniques. In contrast, the control group utilized a general memorization technique focused on rote learning, which involved repetition and straightforward memorization of vocabulary. It is worthy to note that this study focused exclusively on male subjects due to the single-gender policy classes in the educational context in Iran, where schools are often segregated by gender. Additionally, including only male participants helps control for possible gender-related variables that might complicate the interpretations of the outcomes.

Instruments

The materials and instruments utilized in the present study comprised the following components:

1. Elementary Vocabulary book by Thomas Nelson (1990), published by Longman, and the Longman Children's Picture Dictionary were selected as the main books to choose 110 vocabulary items. Additionally, the Oxford Elementary Dictionary was implemented to extract examples of the sentences

which incorporate these words. These sources assured consistency of target words across all groups and appropriateness for the selected techniques. Using these sources to choose vocabulary items simplified the process of creating mental images for the students.

2. A Standard English Placement Test, comprising 30 items presented in a multiple-choice structure, was conducted as a pre-test to homogenize the participants. In this context, the reliability of the pre-test was estimated using the KR-21 formula, and yielded a value of 0.84.
3. After homogenizing the participants, a word knowledge pre-test was conducted. This test included 110 words chosen from the aforementioned sources, which were bolded and contextualized in 70 sentences. The word knowledge test aimed to confirm that the specified words were new to the students and that they had no previous knowledge of them. Highlighting the use of the KR-21 formula, the estimated reliability index was found to be 0.81 in the context of this study.
4. The post-test used in the present study was a vocabulary comprehension assessment, including 30 multiple-choice tests selected from the Key English Test (KET). This test aimed to evaluate and measure the impacts of the aforementioned mnemonic techniques on the vocabulary comprehension of primary students. It is crucial to note that the test's reliability was computed utilizing the KR-21 formula. The reliability metric resulted in a value of 0.85.

Procedure

At the outset, 120 male Iranian students from a nongovernmental primary school in Paveh, Kermanshah, were selected to examine the effects of the peg word, keyword, and loci techniques on the sixth graders' vocabulary comprehension. Each of the four sixth-grade classes had 30 students attending English two times a week, with each class session lasting for duration of 50 minutes.

Before the experiment began, a pre-test was conducted to ensure the participants' homogeneity and to determine their language proficiency level. The pre-test made use of an English Placement Test, published by Oxford University Press, consisting of a standard set of 30 multiple-choice items. The allocated time for the pre-test was 30 minutes. The scores' mean and standard deviation were calculated. Those students whose scores were one standard deviation beyond or below the mean were not considered in later analyses. As a result, 16 students were omitted, and the remaining 104 homogenous students, all at the elementary level of language proficiency, took part in the instructional sessions in the study and the analysis of the data.

Subsequently, a pre-test on word knowledge was carried out to determine the main words for the study. For this purpose, 110 vocabulary items were chosen,

bolded, and contextualized in 70 sentences using the Nelson Elementary Vocabulary book and Longman Children's Picture Dictionary. Samples of these sentences were derived from the Oxford Elementary Dictionary. The students were required to write the Persian meanings of the words within a 40-minute timeframe. The outcomes of the word knowledge test indicated that 45 familiar words were omitted from the instructional sessions, leaving 65 words as target words.

Next, each experimental group (Group A—peg word technique, Group B—keyword technique, Group C—loci technique) randomly received one of the chosen techniques, while Group D (control group) used the memorization technique. The instructional sessions lasted two months, with a total of 14 sessions. The students learned new English words twice a week, spending 50 minutes in each session. During each session, they were taught five or six words based on the specific instructions of each technique.

A description of the chosen mnemonic techniques is as follows:

1. Peg Word Technique (Group A): Participants ($n = 26$) were taught the peg word mnemonic technique and received instruction in each session on six new words. In the first phase, the students, with the teacher's help, created suitable peg words (rhyming words). These rhyming words were concrete and facilitated making meaningful mental images. In the second phase, the students linked the new word to its peg word and formed a mental image. McCabe (2010) describes the two stages of the peg word technique: creating rhyming words (peg words) for numbers one to ten in the first stage and creating mental pictures of the new word and its related peg word, then linking them to the related number in the second stage.
2. Keyword Technique (Group B): Participants ($n = 26$) received related instructions and procedures in the first session. Using the keyword technique, the group learned six new words each session. With the teacher's guidance, the students generated associated Persian keywords and then created mental pictures of the keyword linking with the Persian meaning of the English word. According to Masteropieri and Scruggs (1998), the keyword technique is defined as a mnemonic technique with two main phases: creating a keyword with a similar sound to the new word and visualizing the pertinent keyword along with the definition of the English word, then associating them together.
3. Loci Technique (Group C): Participants ($n = 26$) received this mnemonic strategy to learn six new words each session using the provided instructions. The learners found a familiar location, mentally imagined new words, and mentally placed them in pertinent positions. For recall, the learners visualized the familiar place again and retrieved the names of the words. According to Nemati (2009), the loci technique is an old technique where learners visualize a known place such as a room and put new words there mentally. To recall, they mentally navigate through the room and then retrieve the related words.

4. Memorization Technique (Group D): Participants ($n = 26$), serving as the control group, received six words in each session. However, they learned new words using the traditional technique of memorization without any special instructions.

After the completion of the instructional sessions, a post-test on vocabulary comprehension was conducted to assess the impacts of the peg word, keyword, and loci techniques on the sixth graders' vocabulary comprehension. This vocabulary comprehension post-test was composed of 30 multiple-choice questions chosen from KET tests. The allocated time to perform the test was 40 minutes. Subsequently, a one-way ANOVA analysis was employed to examine the collected data. The ANOVA procedure addressed the research question and measured the impacts of the above-mentioned techniques on vocabulary comprehension of primary students.

Results

Investigation of the Research Question

In the current study, the research question sought to examine the impacts of the three mnemonic techniques, including the peg word, keyword, and loci techniques, on L2 vocabulary comprehension among sixth graders. For this purpose, the effectiveness of these techniques was assessed using a one-way ANOVA analysis to scrutinize the outcomes of the vocabulary comprehension test. To provide an overview of the statistical analysis, Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics outcomes obtained from the ANOVA procedure on vocabulary comprehension. This table offers valuable insights into the scores' distribution and the variability among the groups.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the ANOVA Analysis on Vocabulary Comprehension

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Peg word	26	16.88	3.24	.63	15.57	18.19
KWM	26	18.76	3.19	.62	17.48	20.05
Loci method	26	21.46	2.46	.48	20.46	22.45
Control	26	14.57	1.62	.31	13.91	15.23
Total	104	17.92	3.68	.36	17.20	18.63

Table 1 presents that the loci technique group exhibits the highest mean ($\bar{x} = 21.46$), followed by the keyword technique group with the subsequent highest mean ($\bar{x} = 18.76$). The participants in the peg word technique group place third in terms of mean ($\bar{x} = 16.88$), while the control group has the lowest mean ($\bar{x} = 14.57$).

A one-way ANOVA procedure was conducted to assess whether these mean differences among the chosen mnemonic techniques are statistically significant. Table 2 displays the outcomes of the ANOVA analysis on the vocabulary comprehension test.

Table 2
Outcomes of the ANOVA Analysis on the Vocabulary Comprehension Test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sign
Between Groups	663.30	3	221.10	30.03	.000
Within Groups	736.07	100	7.36		
Total	1399.38	103			

The ANOVA outcomes reveal the significant F value ($F = 30.03$) and the level of significance ($P < 0.05$), indicating statistically significant differences exist among the groups. In this regard, a Post-Hoc Scheffe test was conducted to pinpoint the specific differences among the chosen groups. Table 3 contains the detailed results of the post-hoc multiple comparisons of the means.

Table 3
Post-Hoc Analysis-Multiple Mean Comparisons for Students' Vocabulary Comprehension

(I)group	(J)group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Peg word	KWM	-1.88	.75	.106	-4.02	.25
	Loci method	-4.57*	.75	.000	-6.71	-2.43
	Control	2.30*	.75	.029	.16	4.44
KWM	Loci method	-2.69*	.75	.007	-4.83	-.55
	Control	4.19*	.75	.000	2.05	6.33
Loci method	Control	6.88*	.75	.000	4.74	9.02

*. Significant Mean Difference is at 0.05 Level.

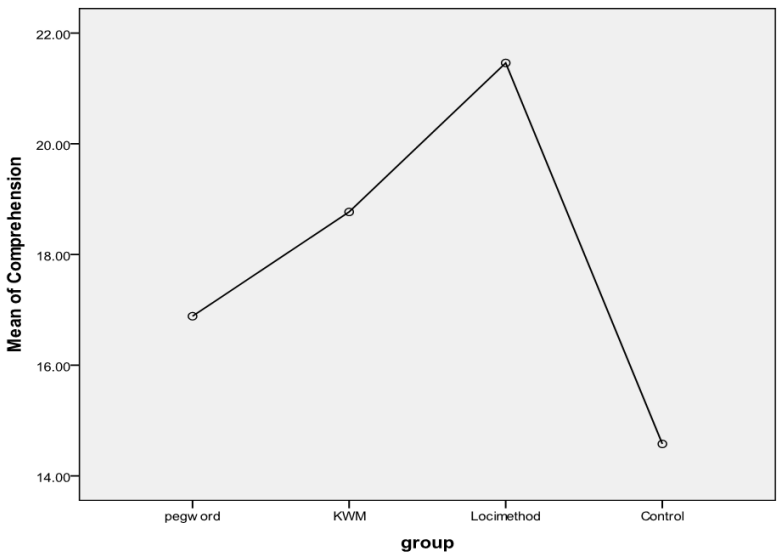
Table 3 illustrates that the mean differences between the peg word technique and the keyword technique groups are statistically insignificant, implying that both groups performed similarly on the vocabulary comprehension test.

However, significant and notable differences emerge when comparing the loci technique group to both the peg word and keyword technique groups. The implication is that the participants of the loci technique exhibited significantly better performance than their peers in the other mnemonic groups.

Additionally, the control group displayed the lowest mean in comparison to the three mnemonic groups. A close look at the obtained results indicates that statistically significant mean differences exist between the loci, peg word, and keyword technique groups compared to the control group. These findings suggest that the control group performed less effectively and demonstrated the lowest proficiency in the vocabulary comprehension test.

Figure 1 graphically highlights significant differences among the chosen groups on the vocabulary comprehension test.

Figure 1
Students' Performance on the Vocabulary Comprehension



Discussion

This study aimed to examine the impacts of mnemonic strategies, including the peg word, keyword, and loci techniques on L2 vocabulary comprehension among primary students. Additionally, a control group used the memorization technique for learning target words. The findings of the current study reveal

statistically significant differences among the groups in vocabulary comprehension among elementary students.

Based on the findings, the loci technique participants demonstrated the highest mean in comparison to the other three groups. The observed statistically significant differences between the loci technique group and the other groups suggest superior performance in vocabulary comprehension among the loci technique participants. This implies that the loci technique could increase the vocabulary comprehension of elementary students. The results also demonstrated that despite observed differences between the means of the peg word and keyword technique groups, these differences were insignificant, implying that both groups functioned similarly in vocabulary comprehension. However, the keyword technique group's performance exhibited slight superiority over the peg word technique group, suggesting that the keyword technique may be more beneficial than the peg word technique in enhancing vocabulary comprehension among elementary students. In contrast, the control group participants performed significantly poorly compared to the three mnemonic groups. This indicates the potential effectiveness of mnemonic strategies over memorization technique.

Based on the findings of the current study, the loci technique group, exhibiting the highest mean in vocabulary comprehension, performed better than the peg word technique group. This contrasts with Roediger's (1980) study, where both the peg word technique and loci technique groups functioned similarly in recalling words. These two groups recalled more words and exceeded other mnemonic techniques such as the link and imagery techniques. Additionally, unlike the present study, Richmond et al. (2008) reported similar performances among the loci technique, peg word technique, and control groups in distinguishing the applications of specific and general transfer activities. The finding of the current study also contrasts with that of Garcia and Herrera (2012), who reported those mnemonic techniques, including the loci, peg word, and keyword techniques, as well as the traditional technique of recall, demonstrated equal effectiveness in aiding fifth graders in learning science words.

Moreover, the study's finding differs from those of Zarei and Keysan (2016), who compared the effects of mnemonic techniques (peg word, keyword, and loci techniques) and mapping techniques on vocabulary learning. Zarei and Keysan reported that the peg word technique group outperformed their classmates in the loci technique and keyword technique groups and mapping groups on both vocabulary comprehension and production assessments. Additionally, the outcomes of Nemat Tabrizi et al. (2018), unlike the findings of the current study, revealed that although both peg word and loci mnemonic techniques had positive effects on vocabulary retention in Iranian EFL students, the participants of the peg word mnemonic technique performed better than the loci mnemonic

technique group, indicating that the peg word had a more substantial effect on vocabulary retention.

Similarly to this study, where the peg word group outperformed the control group who used the memorization technique, Krinsky and Krinsky (1996) also found that using the peg word technique instructions increased both self-paced study and immediate retention among elementary students. The present study's findings also align with those of Rahayuningsi (2020), who reported meaningful differences between pre-test and post-test outcomes following the implementation of the peg word technique instructions. Consequently, using the peg word positively affected and enhanced the vocabulary skills of seventh graders.

The present study's outcomes also indicate that the peg word technique group places third in terms of the mean scores after the keyword technique group. Although the differences between the means of these two groups were statistically insignificant, the keyword technique group exhibited trivially better performance than the peg word group on the vocabulary comprehension test. This finding somehow aligns with the study by Richmond et al. (2008), who examined the transferability of the three mnemonic techniques involving the keyword, peg word, and loci techniques under general and specific conditions. Richmond et al. elaborated that the participants using the keyword technique were highly successful in transferring the application of a mnemonic under both general and specific conditions compared to the peg word and loci techniques. However, this contrasts with the present study, where the loci technique participants outperformed the keyword technique participants.

In light of the results from the present study, the statistically significant mean differences between the selected mnemonic groups and the control group suggest that visual mnemonic techniques are more effective than traditional vocabulary learning techniques. The participants of the control group performed poorly on the vocabulary comprehension assessment in this study. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Avila and Sadoski (1996), who found that the keyword technique increased vocabulary comprehension and recall among primary learners with limited English proficiency in both immediate and delayed assessments. Similar to the present study, Taheri and Davoudi (2016) also found that the keyword technique group outperformed the control group in both vocabulary learning and long-term retention. Thus, using the keyword as a visual mnemonic technique demonstrated greater effectiveness than the memorization technique in both vocabulary learning and retention of elementary EFL students. This trend is further supported by the study of Ahour and Berenji (2015), who reported that the loci group outperformed the rehearsal group (the control group) in both vocabulary learning and retention, indicating that the rehearsal technique was less effective than the loci mnemonic technique in retaining and recalling words.

Given the above-mentioned explanations, in many globalized societies, the primary trend entails introducing foreign language education to children at a young age. Although many studies confirm teaching a foreign language to children, there needs to be more information on the effectiveness of techniques for teaching new foreign words to children (Toghyani Khorasgani & Khanehgir, 2017). Thus, to guarantee learners' success, they must use an extensive array of effective vocabulary learning strategies (Susanto & Binti Ab Halim, 2017).

Several factors can explain the observed outcomes. Firstly, the participants' unique educational context and demographic characteristics, including their cultural background, gender, age, and language proficiency, had substantial impacts on the outcomes. For example, the Iranian EFL students in this study might exhibit different learning styles and preferences compared to those in other EFL/ESL contexts. Secondly, the specific mnemonic instructional strategies and materials used in this study, tailored to meet the learners' needs and fit the educational environment, may have influenced the results. Additionally, the study's methodology, including the use of a control group and systematic application of mnemonic techniques, helped ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The controlled conditions reduced external variables that might have obscured the results, providing a clearer understanding of the efficacy of the mnemonic strategies. Finally, the results may also be influenced by the interaction between the students' intrinsic motivation and the engagement promoted by the mnemonic techniques. The involvement and relevance of the mnemonic tasks could have contributed to the improved vocabulary comprehension outcomes observed in this study. These factors help explain why the current results may align with or differ from those of previous studies.

Conclusion

While vocabulary instruction as a component of classroom syllabus in Iranian EFL contexts has received less attention than other aspects of language (Taheri & Davoudi, 2016), learning English vocabulary remains a primary goal for many learners as an indispensable part of language learning (Susanto & Binti Ab Halim, 2017). Recognizing the crucial role of vocabulary in language learning, teachers must prioritize vocabulary instruction to make a sturdy foundation for learning (Al-Faris & Jasim, 2021).

In light of the crucial role of effective and successful vocabulary learning strategies, the current study investigated the effects of mnemonic strategies involving the peg word, keyword, and loci techniques on L2 vocabulary

comprehension among sixth graders. The control group, as observed, exhibited poor performance in the vocabulary comprehension test. Given the results, the loci technique proved high efficacy over other mnemonic techniques. The loci technique participants were more successful than the other two mnemonic groups. Furthermore, the peg word and keyword technique groups functioned similarly, with a slightly better performance observed in the keyword technique group.

Therefore, various mnemonic techniques, whether spatial, linguistic, music, chunking, rhyming, visual, or other types of mnemonic devices, may show different outcomes in L2 vocabulary learning. Many factors account for the variety of such results and explain why some mnemonic strategies are more effective while others lack success. These factors include the appropriateness of chosen techniques, cultural setting, gender, students' feedback, language proficiency level, degree of teachers' and students' acquaintance with the mnemonic technique in the educational system, and different study fields. The present study's findings may be helpful for teachers, students, institutions, educational systems, and syllabus designers, attempting to employ various L2 vocabulary learning strategies.

Future Research

Future research could compare the effectiveness of mnemonic strategies in various cultural settings and different EFL/ESL contexts. Comparative studies provide deeper insights into how these contexts impact the efficiency of these strategies. Additionally, implementing longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effects of mnemonic strategies on vocabulary learning over time would be valuable. This study focused solely on male learners due to the single-gender policy in the Iranian educational context. Consequently, the outcomes may not be directly generalizable to female learners. While this gives valuable insights into this specific group, it also emphasizes the necessity for future research to include female learners. This would allow for a full investigation of the gender-specific effects of mnemonic strategies and how these outcomes might differ if female subjects were included. Comparing the outcomes between male and female learners can elucidate any gender-specific variations in the efficiency of these strategies. Furthermore, conducting similar studies in mixed-gender or female-only educational settings is crucial to validate and compare the findings. Moreover, incorporating technology in education, including digital tools, applications, and multimedia resources, can increase the tendency toward implementing mnemonic strategies for vocabulary learning, offering new approaches to language education.

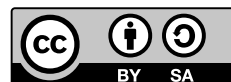
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Islamic Ideologies, National Identity or Intercultural Competence: A Critical Content Analysis of Iranian EFL Textbooks

Abstract

This study critically analysed the content of the Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbook series, *Prospect*, to examine the representation of Islamic and Iranian ideologies and the potential implications for the development of intercultural competence among Iranian learners. Using a combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis, the study investigated the frequency and categories of Islamic and Iranian ideological content in the textual and visual components of the textbooks. The findings indicated a strong emphasis on the inclusion of Islamic values, traditions, and cultural elements throughout the *Prospect* series, accounting for 54% of the overall textual content compared to 46% for Iranian elements. The visual representation exhibited the same imbalanced distribution, with Islamic imagery continuing to dominate the visual representations. The qualitative analysis further revealed that the textbook content reflects a concerted effort to incorporate Islamic ideologies, including religious beliefs, practices, and moral teachings, across various categories such as content, language, visuals, cultural references, and values. While the textbooks did include some Iranian cultural elements, the overall approach suggests an aim to align the materials with the ideological priorities of the Iranian government and educational system. These results raise concerns about the *Prospect* series' ability to foster true intercultural competence among learners, as the limited inclusion of international or target culture elements

may hinder their preparation for effective cross-cultural communication. The study calls for a more balanced and inclusive approach to cultural representation in Iranian EFL textbooks, one that integrates both local and global perspectives to better meet the needs of language learners in a globalized world.

Keywords: content analysis, cultural representation, EFL textbooks, intercultural competence, Iranian ideologies, Islamic ideologies

The role of language education in shaping national identity and promoting ideological beliefs has been a subject of significant scholarly interest (Gheitasi et al., 2022; Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson, 1992; Wang, 2016). Fairclough (1992) pointed out that texts are always biased, and serve an ideological purpose, and are in the interests of particular social groups. Textbooks and materials used in language teaching normally present a certain type of worldview (Aliakbari, 2004). Bakhtin (1981, cited in Wang, 2016, p. 3) noted that learning a foreign language entails a process of “ideologically becoming,” which denotes experiencing a process of constructing and developing a new identity through studying the ideologically-loaded discourse. Language textbooks, in particular, are often considered vehicles for the dissemination of cultural and ideological values (Abd Rashid & Ibrahim, 2018; Abdollahzadeh & Baniasad, 2010; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Liu, 2005; Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). In the context of Iran, the Iranian EFL textbooks have been the focus of several studies exploring how they reflect the country’s Islamic and national identity (e.g., Abbasian & Biria, 2017; Behnam & Mozaheb, 2013a; 2013b; Cheng & Beigi, 2012; Gheitasi et al., 2022).

Language textbooks are not neutral artifacts and “can be examined as a social product” (Abd Rashid & Ibrahim, 2018, p. 2). As Yamada (2006) believed, a textbook is not merely a commercially available reference book used in a language teaching program, it also serves as an important means to deliver political and ideological orientation. Textbooks are imbued with cultural, social, and political ideologies that shape the content and presentation of the material (Foster & Crawford, 2006; Keles & Yazan, 2023; Mandarani et al., 2021; Pennycook, 2017; Uzum et al., 2021; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). The selection and organization of topics, the choice of texts and visuals, and the ways in which language is used all reflect the underlying ideological biases of the textbook authors and publishers (Phillipson, 1992). Iranian EFL textbooks are particularly noteworthy for their emphasis on Islamic and Iranian national identity (Derakhshan, 2024; Gheitasi et al., 2022; Gheitasi et al., 2020; Jorfi et al., 2022; Mozaffarzadeh & Ajideh, 2019). According to Aliakbari (2004, as cited in Gheitasi et al., 2020, p. 151), “there are views that see ELT in Iran as no more than a representation of the Persian or Islamic ideology that lacks the

target cultural content necessary for successful intercultural communication.” As a key component of the Iranian EFL curriculum, the *Prospect* series has been an important vehicle for disseminating these ideological beliefs.

The *Prospect* series, which is the primary focus of this study, is a set of Iranian EFL textbooks that have been in use since 2013. These textbooks have been the subject of several studies that have examined how they reflect the country’s Islamic and national identity (Ajideh & Panahi, 2016; Baghermousvai & Nabifar, 2016; Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018; Shirvan et al., 2016; Shojaei & Noormohammadi, 2016). Shirvan et al.’s (2016) study, for example, found that the *Prospect* series “intends to teach English to the students while heeding the most possible attention to the Islamic-Iranian culture and identity” (p. 82). The textbooks included numerous references to Islamic and Iranian cultural elements, such as religious holidays, historical figures, and traditional customs. Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) also noted the prevalence of Islamic and Iranian ideological content in the *Prospect* series, observing that in the textbooks “culture is mainly limited to Islamic traditions, national ceremonies and festivals” (p. 62).

The focus on Islamic and Iranian ideologies may have implications for the development of intercultural competence among learners, as it may limit their exposure to diverse cultural perspectives and inhibit their ability to engage in meaningful cross-cultural exchange (Maghsoudi, 2020). Intercultural competence, or the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, is widely recognized as an essential skill in our increasingly globalized world (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Language education, in particular, is seen as a key domain for the development of intercultural competence, as it provides learners with the linguistic and cultural knowledge necessary to engage in cross-cultural communication (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). However, the extent to which language textbooks, such as the *Prospect* series, contribute to developing intercultural competence is an ongoing debate, and the books, however, were found not to sufficiently deal with metacultural and intercultural knowledge development (Soodmand Afshar et al., 2018). As Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) note, “the range of cultural topics represented in the series is rather narrow and very limited in its account of intercultural elements, and it is solely constrained to local matters” (p. 55). These findings indicate a need for the inclusion of more cultural topics in the textbooks and it highlights that more attention should be devoted to developing the students’ intercultural competence by the inclusion of tasks or activities directed to other cultures and communities. In the case of the *Prospect* series, the emphasis on Islamic and Iranian ideologies may limit learners’ exposure to diverse cultural perspectives and inhibit their ability to engage in meaningful cross-cultural exchange.

Consequently, this study aims to critically analyse the content of the *Prospect* series to better understand the ways in which Islamic and Iranian ideologies are represented and the potential implications for the development of intercultural competence among Iranian EFL learners. By examining the frequency and categories of Islamic and Iranian ideological content in the textbooks, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue around the role of language education in promoting intercultural understanding.

Literature Review

The Integration of Islamic Ideologies in Iranian Educational Materials

The substantial influence of Islam in defining Iran's educational policy and curriculum is reflected in the incorporation of Islamic ideologies in educational materials used in the country. Religious studies, ethics, and literature are among the areas where Iran's Islamic republican educational system has been most influential (Künkler, 2019; Nuriman & Fauzan, 2017). The goals of this integration are to encourage students to identify with their religion, develop a feeling of moral responsibility, and impart Islamic values (Abrahamian, 2021).

Islamic education is a core subject in Iranian schools, covering various aspects of religious knowledge, including Quranic studies, Islamic history, ethics, and Islamic law (Abrahamian, 2021). The Quran, as the central religious text of Islam, is often studied and memorized by students, instilling a deep understanding of Islamic teachings (Petrushevsky, 1985). Islamic ideologies are also integrated into other subjects, such as literature and social sciences, providing students with an Islamic perspective on topics related to society, morality, and governance (Moghadam, 2019).

The integration of Islamic ideologies extends to the visual and material aspects of textbooks, featuring images, illustrations, and calligraphy related to Islamic art and architecture, as well as Islamic symbols and motifs, reinforcing the Islamic identity of Iran (Moghadam, 2019). This integration aims to nurture a strong religious identity among students, promoting the values of the Islamic faith, including piety, righteousness, and moral responsibility (Kadivar, 2014).

Critics argue that the integration of Islamic ideologies in Iranian educational materials may limit critical thinking and diversity of thought, restricting the exploration of alternative ideologies and perspectives (Arjmand, 2004). However, proponents argue that this integration fosters a sense of cultural identity, moral values, and social cohesion among students (Takim, 2000).

Islamic Ideologies in Iranian EFL Textbooks

The inclusion of Islamic ideologies in EFL textbooks used in Iran reflects the influence of Islam on the educational system and the country's cultural context. Iran, as an Islamic republic, aims to inspire Islamic values and promote religious identity among its citizens, including in the field of foreign language education (Jorfi et al., 2022; Simbuka, 2021). Iranian EFL textbooks often incorporate Islamic values and teachings alongside language learning objectives. Islamic themes and references are integrated into reading passages, dialogues, and cultural sections, providing learners with exposure to Islamic culture, history, and religious concepts (Jorfi et al., 2022). This inclusion serves to reinforce the cultural and religious identity of Iranian students. Language exercises and activities in Iranian EFL textbooks also integrate Islamic ideologies. For example, vocabulary exercises may include words related to Islamic rituals, holidays, or terminology, and grammar exercises may incorporate examples that reflect Islamic cultural practices or values (Mehdipoor et al., 2021; Simbuka, 2021). These integrations aim to help students develop not only their language skills but also their knowledge of Islamic concepts and terminology.

By incorporating Islamic content into language learning materials, the educational system aims to strengthen the connection between language education and the cultural and religious heritage of Iran. However, critics argue that the imposing Islamic ideologies in Iranian EFL textbooks may limit learners' exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, ignore intercultural communicative competence, and hinder critical thinking (Babaii, 2023; Hamdi, 2023). It is suggested that a balanced approach that includes a broader range of cultural content could enhance learners' intercultural competence.

Empirical Studies

The literature review reveals a substantial body of research that has examined the representation of culture and ideology in Iranian EFL textbooks. These studies have employed diverse methodological approaches, including content analysis, interviews, and questionnaires, to investigate the presence and use of Islamic and Iranian ideologies, as well as the inclusion of intercultural competence, in the textbooks.

Baghermousvai and Nabifar (2016) conducted a qualitative analysis of dialogues and conversations in *Prospect 2*, finding that the textbook utilized the source culture and included elements such as attire, tradition, and Islamic concepts. Similarly, Shojaei and Noormohammadi (2016) investigated the representation of local identity aspects, including characters, locales, apparel, foods, drinks, and professions, in the *Prospect* series. Their findings indicate that the

personal aspect of identity ranked highest, while the religious aspect received the lowest score.

Extending the focus beyond Iran, Jorfi et al. (2022) compared the cultural content of the Iranian textbook *Vision I* and the Egyptian textbook *Hello I*, finding that *Vision I* had a more limited number of cultural elements compared to *Hello I*, although both textbooks lacked in-depth cultural information. Gheitasi et al. (2020) also evaluated the cultural content of the *Vision* textbook series, reporting that the textbooks contained the most cultural content associated with Persian as the source culture, with a primary focus on the aesthetic sense of culture.

Researchers have also explored the inclusion of intercultural competence in Iranian EFL textbooks. Mozaffarzadeh and Ajideh (2019) examined the trend of addressing culture in Iranian ELT textbooks before and after the Islamic Revolution, concluding that the cultural contents were neglected both pre- and post-revolution, leading to insufficient materials for teaching communicative language and intercultural competence. Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) specifically investigated the representation of cultural points and the development of intercultural competence in the *Prospect* series, finding that the range of cultural topics was rather narrow and that the textbooks were limited in their account of intercultural elements. Building on these findings, Bagheri Nevisi and Reisi (2024) conducted a comparative study of Iranian and Afghan secondary English textbooks, focusing on the representation of culture and intercultural interaction in the conversation parts. Their results revealed that social interaction was the most frequent category for the representation of culture, while superficial interaction was the most frequent category for intercultural interactions.

Abbasian and Biria (2017) further explored the representation of national, international, and target cultural content in Iranian ELT textbooks, finding that the textbooks covered a restricted range of international and target cultural content, as well as limited national culturally familiar content.

Overall, the empirical studies reviewed highlight a consistent pattern of findings. The Iranian EFL textbooks, particularly the *Prospect* and *Vision* series, tend to emphasize Iranian and Islamic ideologies, with a limited inclusion of intercultural competence and a narrow range of cultural topics. The gap in the existing literature is the lack of a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the *Prospect* series, which is the focus of the current study. The previous studies have examined the cultural and ideological representation in these textbooks, but a more thorough and rigorous analysis is needed to fully understand the extent and nature of the inclusion of Islamic ideologies, national identity, and intercultural competence. The current study aims to fill this gap by conducting a critical content analysis of the *Prospect* series, exploring the frequency and categories of Islamic ideologies and their relationship with national identity and intercultural competence. It tries to provide valuable insights

into the cultural and ideological representations in the Iranian EFL textbooks, which can inform future textbook development and teacher training initiatives.

Therefore, this study aimed at going into more details to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. How frequently are the Islamic and Iranian ideologies used in textual and visual items of the Iranian EFL textbooks of *Prospect* series?
2. What categories are the Islamic ideologies used for in the Iranian EFL textbooks of the *Prospect* series?

Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a content analysis approach to critically examine the representation of Islamic ideologies and national identity in the Iranian EFL textbook series, *Prospect 1*, *2*, and *3*. Content analysis is a well-established research method that allows for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952). This approach enables both quantitative and qualitative analysis of textual and visual elements within the textbooks.

For the first research question, the study employed a quantitative content analysis using an ideological framework model developed by Ramirez and Hall (1990) consisting of five main categories to determine the frequency of Islamic and Iranian ideologies used in the textual and visual items of the *Prospect* series. For the second research question, a researcher-made checklist was developed to qualitatively analyse the categories and underlying reasons for the inclusion of Islamic ideologies in the textbooks.

Materials and Instruments

The corpus for the study consisted of the three EFL textbooks in the *Prospect* series, which are prescribed by the Iranian Ministry of Education for use in primary high schools.

To address the second research question, a researcher-made checklist, "Recognizing Islamic Ideologies in EFL Textbooks," was developed. This checklist which consisted of seven categories, was designed to identify the broad reasons and categories behind the inclusion of Islamic ideologies in the

Prospect series. Each category contained specific questions to guide the analysis of the textbooks.

The first category was Content and Topics, which focused on whether the textbook included content related to Islamic beliefs, practices, or religious concepts, among other things. The second category was Language and Terminology, which examined whether the textbook used Islamic-specific vocabulary or terminology, Arabic words or phrases, and Islamic expressions. The third category was Visual Representations, which looked at whether the illustrations, photographs, or images in the textbook depicted Islamic symbols, mosques, or Islamic attire, among other things. The fourth category was Cultural References, which examined whether the textbook included references to Islamic cultural practices, traditions, or customs, as well as examples of Islamic art, literature, or music. The fifth category was Perspectives and Values, which focused on whether the textbook promoted Islamic values, ethics, or moral teachings in its lessons or stories, and whether it presented Islamic perspectives on social, political, or ethical issues. The sixth category was Bias and Representation, which examined whether there were any instances of bias, stereotyping, or misrepresentation of Islamic beliefs or practices in the textbook, and whether it presented a balanced and accurate portrayal of Islamic ideologies, taking into account diverse interpretations within Islamic traditions and practices. The final category was Language Skills Integration, which looked at whether the textbook incorporated language skills practice related to Islamic topics or contexts and whether there were exercises or activities that encouraged students to engage with Islamic themes through language practice.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collection process involved a comprehensive examination of the *Prospect* series, including all textual and visual components. The researchers carefully reviewed each lesson and unit, identifying and cataloguing all instances where Islamic and Iranian ideologies were present. This included textual references, terminology, visual representations, and cultural elements.

For the quantitative analysis, the researchers conducted a systematic count of the frequency of Islamic and Iranian ideologies in the textual and visual items of the textbooks. The data were organized into tabular forms to facilitate the statistical analysis and to provide a clear representation of the distribution and prevalence of these ideologies throughout the series.

In the second phase, the researcher-made checklist was employed to investigate the underlying reasons and categories for the inclusion of Islamic ideologies in the *Prospect* series. The researchers closely examined the textbooks, using

the checklist as a guiding framework to identify and categorize the various ways in which Islamic ideologies were incorporated into the textbooks.

The qualitative analysis, guided by the researcher-made checklist (Appendix A), involved a detailed examination of the textbooks to identify the specific categories and reasons for the inclusion of Islamic ideologies. The researchers carefully reviewed the textbooks, noting the presence of Islamic content, terminology, visual representations, cultural references, perspectives and values, and instances of bias or misrepresentation. The data were then organized and categorized according to the seven main categories of the checklist, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the underlying motivations and approaches used in the incorporation of Islamic ideologies in the *Prospect* series.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses provided a multifaceted approach to investigating the representation of Islamic ideologies and national identity in the Iranian EFL textbooks. This methodological approach enabled the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the extent and nature of the inclusion of these elements, as well as the potential implications for language education in the Iranian context.

Results

Content Analysis (Quantitative Part)

The present section comprises materials that embody the cultural heritage of Islamic and Iranian societies, which have been methodically organized and presented in tabular form. The textual components within this section encompass linguistic elements that convey the cultural and ideological characteristics of Islam and Iran. Furthermore, the visual components incorporate terms such as “Quran” and “Hafez,” which function as endorsements or symbols of Islamic and Iranian ideologies to varying degrees.

Table 1
The Frequency of Textual Representation of Islamic vs Iranian Ideologies in Prospect Series

Books	People & Identity		Places		Ceremonies		Names		Dressing	
	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.
Islamic vs Iranian										
<i>Prospect 1</i> Student Book	2	3	–	4	–	–	69	55	17	–
<i>Prospect 1</i> Work Book	10	–	2	6	5	–	45	42	8	–
<i>Prospect 2</i> Student Book	6	8	3	22	4	–	25	9	2	–
<i>Prospect 2</i> Work Book	3	5	18	26	6	–	–	–	1	–
<i>Prospect 3</i> Student Book	7	8	1	9	8	8	55	30	–	–
<i>Prospect 3</i> Work Book	3	2	–	10	9	9	23	27	3	–
Total	31 54%	26 46%	24 23%	77 77%	32 65%	17 35%	217 57%	163 43%	31 100%	0 0%

Table 1 presents an analysis of the frequency of textual representation of Islamic versus Iranian ideologies across the *Prospect* series of textbooks. When examining the overall trends across all the textbooks, the data suggests a higher representation of Islamic elements compared to Iranian elements. Aggregating the totals, Islamic references account for 54% of the content, while Iranian references make up 46%. This disparity is particularly evident in certain categories, such as Dressing, where all the references are to Islamic styles with no representation of Iranian fashions. The Names category also shows a stronger Islamic influence, with 57% of the names being Islamic compared to 43% Iranian. The same story goes for the Ceremonies categories with the total 65% for the Islamic culture and only 35% to the Iranian ones. However, the distribution is not uniform across all the examined areas. In the Places category, Iranian elements actually outnumber the Islamic ones, accounting for 77% of the total references respectively. This indicates that while Islamic ideology may be more pervasive overall in the textbooks, certain domains, such as locations, do exhibit a more pronounced Iranian influence. These findings provide valuable insights into the cultural and ideological framing present in the *Prospect* series materials. The data reveals a complex interplay between Islamic and Iranian elements, with Islamic ones more dominating the textbooks.

Table 2
The Frequency of Visual Representation of Islamic vs Iranian Ideologies in Prospect Series

Books	People & Identity		Places		Ceremonies		Names		Dressing	
	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.
Islamic vs Iranian										
<i>Prospect 1</i> Student Book	5	3	–	3	2	–	–	–	27	–
<i>Prospect 1</i> Work Book	6	2	3	3	–	–	–	–	11	2
<i>Prospect 2</i> Student Book	5	4	8	8	3	–	–	–	3	–
<i>Prospect 2</i> Work Book	–	6	7	2	–	–	–	–	3	–
<i>Prospect 3</i> Student Book	6	4	3	2	11	6	–	–	28	3
<i>Prospect 3</i> Work Book	6	–	–	4	6	10	2	1	16	–
Total	28 59%	19 41%	21 48%	22 52%	22 58%	16 42%	2 75%	1 25%	88 94%	5 6%

The data presented in Table 2 offers a detailed breakdown of the visual representation of Islamic and Iranian elements across the different *Prospect* series textbooks. Similar to the previous table, the analysis is structured around key categories. When analysing the overall trends, some interesting patterns emerge. In the visual domain, the data suggests a more balanced representation of Islamic and Iranian ideologies compared to the textual analysis presented earlier. Across all the textbooks, Islamic visual elements account for 59% of the total People & Identity category, while Iranian elements make up 41% in this category. This is a wider ratio than the 54% Islamic to 46% Iranian split observed in the textual analysis. The visual representation, yet again, appears to give more prominence to Islamic influences, where the Iranian elements are either on a par with or slightly exceed the Islamic ones. However, the Dressing category continues to exhibit a strong Islamic visual dominance, with 94% of the images depicting Islamic styles versus only 6% showing Iranian fashions.

These findings suggest that the *Prospect* series textbooks may be making a concerted effort to visually represent both Islamic and Iranian cultural elements, potentially aiming for a more exclusive and imbalanced portrayal in favor of Islamic ideologies. The data indicates that Islamic imagery still

maintains a slight edge overall, and visual content provides little equitable space for Iranian influences. This contrasts with the textual analysis, which showed a more pronounced Islamic bias. The very little divergence between the textual and visual representations points to a nuanced approach by the textbook authors, potentially seeking to offer learners a little comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the cultural landscape. However, the continued dominance of Islamic visual elements in certain domains, such as Dressing, suggests that there may still be room for further diversification and integration of Iranian cultural imagery across all aspects of the textbooks.

Content Analysis (Qualitative Part)

A comprehensive thematic analysis was also used to identify any references to Islamic religious ideologies or beliefs in the textbooks. Significant textual or visual sections relating to Islamic religious beliefs were meticulously examined and extracted, and a category label was assigned to each of these sections. This process was continued until all three textbooks and their corresponding workbooks had been thoroughly scrutinized, and a comprehensive inventory of every code generated was maintained.

By using the checklist, the researchers were able to identify the presence and frequency of Islamic ideologies in the textbooks. The checklist also allowed them to identify any potential biases or misrepresentations of Islamic beliefs and practices in the materials. This analysis helped inform future textbook development and ensured that they provided a balanced and accurate portrayal of Islamic ideologies and beliefs. The main Islamic ideologies represented in the books were the following categories: Dressing Style, Same-Gender Interaction, women-in-kitchen/men-in-yard, Islamic Rituals, and Islamic Republic Policy.

Dressing Style

In all six textbooks analysed, every female character was depicted wearing the hijab, which is a requirement in Islamic jurisprudence or 'Shari'ah'. This religious law mandates that women cover their entire body, except for their hands from the wrists down and their oval-shaped face from the forehead to the chin. This aspect was evident in all analysed images. The Islamic faith prohibits a non-mahram, which refers to a person who is not related to an individual by blood or marriage, from seeing a woman's body. This principle was clearly depicted in the series of textbooks under review. Bigger (2006) notes that the depiction of veiled women was distinct from women who opted for conservative dressing practices or those who were simply attired, implying

that the hijab was a result of the legal framework. The textbooks consistently portrayed female characters wearing the hijab, as a norm of Islamic practice:

Figure 1
Dressing Style for Women



Prospect 1, SB, p. 63 Prospect 1, WB, p. 39 Prospect 2, SB, p. 26 Prospect 2, WB, p. 16



Prospect 3, SB, p. 24 Prospect 3, WB, p. 10

Note: SB: Student Book, WB: Work Book.

The principle of modesty was not exclusive to women in these textbooks. Men were also expected to dress appropriately, concealing the majority of their anatomy and physique with baggy and simple clothing, and to dress decently.

Figure 2
Dressing Style for Men



Prospect 1, SB, p. 52 Prospect 2, SB, p. 12 Prospect 3, SB, p. 16

The images in these textbooks conveyed the message that Muslim women ought to wear traditional garments such as the Chador, Maghnaeh, or Manteau that provide full coverage of the head and body. Men, on the other hand, are expected to wear loose-fitting, dark-colored clothing with long sleeves.

Same-Gender Interaction

After conducting a thorough visual analysis of the six textbooks, it was observed that male-female interactions were typically represented in the following categories: father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, mother-daughter, two male friends, and two female friends. Even in rare non-mahram situations, a sufficient physical distance existed between the two genders. The following examples illustrate this finding:

Figure 3

Same-Gender Interaction



Prospect 1, SB, p. 30

Prospect 2, SB, p. 34

Prospect 3, SB, p. 24

The aforementioned observations were in accordance with Islamic principles, which prohibit individuals of the opposite sex who are not related by blood or marriage from mingling in seclusion, without the presence of a chaperone.

Women-in-Kitchen/Men-in-Yard

Under an age-old Islamic tradition, men are traditionally expected to work outside the home and provide for the family, while women are responsible for managing household chores, raising children, and giving birth. Unfortunately, there has been a common misconception in Islamic communities that the kitchen is the ideal place for women. For a more thorough understanding of this issue, the following excerpts have been presented from *Prospect 1*:

- *What is your father's job? – He's a mechanic. (Prospect 1, p. 23)*
- *What is your mother's job? – She's a housewife. (Prospect 1, p. 23)*
- ...*My father is a farmer. My mother is a housewife... (Prospect 1, WB, p. 52)*
- ...*My father is a taxi driver. My mother is a housewife... (Prospect 1, WB, p. 71)*

Figure 4*Women-in-Kitchen*

Prospect 1, SB, p. 32

Prospect 3, SB, p. 52

Islamic Rituals

- Plentiful Islamic festivities, occasions, and rituals advanced Islamic customs and beliefs. Some of these Islam-centric ideas are: Eid al-Fitr (the spiritual festival that Muslims celebrate as the conclusion of the month-long abstaining phase recognized as Ramadan).

Fitr Eid is an important religious holiday in his country. (Prospect 3, SB, p. 57)

- Ghorban Eid is a significant Islamic festival that commemorates Ibrahim's (Abraham's) obedience to Allah's command to sacrifice his son Ismail (Ishmael). It is the second major Islamic holiday and is celebrated on a larger scale).

In Iran, the Jashn-e Taklif (Obligation Ceremony) is a significant event for primary school pupils. According to the regulations of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Ministry of Education, every nine-year-old girl and fifteen-year-old boy must participate in this ceremony led by the schoolmasters. The religious instructors educate the students that they are now "Mokallaf," implying that they have reached the age of responsibility and should adhere to Islamic religious duties like wearing the hijab, praying, and fasting. This celebration marks their transition from childhood to adulthood.

...It was Taklif Celebration. I enjoyed it a lot.... (Prospect 3, WB, p. 79)

Another Islamic concept discussed was Ashura and Tashua. This spiritual occasion happened every year on the 10th day of Muharram and was a prolonged time of grieving observed to commemorate the passing of Husain ibn Ali, the third Imam of the Shi'ite community.

Numerous diverse religious ceremonies were frequently cited in the texts such as the Chanting of the sacred Quran (the Islamic holy scripture revealed by the prophet Muhammad), offering Salah (the act of communicating with Allah that Muslims perform five times a day), observing Sawm (a period of abstinence from food and drink for religious reasons), and pilgrimage to the shrines of Shi'ite Imams.

Who is very good at reciting the Holy Quran? (Prospect 2, WB, p. 13)

Does he recite the Holy Quran at the turn of the year? (Prospect 3, SB, p. 51)

The text talked about the mention of reciting prayers regularly, with the intention of subtly instructing that Muslims were obligated to offer Salat (Prayers) on a daily basis. Additionally, the observance of fasting was noticed, which involved the act of worshiping Allah by refraining from consuming food, drink, and other actions that could invalidate the fast, from the actual time of dawn until sunset.

...At noon we pray and have lunch... (Prospect 3, WB, p. 64)

...On Fitr Eid, Muslims don't fast... (Prospect 3, SB, p. 57)

A mosque—a structure utilized for Muslim worship—was depicted in various sections of the educational materials, both in written and illustrated formats.

Isfahan is very famous for its mosques and palaces. (Prospect 2, SB, p. 42)

Holy Prophet's Mosque. (Prospect 2, WB, p. 29)

Great mosques. (Prospect 2, WB, p. 33)

Jameh Mosque. (Prospect 2, WB, p. 26)

The act of visiting the tombs of their Imams was a religious practice among Shi'a Muslims. These tombs held great significance as sacred sites, and one prominent example was the revered sanctuary of Imam Reza, the eighth Shi'a Imam, situated in the northeastern region of Iran, specifically in Mashhad city.

These practices are considered fundamental in Islamic culture, as they are believed to bring blessings and spiritual benefits, or mark the conclusion of Ramadan. The *Prospect* series provides detailed explanations and instructions on the etiquette and importance of visiting Imams' tombs, offering students a comprehensive understanding of this ritual.

Figure 5
Islamic Rituals



Islamic Republic Policy

The corpus contained numerous references to other concepts associated with the Islamic Republic and the governing system’s doctrines in Iran. These references were particularly related to the Islamic administration in Iran, which aligns with the aforementioned Islamic ideologies. The celebration of the Islamic Revolution is a tribute to the protests that resulted in the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty and the emergence of the Islamic Revolution.

The literature classified those who died during the Islamic Revolution, whether in the Iran-Iraq conflict or as a result of terror tactics, as ‘shahids.’ This classification also extended to the nuclear scientists who were assassinated. The textbooks contained visuals that depicted these individuals in various contexts:

Figure 6
Shahids



In *Prospect 1*, certain historically significant days that hold great importance for the Islamic ruling system of Iran were explicitly listed. These include the start of the holy defense (Defae Mohgaddas), which refers to the Iran-Iraq 8-year war, the anniversary of the Islamic revolution, the Islamic Republic Day, and the commemoration of the liberation of Khorramshahr.

Figure 7

Historically Significant Days



Prospect 1, WB, p. 41

It appeared that in a religiously governed nation such as Iran, the ideas presently taught in history textbooks ought to be presented in an English language publication once more!

Fajr film festival (The Islamic Guidance and Culture Ministry is in charge of the festival) that takes place on the commemoration of the 1979 Islamic Revolution is also one of the cultural representations related to the governmental ideological aspects.

...I attended Fajr International Film Festival... (Prospect 3, SB, p. 82)

Rahian-e Noor is a group of political and religious caravans that travel to various tourist destinations in the southern and western regions of Iran to commemorate the sacrifices made by Iranians during the Iran-Iraq War).

Moreover, the Islamic Republic's opposition to Israel is evident in two of the pictures featured in *Prospect 3*.

Figure 8

The Islamic Republic's opposition to Israel



Prospect 3, SB, p.121

Prospect 3, SB, p.18

Prospect 3, SB, p. 82

The *Prospect* series of EFL textbooks feature a higher number of Islamic events compared to Iranian events, highlighting the prominence of Islamic holidays. In summary, the *Prospect* series of EFL textbooks includes numerous political aspects related to the Islamic Republic. This can be attributed to the focus and goals of each series, the intended audience, and the educational regulations in Iran.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the current study provide significant insights into the representation of Islamic ideologies, national identity, and intercultural competence in the Iranian EFL textbook series, *Prospect*. The comprehensive content analysis and qualitative investigation of the textbooks reveal a strong emphasis on the inclusion of Islamic values, traditions, and cultural elements throughout the series.

To provide an answer to the first and second research questions a thorough content analysis, both quantitatively and qualitatively, was conducted. Given the visual and textual content of the books, it was discovered that almost every section conveyed Islamic values and ideologies. Based on the tables provided in the Results section (Tables 1 and 2), it could be seen that Islamic values predominated in the category of people and identity, which the authors used to introduce students to the Islamic figures and values admired in Islamic culture. In line with the findings of the current study, Abdollahzadeh and Baniasad (2000) found that the government preferred to impose ideologies through textbooks when they looked at the role of ideology in English textbooks. Additionally, the majority of the ceremonies and events—textual or visual—were based on Islamic customs to teach the students about and prepare them. The study also showed that the series was limited to local issues and did not address cross-cultural issues. The same outcomes were found by Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) in their analysis of how cultural elements were represented in Prospects 1–3. They concluded that there was little cultural representation of the target culture and a significant amount of representation of Islamic culture.

The use of both Iranian and Islamic proper nouns was attempted, with a slight advantage going to the Islamic names, and it was also discovered that the number of proper nouns was more evenly distributed. Everyone was dressed according to the customary Islamic dress code, which mandated that women wear the Islamic hijab (a type of clothing style that is required for female Muslims) at all times. Only one visual representation of a local dress pattern was included in *Prospect* 3 along with the Islamic Hijab. In their analysis, Benham and Mozaheb (2013) investigated the depiction of men and women within Iranian high school EFL textbooks, tested against Islamic custom,

utilizing linear and nonlinear approaches. Or, to put it another way, the content and pictures of these textbooks were tested with regard to Islamic customs. Their findings confirmed the findings of the current study by concluding that all visual segments of the EFL textbooks of Iran must adhere to the laws and principles of the Islamic special way of dressing known as hijab. When it came to locations, the majority of the locations mentioned in the books were connected to various regions of Iran in the textual analysis, but in the visual analysis, the Islamic locations once again had an advantage. It is important to note that, in accordance with the relevant theoretical framework, the majority of these cultural representations were in favor of the local cultural context (whether Islamic or Iranian), and only a small number of international target cultures were introduced (Gheitasi et al., 2020). According to Ajideh and Panahi (2016) confirming more Islamic-Iranian cultures than the target or international culture, the textbooks are inadequate in fostering intercultural communicative competence.

Considering the second research question, the results of the current study showed that books were attempting to subtly teach some Islamic moral codes by exposing readers to Islamic ideologies while hiding Western culture from them. Clothing Style, Physical Interaction, Women at Home, Men Outside, Ideologies Related to Islam, and Ideologies Related to the Islamic Republic were the five categories under which these codes of conduct were divided. An effort was made to incorporate Islamic culture into each of these categories, including the way people dress, and interact with one another, the roles of men and women in society, holidays, religious ceremonies, and events related to Islam, as well as the Islamic political system.

No women were seen in the analysed textbook illustrations wearing anything other than the Islamic hijab in the first category, Clothing style. Similar to what Bigger (2006, p. 6) said, "Consequently, both men and women must dress modestly, which means they must cover their bodies with loose clothing or, in this case, the hijab."

The majority of the physical proximity among the characters of the series fell into the category of family members (Father–Son, Mother–Son, etc.), according to the analysis of the Physical interaction category, which was consistent with the research conducted by Haeri (1989). Regarding the third category, the analysis confirmed Cheng and Biglar (2012) who found, women were responsible for household duties while men were occupied with outside employment. A male-dominated family was regarded as the norm in this school of Islamic thought.

Considering the principles of Islam, such as its rituals, festivals, events, and acts, the current study's conclusions supported the government's efforts to engage young people and piqued their interest in Islamic ceremonial occasions. Accordingly, it was discovered that some cultural, traditional, economic, and behavioral aspects of Islamic ideology were purposefully portrayed in the

Iranian EFL textbooks. They explained that the purpose of including these religious ceremonies was to arouse students' interest in adhering to and supporting these Islamic traditions (Tahir et al., 2021). There was no question that these memorial services and events could draw in a lot of people's attention, especially teenagers who can express their joy or grief through these memorials. Due to this, the authors made an effort to mention as many Islamic celebrations as they could. As Ali et al. (2019) concluded students were being indoctrinated with the government's ideologies through textbooks. Shah et al. (2013) reporting an excessive amount of Islamic content in Punjabi English textbooks, stated these ideologies needed to be dropped. Fundamentally, no particular school of thought should be practiced in EFL textbooks; rather, students should learn creative writing and speaking techniques that enable them to perform successfully in a communicative situation (Shah et al., 2013).

Because of some political constraints, it was clear from the results of the textual and visual critical analysis that the book's authors did not want students to become familiar with either the target culture or the global culture. Tajeddin and Teimourizadeh (2014) contend that it was impossible to learn a second language without also learning its culture. Therefore, it might be necessary for language acquisition to have some level of exposure to the target or global culture. Likewise, Alptekin (2002) and Schnitzer (1995) made arguments for the importance of intercultural competence. According to Abdullah and Kumari (2009), when students were not exposed to the target culture, there would inevitably be a cultural divide and a subsequent lack of language proficiency. Additionally, as Tajeddin and Teimourizadeh (2014) highlighted, students who were learning English may later put their own cultural identities in danger because they were unable to communicate and transfer their values with people from other cultures.

In summary, the study indicates that Islamic ideologies and representations are dominant across various categories, including people and identity, ceremonies, names, and dressing. This suggests that the textbook authors have made a concerted effort to infuse the materials with Islamic content, potentially to align with the ideological priorities of the Iranian government and educational system. The limited inclusion of international or target culture elements, as highlighted by previous studies, suggests that the *Prospect* series may fall short in fostering true intercultural competence among learners. This raises concerns about the ability of these textbooks to adequately prepare students for successful cross-cultural communication and understanding. The findings align with the concerns raised by scholars regarding the need for a more balanced and inclusive approach to cultural representation in language learning materials, one that allows for the integration of both local and global perspectives.

Building on the insights gained from this study, future research should explore the representation of Islamic and Iranian ideologies, as well as intercultural

elements, in a wider range of EFL textbooks used in Iran. Expanding the analysis to include other nationally developed series, such as the *Vision* series for secondary high school students, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the trends and patterns observed in Iranian EFL materials. Additionally, it would be valuable to investigate the perspectives of teachers and students who have used the *Prospect* series, as well as other EFL textbooks in Iran. Gaining insights into their experiences, perceptions, and the practical implications of the textbook content in the classroom could help shed light on the real-world impact of the ideological representations. This could inform the development of more culturally-responsive and inclusive language learning resources that better serve the needs of Iranian EFL learners. Furthermore, future studies could explore the reasons and justifications behind the inclusion of specific Islamic and Iranian elements in the textbooks, moving beyond the descriptive analysis provided in this study. A deeper examination of the decision-making processes and the underlying educational and political agendas could offer valuable insights into the motivations driving the textbook content.

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Appendix A

Checklist: Recognizing Islamic Ideologies in EFL Textbooks

1. Content and Topics:

- Does the textbook include content related to Islamic beliefs, practices, or religious concepts?
- Are there specific sections or units dedicated to Islamic culture, history, or values?
- Are Islamic holidays, events, or figures mentioned or discussed in the textbook?

2. Language and Terminology:

- Does the textbook use Islamic-specific vocabulary or terminology?
- Are there Arabic words, phrases, or Islamic expressions incorporated in the material?
- Are Islamic greetings or phrases commonly used in the textbook?

3. Visual Representations:

- Do the illustrations, photographs, or images in the textbook depict Islamic symbols, mosques, or Islamic attire?
- Are there visual representations of Islamic rituals, prayers, or religious gatherings?
- Are there visual depictions of Islamic historical figures, prophets, or important Islamic sites?

4. Cultural References:

- Does the textbook include references to Islamic cultural practices, traditions, or customs?
- Are there examples of Islamic art, literature, or music discussed or showcased in the material?
- Does the textbook highlight the contributions of Islamic scholars, scientists, or philosophers?

5. Perspectives and Values:

- Does the textbook promote Islamic values, ethics, or moral teachings in its lessons or stories?
- Are there instances where Islamic perspectives are presented on social, political, or ethical issues?
- Does the textbook encourage respect, understanding, or appreciation for Islamic culture and beliefs?

6. Bias and Representation:

- Are there any instances of bias, stereotyping, or misrepresentation of Islamic beliefs or practices?
- Does the textbook present a balanced and accurate portrayal of Islamic ideologies?
- Are diverse interpretations within Islamic traditions and practices taken into account?


7. Language Skills Integration:

- Does the textbook incorporate language skills practice (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) related to Islamic topics or contexts?
- Are there exercises or activities that encourage students to engage with Islamic themes through language practice?




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How is the National Image Represented? A Multimodal Cognitive Perspective of EFL Textbooks in China

Abstract

Currently, very few studies have discussed representations of a national image in textbooks of English as a foreign language (EFL) from the multimodal critical cognitive perspective. To address this issue, this study, based on conceptual blending theory, critical discourse analysis, and multimodality, aims to qualitatively examine the co-instantiation of texts, images, and tasks that represent the national image in two Chinese EFL textbook series, People's Education Press (PEP) and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP). The study explores the text-image-task semiotic relationship in constructing social-cultural meanings in textbooks. Content analysis of the selected textbooks suggests that the indexical relationship between the text, image, and task matters in the representation of the national image. The findings reveal how the text-image-task co-instantiation helps EFL learners develop cultural awareness of national image cognitively. The study makes comparisons between PEP and FLTRP and suggests that teachers' pedagogical strategies, textbook design, and learners' learning approach be improved in the development of cultural awareness.

Keywords: representation of national image, English as a foreign language textbook, conceptual blending theory, multimodality

Technological development facilitates the birth of several types of teaching materials, among which textbooks have increasingly received attention from scholars in China (Wang, 2000). That is because the textbook, for teachers, is viewed as the default teaching material. As for language learners, it is perceived as a primary source of language input and practice. Although the convenience of cultural communication in textbooks brings about different pedagogical philosophies, a consensus is reached in language education, according to which language learners should have good English communicative competence and excellent multicultural and multimodal sociability (Atkinson, 1999; Hinkel, 1999; Kramsch, 1998). According to *The Curriculum Standard of Senior English for Chinese Students in 2017*, the construction and development of learners' cultural awareness of the national image should also be highlighted, and aimed at shaping their correct cultural values and cultivating their sense of national identity. Nonetheless, we are puzzled about how national cultural awareness can be implemented in tasks and exercises that are offered in the textbooks (Kurtz, 2010; Tomlinson, 2012). Traditionally, national culture was presented in the textbooks with one or two pictures due to less emphasis on the diversity within that culture. Therefore, a monolithic view of national culture in the textbook was evoked by focusing on certain information without structural exploration, which leaves learners with an impression of disorganization and impeded them from forming cultural awareness of the national image through visual associations. Present-day EFL textbooks employ multimodal resources inclusive of both verbal and visual semiotic modes (Chen, 2010). The cognitive formation of a national image is encouraged through a multimodal, dynamic, hybrid, and emergent understanding of language and culture (Baker, 2012) and results in politically and culturally conscious citizens (Kramsch, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

The national image symbolizes national power and represents the overall strength of a nation because it is comprised of different semiotics that underscore the importance of signs and symbols as basic components in human communication and expression. These signs and symbols include culture, history, technology, military, and so forth. The term national image appeared in the work of Kenneth Boulding (1956) and was understood from the social-psychological perspective during the Cold War. Boulding's definition of image as a combination of the cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavioral unit is further extended to the role of national image. Therefore, national image plays a role in shaping the perception of other agents in the international system (Boulding, 1959). In this regard, research on the national image, economic advancement, and political success is increasingly available in different fields, such as business, tourism, and public media (Dolea et al., 2021; Gilboa, 2008; Hall, 1999; Zhang et al., 2020). However, to date, only a few studies have included the national image in the educational setting (e.g., Goshylyk & Artysh, 2020; Sinaga et al., 2020).

With such a gap in mind, this study aims to examine learning materials available in popular Chinese textbooks for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) at senior high schools. The focus is on how national images are represented multimodally, conceptually, and critically in the textbook through various images, texts, and tasks. “National image” belongs to a kind of cultural awareness that is complicated and largely influenced by diverse factors like people, history, climate, and so forth (Risager, 2007). Learners, who concentrate on studies of national culture, are interested in various cultural elements in the sense of linguistic diversity and explore how individuals and communities construct, share, and navigate the meaning of national identity within cultural contexts in their minds. Psychologically, these elements and their relationships come into play when people use language, and these actions construct cultural mental spaces (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008). In textbooks, a variety of input sources inclusive of dialogs, tasks, pictures, and exercises are offered to help learners construct cultural awareness of the national image through language learning in more meaningful contexts (Limberg, 2016). Against the backdrop of previous studies on how to multimodally construct social meanings (Antović, 2021; Athanasopoulos & Antović, 2018; Serafini & Reid, 2019), this study critically and interpretively examines EFL resources through a multimodal critical-cognitive approach. This approach is applied to two respective cases of two textbook series, more specifically, People’s Education Press (PEP) and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP). Analysis and discussion of selected texts, tasks, and images presented in the textbooks attempt to answer the research question: How does the coordination of texts, images, and tasks as a major focus in Chinese EFL textbooks represent the national image?

Literature Review

The National Image

The term *national image* refers to the influence of the total cognitive, emotional, and evaluative structure of the nation’s behavioral unit on the international system that consists of a group of interacting behavior units called “nations” or “countries” (Boulding, 1956, 1959). Regarding the interpretations, elements, and functions of the national image, Sun (2002) expressed the view that the national image, which is not necessarily equivalent to its actual situation and is inherently constructed, represents the public perception and assessment of a state, involving its politics, economy, society, geography and more. According to Hu (2011), individual knowledge of the national image

is derived from learning, personal experiences, book narratives, social media, and the social relations of a person. Besides, the national image is perceived by the state itself and other agents in this international system, and it is the result of information input and output with a clear structure (Boulding, 1959). It is also considered as a state's intangible asset or soft power (Wu, 2012).

From the perspective of constructivism, the national image is comprehensively reflected upon and criticized by researchers, to illustrate its social nature and to emphasise the influence it has on learners. Methodologically and theoretically, the national image is mainly understood through qualitative and quantitative content analysis to identify the persistent patterns of frames or agendas of media journalism that play a vital role in shaping and influencing the national image, both domestically and internationally (e.g., Leung & Huang, 2007; Wu, 2006). Therefore, Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), which selectively focuses on emphasizing or de-emphasizing specific elements in shaping the national image, and agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009), which explores the impact of setting agendas on the public perception of international affairs, are universally used in studies related to the national image. Apart from the area of communication, there are studies of the national image in the field of linguistics. For instance, a corpus-based critical discourse analysis of China's image that is represented in the US social media, through statistical measures of collocations, aims at identifying—in great measure—the recurrent transitive patterns against the backdrop of China's economy (Tang, 2021). Another perspective of the national image construction adopts a diachronic and holistic approach, utilizing critical discourse analysis to analyze business news headlines from mainstream media in both China and ASEAN countries (Yuan et al., 2022).

To sum up, the aforementioned studies are insightful and have strong explanatory power in the construction of the national image. However, the national image is a form of cultural awareness, and its development is a cognitive process. From a macro-perspective, the construction of the national image seems to be more ideological and stereotypical. As per the synthesized aforementioned literature review, it is found that many studies on the national image rely on social media interpretations, but less attention is paid to the educational discourse. Therefore, the construction of the national image, along with the urgency of the international system and the publication of relevant policies, becomes a pedagogical focus. It is a kind of awareness that inspires teachers and learners to negotiate and better appreciate their own culture dynamically and progressively (Kramsch, 2013), so a statistical and holistic method to study the national image is not suitable. Thus, in the present study, a critical cognitive perspective for the analysis of the national image constructions in EFL textbooks in China is employed, because these textbooks are rich in cultural elements, and increasingly emphasize fostering a sense of national identity among learners.

National Image Studies on Textbooks

Textbooks are regarded as representing the basis of the curriculum for foreign language learners and teachers, and in specific cultural contexts, learning culture is closely associated with textbooks (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Macgilchrist, 2017). The national images that are represented in textbooks are studied throughout the world, as countries in development are confronted with various complex ideological issues that have a great influence on the construction of the national image. Much research is solely focused on textbooks of literature, history, geography, or civil education (Gao & Zhang, 2021; Gu, 2015; Pingel, 2008).

The research track of the national image in textbooks started in the 1950s and continues to the present. It experiences three phases, including various theoretical innovations (1950s–1980s), the systematic construction of theories (1990s–2000s), and the integration of theories and practices (2000s–present). In the first phase, the initial concept of national image, coined by Boulding (1959), was expanded to include the discussion of the intergenerational transmission mechanism of the national image in the textbooks (Kelman & Bailyn, 1962). Along with industrial advancement, studies turned to the relationship between society and social power. In the second phase, textbooks were viewed as a carrier of the national image and were systematically embodied in philosophical views and in the cultural discourse of the society of the time (Coman, 1996; Garcia, 1993; Kizilyürek, 1999; Ohliger, 1999). The third phase witnesses the maturity of research on the national image in textbooks regarding the integration of theories and practices, such as national image representations. It is logically constructed and has a far-reaching influence on learners' and teachers' cultural awareness.

Studies of the national image in textbooks have shed some light on the importance of national image constructions and made language scholars aware of the need to emphasize the relationship between the national image and EFL contexts. That is because the national image helps people identify with other groups who have the same nationality and shared interests and helps better communicate the social spirits and civilization in EFL to other parts of the world (Heidari et al., 2022). As per the aforementioned research, textbooks are the primary input source of language and culture. National image in EFL textbooks, however, is less talked about. A search of “national image” and “EFL textbooks” as keywords in searching papers on the related topics in the ERIC database, the statistics from the year 2018 to 2022, suggest that 487 peer-reviewed articles were found.

Previous EFL studies of the national image in textbooks, theoretically and methodologically, were more focused on the critical analysis of the EFL discourse, and some interviews, utilizing a qualitative or a quantitative method to identify the persistent national patterns of ideology and power relations

(Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Ulum & Köksal, 2021; Xiang & Yenika-agbaw, 2019; Xiong & Peng, 2020). For instance, Ulum and Köksal's study (2021) collected qualitative and quantitative data via interviews and questionnaires to unveil teachers' and learners' understanding of the national image contained in EFL textbooks. On a different stance, Setyono and Widodo (2019) examined different themes of national image in EFL textbooks based on critical social semiotic analysis in examining the image-text semiotic relations and their hidden cultural meanings in EFL textbooks (Xiong & Peng, 2020). Xiang and Yenika-Agbaw (2019) employed Kachru and Nelson's model of English spread in critically analyzing the national image of cultural variables in EFL textbooks. Such analyses in the studies offer a macro-perspective of the cultural awareness that is represented in EFL textbooks and inform the analytical focus of the present study.

Previous studies have highlighted the global conceptualization of the national image but tended to largely ignore the representation of cultural awareness and its underlying reasons dynamically and progressively. Besides, in comparison with traditional EFL textbooks, the modern ones are abundant in colorful images, which makes them more personalized and interactive. A multimodal perspective of the national image in the EFL textbooks (Elmiana, 2019) enlightens the present study, since, in Elmiana's research, functions and appropriateness of different modes are illustrated in EFL textbooks from the part of learners' cognitive associations, for pedagogical purposes. Concerning research methods, the quantitative analysis only takes unambiguous features of the texts, while the qualitative method pays more attention to implicit contents and contexts (Syed, 2010). In the current study, the qualitative approach is adopted to identify salient patterns of national image in EFL textbooks. That is because the emergence of potential social meaning regarding cultural awareness is largely reliant on contextualisation cues and needs interpretation in some cases.

Therefore, the EFL textbooks that the current research studied were chosen from PEP and FLTRP, which are the two largest publishers for EFL learners in China. Importantly, both include plentiful images, well-structured texts, and meaningful tasks, following the guidelines set by the Ministry of Education of China. The research seeks out how the national image is represented in the two selected EFL textbook series and suggests differences between them.

Theoretical Framework

The Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT), also referred to as Conceptual Integration Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008), is widely used in different research fields such as music, language and literature, film studies, and

many more, for exploring the construction of meaning (e.g., Gordejuela, 2019; McAlister, 2006; Spitzer, 2018). CBT, which is multidirectional, differs from the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff, G. & Johnson) and the Perceptual Meaning Analysis (Geeraerts et al., 2005), and is more advanced than the two unidirectional theories. In CBT, the effectiveness of uncovering emergent meanings lies in the integration of components from different, yet structurally relevant and blended, mental spaces. This integration results in the creation of new spaces with robust explanatory capabilities, enhancing the comprehension of existing concepts or the emergence of novel ones (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). In the current study, the selected EFL textbooks are designed with plentiful culture-related images, texts, and tasks to represent the national image, which can be understood and interpreted by EFL readers. In the process of their reading and interpreting these images, texts, and tasks, readers relate various cultural elements available to the national image in their mental spaces, during which different conceptual meanings emerge and blend, contributing to the readers' overall conceptualization of the national image. Thus, given the influence of EFL textbooks on shaping learners' cultural awareness of the national image, CBT is deemed a relevant approach in investigating discursive representations within EFL textbooks.

Furthermore, CBT is seen as being subjectively goal-driven. The analytical procedures within CBT are always viewed as a motivated explanation, which has been answered by mountainous empirical qualitative research from different perspectives, primarily drawing from the book *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). The current study aims to investigate the readers' mental process related to the ongoing construction of the national image. In the process, the underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and social constructions that contribute to the formation of the national image are uncovered. Therefore, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be a valuable tool to uncover the values, beliefs, and norms that are promoted or challenged, and shed light on the ideological underpinnings of the national image in the context of social meaning constructions within CBT (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

The compatibility of CBT and CDA is largely attributed to the relationship between language, conceptualization, and cognitive factors. This relationship can be mirrored by CDA which describes the relationship between text and discourse (Hart & Lukes, 2007). To be more specific, CDA reveals how the co-representations of texts, images, and tasks contribute to the construction of the national image and shape readers' perceptions by uncovering the symbolic meanings attributed to these elements and how they contribute to the construction of social meanings. However, social meaning constructions should not be merely confined to the words themselves, since multimodal cognitions of what we focus on are of great importance. Jewitt (2009), for instance, argued

that the “multimodal turn” ushers a new era in the understanding of how new technologies have largely broadened the avenues through which meanings are constructed. A mode, therefore, serves as a means for creating meaning, encompassing elements like images, dialogues, colors, or written text (Smith, 2021). That is because the semiotic modes are regarded as carriers of cultural meanings as well as signs indexing cultural significance (Weninger & Kiss, 2013). In the context of the multimodal environment, which benefits from technological advancements, another significant undertaking is set in motion by multimodality. This concept involves the utilization of multiple means, such as speech, images, and color, in the process of meaning-making (Bateman et al., 2018; Norris, 2019). In EFL textbooks, abundant different modes create a constellation and they are instantiated together to achieve curriculum goals and hidden ideologies (Chen, 2010).

The national image in EFL textbooks is regarded as a type of cultural awareness that is constructed and reconstructed through the interaction of textbooks and learners (Derakhshan, 2021). Interactional and structural micro-processes of language choice are always coupled with social ideologies and power relations, from the view of sociolinguistics (Hart & Lukes, 2007). Thus, the context of well-structured images, texts, and tasks in EFL textbooks carries societal values and reinforces specific ideologies, which largely realizes the development of learners’ being culturally aware of the construction of the national image.

Taking the above-mentioned concerns into account, this present study, based on CBT and CDA, focuses on how the co-instantiation of texts, tasks, and images can conceptually lead to the learners’ formation of the semiosis process in the construction of the national image. Besides, this study also offers practical insights that can benefit teachers in refining their pedagogical strategies, assist language textbook designers in comprehending the potential cognitive processes involved in constructing social meanings, and aid language learners in improving their reading skills.

Methodology

The overarching aim of the study, situated within the interpretivism paradigm, is to investigate how the national image is represented conceptually and multimodally in the selected EFL textbooks by the content analysis of the text, image, and task.

Textbook Sampling

Data sources are two EFL textbook series for senior high school learners in China, one from PEP and the other from FLTRP. The two EFL textbook series were officially approved by China's Teaching Material Committee in 2019 before they could be distributed in the market. Each of the book series comprises seven textbooks, Compulsory Textbooks 1–3 and Selective Textbooks 1–4. Hereafter, compulsory Textbooks 1 to 3 are numbered as Book 1 to Book 3 and the selective Textbooks, as Book 4 to Book 7 in sequence.

The reasons for choosing the two series of textbooks were based on several criteria. First, the two textbook series are consistent with the pedagogical philosophy that is centered on the cultivation of learners' cultural awareness of China's patriots and the development of their multicultural sociability in *The Curriculum Standard of Senior English for Chinese Students in 2017*. Second, these textbook series are the primary input sources of language and culture for senior high school learners in China. This means that the EFL textbooks from PEP and FLTRP play an influential role in shaping learners' language skills and awareness and are worthy of investigation. For the PEP textbook series, each book has five units covering sections such as Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing, Structure, Project, Video Time, and Workbook. In contrast, for the FLTRP textbook series, each book has six units covering activities such as Starting, Understanding Ideas, Using Language, Developing Ideas, and Presenting Ideas. Similarly, each unit in both textbook series has distinctive themes and contains various types of activities. Finally, the two coursebook series provide audio-visual materials that serve as supplementary resources for practicing listening and viewing skills on their official websites.

Data Selection for Analysis

The purposeful sampling technique was utilised for selecting specific sample data for analysis. It was based on the frequency of images occurring in the book units that are relevant to the national image and on the number of their indexicality, a linguistic and semiotic concept that refers to the way signs or expressions derive meaning by pointing to or indexing specific contextual information (Bochmann, 2023), as calculated and shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Based on the information displayed in these two tables, the unit with the maximal degree of text-image-task co-instantiation and indexicality was chosen from each of the series. All these images in units-themed national images were initially scrutinised and identified by the researcher. The identified images were later examined by two experienced researchers who specialise in linguistics and multimodality to verify whether the selected images conform to the text-task-image co-instantiation and indicate indexicality.

Table 1
Details on Images and Indexicality in Units Depicting National Image in PEP

Number	Theme	Unit topic	No. of images	No. of image's indexicality	Source
1	Nature	Natural Disaster	22	6	Book 1 Unit 4
2	Culture	Cultural Heritage	19	6	Book 2 Unit 1
3	People	Morals and Virtues	8	3	Book 3 Unit 2
4	Technology	Space Exploration	10	4	Book 3 Unit 4
5	People	People of Achievement	11	6	Book 4 Unit 1
6	People	Science and Scientist	16	1	Book 5 Unit 1
7	Life	Sharing	9	2	Book 4 Unit 4

Table 2
Details on Images and Indexicality in Units Related to the National Image in FLTRP

Number	Theme	Unit topic	No. of images	No. of image's indexicality	Source
1	People	Making a Difference	16	2	Book 3 Unit 2
2	Sport	Faster, Higher and Stronger	22	4	Book 4 Unit 3
3	People	Meeting the Muse	23	5	Book 4 Unit 4
4	People	A Life's Work	15	5	Book 6 Unit 2
5	History	War and Peace	20	5	Book 6 Unit 3
6	Culture	The World Meets China	21	4	Book 7 Unit 3

Research Findings

The findings of the data analysis are presented and organised according to the selected data identified as *Selection* followed by a number, for instance, 1. This paper presents a detailed analysis of only two selected data samples which comprise texts and images extracted from each of the two aforementioned book series. Due to copyright issues related to multiple designers and authors of the textbooks, Figures 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 12 in the paper can be accessed through the following link: <https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>.

Selection I

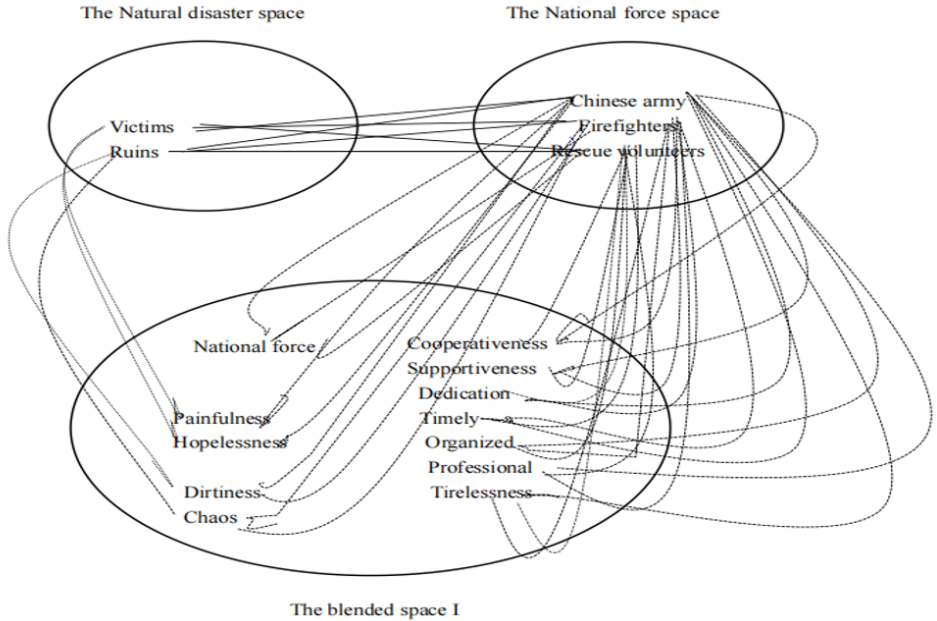
Section I was extracted from PEP's Book 1, Unit 4, Natural Disasters (pp. 47–58). In this unit, the theme of the national image is emphasised through several activities, which include the introduction page, and Listening and Speaking, Reading, and Thinking and Discovering Useful Structures chapters. Meanwhile, the indexical relationship between the text and task in this unit is depicted in six images. Most importantly, the text-task-image co-instantiation facilitates learners' cognitive process of various modes and their associated cultural meanings in the representation of the national image of China.

As shown in Figure 1 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), the title Natural Disaster, which is the focused topic of this unit, is closely related to issues including destructions, deaths, victims, and hazards caused by different disasters, which evokes the natural disaster space. Apart from the title, the image in Figure 1 consists of the “ruin space,” the “victim space,” and the “national power space.” This is related to the Chinese army which is one of the major components of the national pillar, and on occasions that Chinese people suffer from disasters, the Chinese army always honors its role in defending the people. In this part, the Chinese army evokes a few emotion-related conceptual elements including dedicated, united, and cooperative. The “ruins,” in this context, evoke conceptual elements of dirt, chaos, and aridity, because these elements are related to various mental spaces associated with the concept of dirt. The “victim” evokes conceptual elements like pain, injury, and death. Emphatically, the “ruin space” and the “victim space” can be integrated into the “natural disaster space” to form a blended environment that will include them all. This is due to their Cause-Effect relation. As suggested by the following task, “What’s going on in this photo?”, a Cause-Effect relation emerges between the “victim space” and the “national force space” as well as a vital relation emerges by “Time” that connects the “national force space” with the “natural disaster space.” In more detail, and according to the following, the victim who was injured in the natural disaster was saved by the Chinese army, and the events of the natural disaster occurring and the Chinese army appearing are temporarily situated. Therefore, Time has a vital role in connecting two events across input spaces.

Three disaster-related causes are provided in Figure 2 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>) and are accompanied by an image of the Chinese army and firefighters depicted as moving post-disaster ruins. Prompted by the tasks, reading about the disasters and preparing a short news report, the Cause-Effect and Time relation is enhanced, based on information in Figure 1. That is because the hint given by the task requires the target learner to figure out the relationship between the two events. More importantly, the national force space is enriched by other members, such as Chinese firefighters, who are national

contributors, along with the addition of other conceptual elements, including their timely organisation and specialisation. Additionally, in Figure 3 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), as the task asks learners to look at the text's title and illustration, guess what the text is about, and check whether their assumption is correct, the rescue volunteers in this image attract learners' attention and the text's title tells learners how much time the rescue volunteers spend in helping those trapped in the disaster. Consequently, conceptual elements related to perseverance and assistance are evoked in learners' mental spaces. In their mental spaces, perseverance and assistance are conceptually related to rescue volunteers who are always steadfast and cooperative in helping people in a disaster without considering their cost. The national force space is enriched accordingly. In addition, with the task requesting to "read and check whether the learner is right," and based on the previous conceptual information of rescue volunteers' "perseverance" and "assistance," the text further confirms the Time and Cause-Effect relation between the natural disaster space and the national force space. Based on Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3, an emergent blended space is identified as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4
A Simplified Network Diagram of the National Force and Natural Disaster Blend

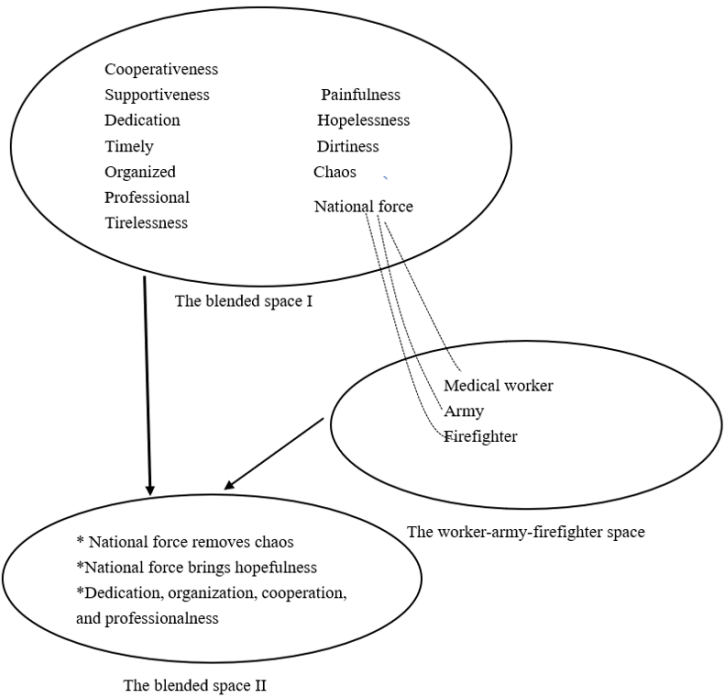


Three images are provided in Figure 5 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce-34d7a1e95323e4>). The first image provides a proximal lens of a medical worker feeding a baby who survived an earthquake. The second image shows the Chinese army putting up tents, and the third shows a firefighter professionally guiding a dog to a safe place. The proximal perspective of the three aforementioned images triggers the intended effects of making learners empathetic toward these situations and, thus, largely enhances learners' awareness of the national image which involves Chinese soldiers, volunteers, and firefighters who help those in need without hesitation. More importantly, as prompted by the task of "taking turns to ask each other about the pictures and making sentences as per given instruction," the three images evoke a Part-Whole relation with the blended space I. This is because the three images depict three classical roles that are representative of hundreds and thousands of people doing the same job, and bringing hope and stability to the whole nation, which constitutes embodiments of what was achieved by the national forces. A Part-Whole mapping across the mental space that is constructed by the three images in Figure 5, namely the worker-army-firefighter space, and the blended space begins the selective projection of conceptual elements structured previously into the final blend where the representation of the national image comes into being, as shown in Figure 6.

The above analysis offers an explicit explanation of the cognitive aspect that is influenced by information obtained from images, text, and tasks. Essentially, the representation of the national image involves the strategic comprehension that affects the formation process of conceptual elements and mental spaces. The conceptual elements that need to be clarified in this context are not only internal processes but also highly dynamic societal processes of positioning (Li, 2017). The context of natural disasters in this EFL textbook vividly represents the national image of the Chinese national force, including medical workers, firefighters, and the Chinese army bringing hope to the victims of natural disasters with dedication, cooperation, professionalism, and organization, which is reflected in their respective responsibilities and functions to comprehensively safeguard the interests of the Chinese.

Figure 6

A Simplified Network Diagram of the Representation of the National Image

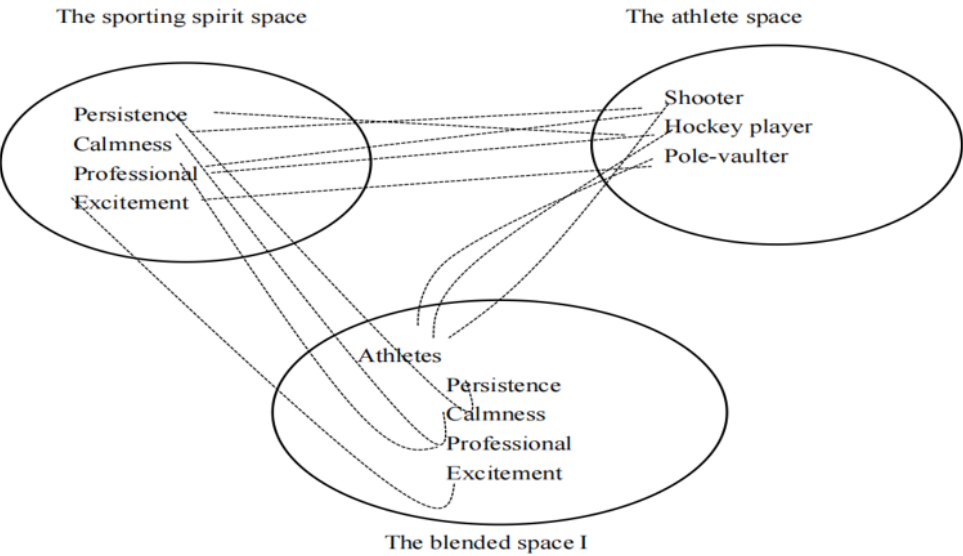


Selection II

Selection II was extracted from FLTRP’s Book 4, Unit 3, Faster, Higher, Stronger (pp. 25–36). Activities that consist of Starting and Developing Ideas are used to emphasise the theme of the national image. The topic Faster, Higher, Stronger displayed at the beginning of this unit can simultaneously activate two mental spaces: the athlete space and the sporting spirit space. That is because the topic, which most Chinese people are familiar with, comes from the slogan used in the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, which facilitates the activation of learners’ mental spaces. In Figure 7 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), there are three images. The former two display athletes’ professionalism and the latter depicts the athlete’s excitement from winning the game. Additionally, prompted by the task comprising questions of “What do you know about these sports people?,” “What can you learn from them?,” “Are there any other sportspeople who inspire you?,” “Who are they” and “Why do they inspire you?,” the outer-space relation “Change” is formed between the athlete space and the sporting spirit space in learners’ minds. This occurs

because the initial sight of athletes in the arena triggers the learners’ conceptual associations with professionalism and beauty that are radiated from their confidence and physical fitness. In line with the clues provided by the task and the topic, our internal knowledge of sporting spirit, such as qualities like persistence, composure, and enthusiasm, gradually comes into play. As a result, the relationship between the external and internal elements can be condensed to create a blended space, as depicted in Figure 8.

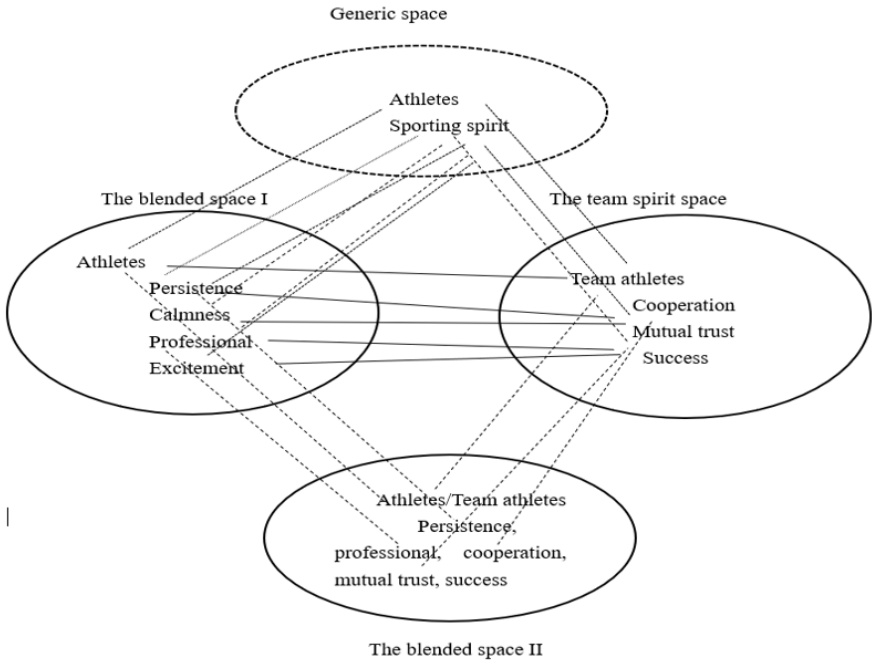
Figure 8
A Simplified Network Diagram of the Sporting Spirit and the Athlete Blend



In Figure 9 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), the image of the Chinese women’s volleyball team engaged in competition leaves a strong impression on learners in that it evokes conceptual elements associated with a strong team spirit, fighting spirit, and professionalism. Along with the given task, the questions “What are the key differences between team sports and individual sports?,” “Can you think of any famous sports teams?” and “Why are they so well-known?” remind learners to keep in mind the spirit of cooperation and mutual trust. More importantly, the hint, “team sports and individual sports,” activates the two mental spaces, namely the “blended space I” and the “team spirit space.” The two input spaces begin cross-space mapping within a mirror integration network, as seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10

A Mirror Network Diagram of the Athlete Spirit and the Team Spirit Blend



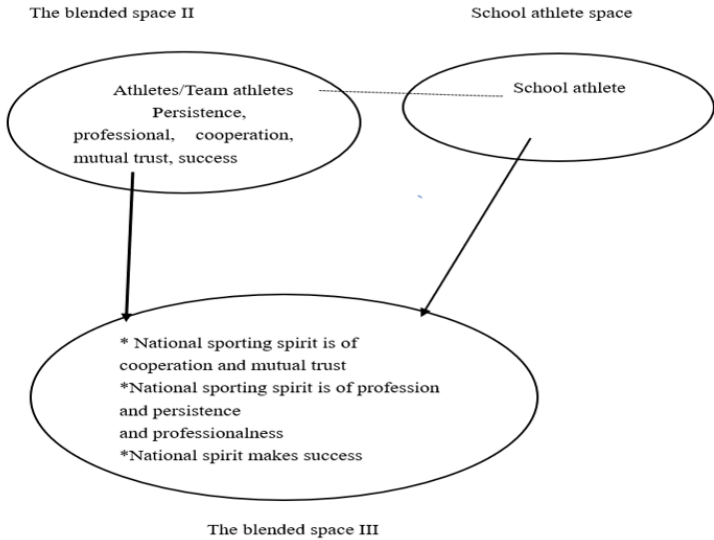
Additionally, within the text shown in Figure 9, the phrases “strong team spirit also contributed greatly to their success” and “teamwork is the key to China’s victory” elicit the desired effects, fostering a sense of patriotism and further enriching the sporting spirit space as depicted in Figure 7. This is because team spirit, involving elements like cooperation and trust, plays a significant role in this context. In Figure 11 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce-34d7a1e95323e4>), the image with the headline of the spirit of the Chinese women’s volleyball team and the group task strengthens learners’ cultural awareness of the national image.

A Part-Whole cross-space mapping between the mental space that is activated by the task, the text, and the image in Figure 12 (<https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>), and the previous “blended space II,” which are projected to the “blended space III,” can be seen in Figure 13. Here, a conceptual representation is formed that suggests if one strives to complete the race, success will be achieved, and cheers from others will follow, as mentioned in the text. Additionally, inferred information from the task and the image implies that qualities like diligence, perseverance, fatigue, and endurance are intertwined with success in the sporting arena. Within the blend, success and the sporting

spirit are the desired outcomes, and relentless hard work and endeavor are the prerequisites for the attainment of national resurgence.

Figure 13

A Simplified Network Diagram of the Representation of the National Image



Cultural elements such as the Chinese red color, underpin the representation of the national image, visually. The image of the Chinese female volleyball team can be regarded as a kind of ideological regulation, which attempts to evoke learners' sense of patriotism. Moreover, inference information evoked by different tasks and texts in this unit facilitates the readers' understanding of how the text, image, and task co-construct the national image.

Discussion and Pedagogical Implications

Comparisons between the two selected samples from the PEP and FLTRP are drawn based on the methodology, and the research findings. The EFL textbooks from the two series are focused on various themes with different techniques and activities that facilitate learners' activation of the mental spaces in constructing the national image by the co-instantiation of the text, image, and task.

Based on the above analysis, the two series of representations of the national image are similar in the activation of learners' internal knowledge and their interactively creating and applying knowledge in their real-life situations (Burr, 2021). The tasks in the two series are not solely responsible for the learners' basic language skills, but also for being the link between the development of their cultural awareness and the context of different semiotic resources; both of them are, at the same time, afforded by images and texts. Texts, being intricate linguistic practices, are examined with a partial focus on the contextual elements provided by images. This approach aids in grasping the contextualization of cultural, social-political, and ideological processes (Burr, 2021).

Meanwhile, significant variations between the EFL textbook series are evident in terms of the types of activities, the frequency of images, and the indexical qualities of those images. In terms of activities, PEP largely emphasizes the development of learners' basic skills, because each one of its units is made up of listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, and structure, while FLTRP focuses on developing learner's cultural awareness. This is expressed through such activities as understanding ideas, using language, developing ideas, and presenting ideas. The frequency of images in the two series also differs, which can be seen in Table 1. It is worth noting that when it comes to image indexicalities, PEP incorporates a greater number of images than FLTRP does to represent the national image.

In this study, the proposed approach to cognitive resources in EFL textbooks is attributed to the premise that texts, images, and tasks are consciously designed ahead. However, the well-designed contents are not conducive to learners' imagination, because conceptual integration as a human's general capability of innovatively cognitive processing is subject to diverse cognitive elements in their socio-cognitive environment (Stroud, 1992). Besides, as Turner (1994) put it, a multimodal semiotic perspective allows us to theoretically divorce ideas from the representation to see how our view of the world is constructed. The critical analysis in the section on results and discussions, thus, is scaffolded by textual evidence that is approachable and addressable from EFL textbooks, which is assumed to inform representations of the national image.

What can also be achieved is research implications for teachers' pedagogical strategies. Advisably, EFL teachers are encouraged to receive continuous professional growth courses that are designed for them to better familiarize themselves with the recent conceptualization of cultural matters (Derakhshan, 2021). Furthermore, their pedagogical strategies should align with the learners' abilities, and the examples mentioned above can serve as valuable references for enhancing learners' cultural awareness of the national image. That is to say, the interlaces between images, tasks, and texts that are related to Chinese culture should be highlighted to help learners form a clear and correct mental image of China.

Implications for EFL textbooks' designs and EFL learners are also worth mentioning. What can be underscored for EFL textbooks' designs is the co-instantiation of images, texts, and tasks. Some images and tasks that lack cultural significance and serve primarily as decorative elements should be removed. In designing EFL textbooks, one can consider four key directions: authenticity, resourcefulness, connectivism, and a focus on text genres (as outlined by Burr, 2021). Unaltered examples respect learners' identities, experiences, and opinions. Strategically, pedagogical objectives should be pursued through diverse methods that are interconnected on both micro and macro learning levels. Different themes can linguistically and semiotically engage learners' perspectives. For EFL learners, as they strive to imaginatively grasp the cultural purpose, they can initially examine the images in textbooks and, guided by task prompts, establish connections between the images and the texts. This process should nurture their ability to critically interpret cultural practices.

Conclusion

This study has applied a multimodal critical cognitive analysis to examine how national images are represented multimodally in EFL textbooks. The findings of the study indicate that learning materials from both PEP and FLTPR co-instantiate text, task, and image that facilitate learners' activation of mental spaces to represent the national image. Traditional EFL textbooks tend to highlight linguistic resources, but the data analysis of the selected samples suggests that in social meaning constructions, the role of the text-task-image co-instantiations and their mutual indexicality is more important compared to the presence of words alone. As Turner (1994) originally puts it, "When we deal with images, it is especially apparent that we are not only dealing with the object or the concept they represent, but we are also dealing with how they are represented."

There are some limitations to this study. The findings are descriptive due to the worldview of the research, which employed CBT and CDA to examine learning materials in EFL textbooks. Future studies should undertake an analysis of discourse combined with technological assistance. In addition, due to space and time constraints, only two sections from PEP and FLTRP have been examined with the contribution of two researchers and the author in the data collection process. In terms of the characteristics of cultural awareness related to the national image, prospective studies should involve actual classroom interactions. Such an approach has the potential to significantly enhance learners' cultural competence and linguistic skills. Furthermore, using the

insights gained from this study, theoretically coherent pedagogical models may be formulated to support the development of learners' cultural awareness in the EFL classroom.

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Acknowledgments

This study was funded by Tongji Zhejiang College under the Research on Education and Teaching Reform Program: The Exploration of EFL Courses in China: Multiple Semiotic Practice and the Construction of Chinese Culture (XNJG21028). Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Tongji Zhejiang College. We would like to thank KetengEdit (www.ketengedit.com) for its linguistic assistance during the preparation of this manuscript. The authors acknowledge that Figures 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 12 are adapted from copyrighted materials published by the People's Education Press (PEP) and the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP). Due to copyright restrictions, which prohibit the direct reproduction or distribution of these materials without explicit permission, these figures are not included in this paper. However, they can be accessed via the following link: <https://figshare.com/s/c750ce34d7a1e95323e4>.



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Exploring the Relationship between AI Tool Language Learning Awareness and Motivation to Learn English: Focusing on the Mediating Role of Adaptability

Abstract

As AI technology becomes more available and accessible to students, there has been a surge of research investigating its impact on how students learn a target language. However, a comprehensive understanding of how these technologies influence the motivational aspects of language learning remains limited. Addressing this gap, this study explores the broader relationship between individual engagement with various AI-based tools and their motivational impact on English learning, moving beyond the focus on specific AI tools. To achieve the research objectives, engagement with AI-based programs was examined in relation to awareness, experience, and interest in the future use of AI-based programs. Then, the relationships between these AI-related elements and motivational variables (such as self-efficacy and ideal L2 self) in language learning were investigated. Finally, the influence of adaptability was explored in these specific relationships.

For this study, convenience sampling was employed to collect data from 180 Korean students who were enrolled in an English course at a university in South Korea. Hierarchical regression and mediation analyses revealed that students' awareness and experience significantly influenced their interest in the future use of AI-based applications. Among the three AI-related elements, awareness and interest in future use were related to language learning motivation, specifically, self-efficacy and ideal L2 self. Notably, adaptability was identified as a mediating factor in the relationship between awareness of AI and the motivational variables. These findings contribute to our understanding of effective language learning in conjunction with AI-based tools.

Keywords: adaptability, AI technology, awareness of AI-based programs, ideal L2 self, language learning motivation, self-efficacy

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is revolutionizing many areas of modern society. AI-powered language tools have become more sophisticated, and their accessibility has significantly increased. For instance, AI-powered tools such as Open AI's ChatGPT and others of a similar nature have emerged, and the number of users has been growing exponentially (Chow, 2023). This development has even been called "a cultural sensation" (Thorp, 2023, p. 313). AI-powered tools equipped with advanced natural language processing and generative AI can now assist users in understanding, generating, and translating text in a variety of languages. This technological evolution has profoundly impacted the field of language learning, transforming traditional methods and markedly altering how students learn a target language (Wei, 2023).

Recent studies have focused on the impact of AI-based programs (AI-BPs) on language learning. They explored diverse modalities such as machine translation (Cancino & Panes, 2021; Chung & Ahn, 2022; Deng & Yu, 2022), chatbots (Deng & Yu, 2023; Jeon, 2024; Shidiq, 2023), and writing assistance tools (Lee, 2022; Kim, 2023). In general, although studies show that these tools enhance the efficiency of individual language learning (Alqahtani et al., 2023; Deng & Yu, 2022, Kuddos, 2022; etc.), the specific reasons behind the effectiveness of AI-based devices in this process, including their motivational role, remain largely unexplored. Such exploration should be continued because understanding the influence of AI-BPs on learning outcomes is fast becoming essential in the quest for deeper insights into the modern ways of language learning (Song & Song, 2023). Findings in this area would provide valuable information to students and teachers at a time of rapid change and development in AI-assisted language learning environments. In addition, student adaptability seems critical in today's rapidly changing environment. The relatively understudied concept of adaptability has been recently revisited by Zarrinabadi (2022). Adaptability is likely to play an important role in the relationships between engagement in AI-BPs and motivation to learn English.

To fill the gaps in the current literature, this study aims to examine the relationships between individuals' engagement in AI-BPs and their motivation to learn English and seeks to explore the role of adaptability in these relationships. This study begins by exploring relevant research that establishes a foundational understanding of artificial intelligence, motivational beliefs, and adaptability related to language learning. It then describes the methodologies employed, followed by a presentation of the results. The discussion section integrates these findings with existing knowledge, and the study concludes with implications for future research and practical applications.

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence and Language Learning

There have been almost three times as many AI-related publications between 2021 and 2022 (Crompton & Burke, 2023), signifying an inevitable ubiquitous transformation, affecting the education sector. Through examining the perceptions of students and scholars toward ChatGPT, Firat (2023, p. 59) identified the most common themes in his study, listed in order of frequency. The themes include changes in the learning and educational system, changes in the role of the teacher as a facilitator, and shifts in assessment and evaluation paradigms. The participants perceived AI-based technologies as having the potential to significantly transform education. Understanding these themes is crucial for anticipating how AI-based programs like ChatGPT can reshape educational practices and outcomes. Despite some challenges and ethical concerns, Firat (2023) and a few other studies (see Barrot, 2023; Thorp, 2023, etc.) found a generally positive attitude toward AI-based technology.

Technologies that fall under the umbrella of AI include natural language processing (NLP) and large language models (LLMs) as key capabilities (Alqahtani et al., 2023). NLP refers to the AI capability that facilitates the interaction between computers and human language users, forming the foundational basis for machine translation (Son et al., 2023). In other words, it allows computers to understand, assess, and produce human language. LLMs are deep learning models that undergo training on massive datasets, followed by reinforcement learning algorithms based on human feedback to generate human-like language and conduct a variety of language processing tasks. Together, these technologies make up what is known as *generative AI*.

For example, ChatGPT developed by OpenAI is designed to interact conversationally with users based on a trained model capable of providing what is touted as human-like answers to questions. It can admit its mistakes, contest inaccurate assumptions, and refuse inappropriate requests (OpenAI, 2023). Fueled by technological progress as well as heightened demand and popularity, tech enterprises have produced and updated AI-based applications similar to ChatGPT following its initial release (Chow, 2023). This may well indicate an impending, significant, and dramatic transformation in the contexts of both current and future research, including the field of education.

The variety of AI-BPs supporting language learning has significantly increased, and their functionality is rapidly advancing. Previous studies have examined the effects of individual AI-BPs on specific language domains. For instance, research has highlighted the advancements in machine translation

tools, which have shown improvements in translation accuracy and learning efficiency (Cancino & Panes, 2021; Chung & Ahn, 2022; Deng & Yu, 2022). Similarly, chatbots have been examined for their potential to enhance conversational skills and provide instant feedback, contributing to better engagement and knowledge retention (Deng & Yu, 2023; Jeon, 2024; Shidiq, 2023). For example, Deng and Yu (2023) conducted a 32-study meta-analysis examining the effects of the use of chatbot technologies in learning. Their findings showed a significant impact ranging from mild to substantial irrespective of moderator variables, not only on overall learning outcomes but also on explicit reasoning, knowledge retention, engagement, and motivation. Similarly, Shidiq (2023) examined the influence of AI-based chatbots like ChatGPT on students' creativity in writing, emphasizing both the advantages and the challenges associated with these technologies. Additionally, writing assistance tools have emerged as a significant area of study, demonstrating their utility in aiding students' writing proficiency by offering real-time grammar and style suggestions. For example, Gayed et al. (2023) developed an AI-BP with advanced writing assistance features for organization and revision. They evaluated its effectiveness and found it potentially useful for English learners. The adoption and utilization of AI in learning English can enhance efficiency by providing practical direction and nurturing students' autonomy (Kuddus, 2022).

These findings provide valuable insights and contribute to our understanding of the role of AI in language acquisition, highlighting the potential to improve the performance and learning dynamics of students by transforming the way they learn (Alqahtani et al., 2023). While these programs are becoming more accessible to students, the concrete impact on language learning still requires further investigation. In particular, this study identifies a critical gap in understanding the motivation to learn English in relation to the use of AI-BPs, specifically in the areas of awareness, experience, and interest in future use. Investigating these factors offers a deeper understanding of how individuals' awareness and experience of AI-BPs influence their interest in utilizing them in the future. Such insights can offer valuable information for the effective integration and utilization of AI-BPs in the field of language learning. Awareness of AI-BPs may significantly affect individuals' English learning since it involves knowing the existence of the AI-BPs, their functionality, and their benefits. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the interplay among these elements and their impact on language learning motivation such as self-efficacy and ideal L2 self.

Motivational Beliefs Related to Language Learning

Many studies have focused on the L2 self-guides and the self-efficacy of EFL students to explore language learning motivation. The findings show that such motivational beliefs are closely related to the learning process and its outcomes.

L2 self-guides are internal standards that L2 learners use to navigate their learning path and motivate themselves toward their future language selves (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013). Dörnyei's L2 self-system theory (2009) served as a foundational framework for research related to L2 future self-guides involving the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self. Dörnyei (2009, p. 29) defined the ideal L2 self as "the L2 specific facet of 'ideal self'" considering it "a powerful motivator to learn the L2." On the other hand, ought-to L2 self pertains to the qualities individuals believe they should possess to prevent potential negative outcomes. The notion of the ideal L2 self was developed through the following key studies. While many empirical studies have underscored the profound connection between the ideal L2 self and positive outcomes in language learning processes, the ought-to L2 self is seen as having a less powerful or negligible effect, often failing to predict a substantial motivational drive (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Papi & Teimouri, 2012; Taguchi et al., 2009; Takahashi & Im, 2020; Teimouri, 2017). Recently, Papi et al. (2019) presented the 2x2 model of L2 self-guides based on two regulation focuses such as promotion/prevention perspectives (aspirations and growth vs. safety and responsibility) and own/other standpoints (personal desires and internal motivations vs. external expectations and obligations). Kim (2023) conducted a study in Korea using this model and found that the ideal L2 self, encompassing its own standpoint and promotion focus, was more strongly related to motivated behavior in English learning. Her findings also support that the ideal L2 self is linked to intrinsic and identified motivation.

Additionally, self-efficacy beliefs are viewed as regulating motivation and emotion, leading to specific behavioristic patterns (Bandura, 1994; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Bandura (1997, p. 3) says self-efficacy is the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments." He explains that individuals with high levels of academic self-efficacy are inclined to take on specific assigned tasks, exert effort to complete them, and continue to engage in these tasks even when facing challenges. Many studies (e.g., Bai & Wang, 2020; Bandura, 1994; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Kim et al., 2015, etc.) have found that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in driving individuals to engage in learning processes persistently and earnestly, which is essential for achieving language learning goals. In the study by Bai and Wang (2020), self-efficacy was categorized as one of the motivational beliefs and found to affect English language learning achievement through the mediator of self-regulated learning strategy use involving monitoring, effort

regulation and goal setting, and planning. Likewise, self-efficacy is employed as a motivating and regulating variable that affects language learning.

With these insights in mind, a recent study by Wei (2023) examined the impact of AI technologies on English learning. Using a mixed-methods approach he analyzed data collected from 60 Chinese EFL university students to investigate how AI-mediated language instruction affects L2 motivation, self-regulated learning, and outcomes. The results indicate that those who received AI-mediated instruction outperformed their counterparts in these three areas. The responses of the 14 students in the experimental group revealed that the effect of AI platforms heightened academic involvement and provided tailored learning experiences, thereby enhancing motivation and promoting self-directed learning. However, it remains uncertain how the motivational variables such as ideal L2 self and self-efficacy are impacted by an individual's awareness of and level of engagement with AI technologies for language learning, necessitating the need for further investigation.

Adaptability

Martin et al. (2012) conceptualized the notion of adaptability which serves as a framework for comprehending an individual's capacity to regulate and adjust psychological and behavioral properties when confronted with challenging situations, including new, changing, and uncertain conditions. They position adaptability as encompassing cognitive, behavioral, and affective adjustments, demonstrated by how an individual manages and regulates their resources in these facets to facilitate positive adjustment. Martin et al. (2013, p. 729) argue that adaptability places greater emphasis on "adjustments and modifications to thought and behavior (and affect)" rather than on the functions of self-regulation (Winne & Hadwin, 2008) such as monitoring, guiding, and orchestrating thought and behavior. They distinguish adaptability from the adversity variables that depict responses to challenges in difficult or adversarial situations such as buoyancy, resilience, and coping. Adaptability has a deliberate focus on psycho-behavioral functions in reaction to novelty and uncertainty.

Based on this notion, Martin et al. (2012) developed and validated the Adaptability Scale with a domain-general nature. A study conducted by Martin et al. (2013) aimed to explore the characteristics of adaptability. Notably, their study indicates that adaptability played significant mediating roles in the influence of neuroticism, conscientiousness, and effort beliefs regarding both academic and non-academic variables. It was shown that adaptable students are more likely to have favorite effort-related beliefs. They tend to not only exhibit high engagement in class and school enjoyment but also show heightened academic motivation and engagement irrespective of academic and non-academic

domains. With the data collected from 186 freshmen in a university, Collie et al. (2017) investigated the degree to which adaptability is linked to behavioral involvement at the start of their first year. They also examined how these factors are connected to academic achievement. Their findings indicate that adaptability is greatly associated with persistence and planning, which are categorized under positive behavior involvement, and weakly with disengagement and self-handicapping, which are considered as negative involvement. Negative involvement is found to predict lower academic achievement. Their study implies that adaptability is a vital variable in academic domains. However, while their study contributes to our understanding of adaptability, it has yet to explain its association with motivation in language learning. Recently, Zarrinabadi et al. (2022) revealed that adaptability serves mediating roles in language learning in line with Martin et al. (2013). Their study underscores the importance of adaptability in explaining the influence of language mindsets on emotional factors such as enjoyment and anxiety as well as self-related factors such as self-efficacy and self-concept in the context of language learning.

In the rapidly changing landscape of information and technology, the need for individual adaptability becomes evident as its definition indicates. Given the limited understanding of how adaptability mediates the connection between engagement with available AI-BPs and language learning motivation, this study seeks to explore this relationship with a focus on the mediating influence of adaptability.

Taken together, this study aims to explore how students' engagement with AI-BPs influences their motivation to learn English. It includes a thorough examination of how engagement with AI-BPs, characterized by awareness, experience, and interest in future use, affects key motivational variables such as ideal L2 self, self-efficacy, and motivational intensity. Notably, in response to the rapid advancements in AI technologies within educational environments, the study also investigates how adaptability serves as a mediator in these relationships. To address these issues, this study involves the following research questions (RQs).

RQ1. How are the three elements that consist of engagement with AI-BPs related?

RQ2. How are these underlying factors related to motivational variables?

RQ3. How does adaptability mediate these underlying factors and motivational variables?

Methods

Participants

Korean university students (180) studying at a university in Seoul, Korea, with various majors voluntarily joined the study in the spring semester (June) of 2023. They were in one of the English courses such as conversation ($n = 110$), reading ($n = 30$), and basic writing ($n = 40$). English conversation was one of the compulsory general education courses, mostly taken by first-year students while reading and writing were electives available to all students. Those in the English conversation course were placed in the Basic English Level based on the results of the placement test before starting the English course. Those in reading and writing courses had varying levels of English. The participants responded to questions involving their perceived proficiency and experience using AI-BPs as well as a series of questionnaires. Before data collection, the participants were provided with the aims of this study and informed that they could quit answering the questions whenever they wanted. Those who were willing to join the study were given the link to the online survey.

Their average age was 20.22 years ($SD = 2.07$), with 107 female and 73 male students. Considering the mean scores of perceived English proficiencies marked by the participants in the four domains of reading ($Mean = 3.54$, $SD = 1.08$), writing ($Mean = 2.95$, $SD = 1.09$), listening ($Mean = 3.41$, $SD = 1.20$), and speaking ($Mean = 2.93$, $SD = 1.13$) on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = not at all proficient, 6 = very proficient), it was found that they considered their speaking and writing to be moderately low while reading and listening was average.

Among the total participants ($n = 180$), 75% ($n = 135$) reported having used AI-BPs for English learning. When asked about the tools used (with multiple responses allowed), the most common were translation tools (78.12%, $n = 250$) (e.g., Google Translator, Papago, etc.), followed by AI-based Chatbots (15.94%, $n = 51$) (e.g., ChatGPT, etc.), online editing tools (4.96%, $n = 15$) (e.g., Grammarly, etc.), and AI-based speaking services (1.25%, $n = 4$). The lower reported usage of services like ChatGPT may be due to the fact that data collection took place in June 2023 while they were relatively new. Among the students who have experience using AI-BPs for English learning (with multiple responses allowed), the predominant reason stated was for English assignments (51.11%, $n = 138$), followed by personal improvement in English skills (25.56%, $n = 69$), studying English for their academic majors (18.52%, $n = 50$), and others (4.81%, $n = 13$).

Instruments

This study aims to explore the relationship between students' engagement with AI-BPs and their motivation to learn English. It also investigates how adaptability mediates these relationships. To achieve these objectives, the following instruments were used.

Engagement with AI-BPs in English Learning (EL-AI)

To capture participants' engagement with AI-BPs, 14 items were proposed. This instrument measures three key aspects of AI-BP engagement and the three underlying factors of EL-AI were identified through exploratory factor analysis. As shown in Table 1, "experience with AI-BPs" indicates the actual usage or interaction that individuals have had with AI-BPs. "Awareness of AI-BPs" describes the knowledge of the existence of these programs, understanding how they function, and recognizing their potential benefits in language learning. "Future-driven interest in AI-BPs" reflects a student's eagerness to stay updated on new AI programs, understand their applications, and seek guidance for their use in English learning, as well as their readiness to incorporate them into their language studies.

Participants responded to survey items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). The average scores of the three underlying factors of EL-AI, identified through exploratory factor analysis, were used for achieving the research aims.

To examine motivation in language learning, this study investigated three key motivational variables: self-efficacy, ideal L2 self, and motivational intensity. The participants also responded to the motivational items in the same manner as they did for those on EL-AI. The results of exploratory factor analysis (Table 2) and the coefficients of internal consistency are provided in the Data Analysis section. Average scores for each variable were used in subsequent analyses to explore their relationships with EL-AI.

Self-Efficacy (SE)

To measure students' self-efficacy beliefs, five self-efficacy items were adapted from the study by Bong (2001). As already hinted, according to Bandura's (1997) definition, self-efficacy is focusing on an individual's perception of their capabilities when facing difficulties. Therefore, the wording of a few items was modified based on this. The five items are as follows: "I can master even the hardest material in English if I try. I can do almost all the work in English if I don't give up. I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned

for English class. I can learn the material for English class. I can receive a good grade in English this semester.”

Ideal L2 Self (IL2S)

This study employed the concept of the ideal L2 self, encompassing both “own standpoint” and “promotional perspective,” following the categorization by Papi et al. (2019). Their L2 self-guides consist of two regulation focuses: ideal L2 self (promotion) vs. ought-to L2 self (prevention), and two standpoints: own vs. other. IL2S in this study refers to “the L2 attributes that the learner (own standpoint) would ideally hope (promotion focus) to possess in future” (Papi et al., 2019, p. 346). This model identified IL2S as the only significant predictor of intended effort, which is measured by “eager L2 use.” This involves strategies employed by an individual to enhance positive outcomes and performance among the other L2 self-guides. This suggests that IL2S is one of the more powerful motivational drives for target language learning. It includes four items.

Motivational Intensity (MI)

The five-item scale that measures motivational intensity in L2 learning was adapted from the study by Feng and Papi (2020). According to them, motivational intensity is one dimension that can help understand and describe students’ motivation when individuals learn a target language, similar to motivational effort, but distinct from persistence. This variable represents the degree of cognitive and behavioral engagement held by individuals in their L2 learning.

Perceived L2 Competence (L2C)

Participants were asked to rate their subjective competence in four English skills – reading, listening, writing, and speaking – on a six-point Likert scale (1 = not at all proficient, 6 = very proficient). As Du (2015) points out, individuals’ perceptions of their competence are true in and of themselves, and often serve as a driving force for their behavior, even if it may have a weak correlation with actual proficiency. In the study of Tanaka (2024), L2C was found to be more closely related to the development of intrinsic motivation than actual achievement, thereby serving as an indicator of an individual’s motivation. Exploratory factor analysis consolidated the four skills into one factor, and the high internal consistency was observed and shown in the Data Analysis section. Consequently, the average score of these four skills was used as the value for perceived L2 competence.

Adaptability

This variable refers to the capacity to adjust and respond appropriately and effectively to uncertainty and novelty such as changes in either situations or people. The Adaptability Scale constructed by Marin et al. (2013) was employed to capture adaptability (see the survey items and the result of exploratory factor analysis in Appendix 1). Nine items were identified as a single factor, and the average score of all items was used for the analysis.

The average scores of all the factors employed in this study to achieve the research aims can be found in Table 3, under Descriptive Statistics.

Data Analysis

Before the analysis was aimed at the research questions, several exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were performed to ensure the validity of the instruments used in this study. The participants' responses to the survey items were computed using SPSS (version 24.0). Principal axis factoring was employed with a direct oblimin rotation. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and loading values greater than .05 were retained.

First, the 14 EL-AI items were examined with factor analysis to identify the structure of this instrument. EFA resulted in a three-factor solution which accounted for 59.46% of the total variance. The first factor ($n = 6$) explained 40.37% of the total variance and was labeled as "English learning experience with AI-BPs" (AI-EX) because it deals with the effectiveness of English learning experiences and tasks with the help of AI-BPs. The second factor ($n = 4$) explained 10.28% of the total variance. It was labeled "awareness of AI-BPs" (AI-AW) because it addresses an individual's understanding of AI implementation and of how to use AI-BP, awareness of their benefits, and identification of effective learning areas for them. The third factor ($n = 4$) explained 8.81% of the total variance. It was named "a future-driven interest in AI-BPs" (AI-FI). This factor represents an individual's willingness for timely updates on newly released AI-BPs, acquiring information on their use, desiring guidance on incorporating them in English classes, and willingness to use them for English learning purposes (see Table 1). The internal consistencies for the three AI factors were high ($\alpha = .86, .86, \text{ and } .87$, respectively), ensuring the reliability of this scale. To answer the research questions, the mean scores of the factors were used.

Table 1
Factor Analysis for EL-AI

Items	Factor		
	1	2	3
Factor 1	English learning experience with AI-BPs (AI-EX)		
AI-EX4	I have used an AI-BP to help me learn to speak English.	.79	
AI-EX3	I have used an AI-BP to help me read and understand English texts related to my major or liberal arts.	.73	
AI-EX6	I have used an AI-BP to help me learn to listen to English.	.73	
AI-EX1	I use an AI-BP to help me with my English assignments.	.72	
AI-EX5	I have used an AI-BP to help me learn to write English.	.64	
AI-EX2	I think it is efficient to use an AI-BP for English assignments.	.60	
Factor 2	Awareness of AI-BPs (AI-AW)		
AI-AW3	I understand how AI-BPs will benefit me.		.87
AI-AW2	I know how to use the AI-BPs I am aware of.		.84
AI-AW4	I know which learning domains AI-BPs are effective in.		.74
AI-AW1	I know how AI-BPs are designed and implemented.		.59
Factor 3	Future-driven interest in AI-BPs (AI-FI)		
AI-FI3	I want guidance on how to use AI-BPs in my English class.		-.83
AI-FI2	I want to learn how to use AI-BPs in the future.		-.80
AI-FI4	I would like to use AI-BPs for English-related learning activities in the future.		-.74
AI-FI1	I want to be informed about new AI-based programs as they become available.		-.68

Second, motivation-related survey items pertaining to MI, SE, and IL2S were analyzed in SPSS. EFA yielded a three-factor solution, which accounted for 71.68% of the total variance. Except for one SE item (“I can receive a good grade in English this semester”) due to an insufficient loading value (greater than .50), all the items were classified into their respective categories. The primary factor identified as MI accounted for 48.85% of the variance, followed by IL2S explaining 16.94%, and SE explaining 5.89% of the total

variance (see Table 2). These distinct factors indicate that they reflect different facets of motivation. The internal consistencies were high ($\alpha = .92, .96,$ and $.86$, respectively). Lastly, all nine items of adaptability resulted in a one-factor solution, explaining 58.51% of the total variance based on EFA. Its internal consistency was also high ($\alpha = .92$). The mean scores of each variable were used for further analyses. The descriptive statistics for the variables used in this study are shown in Table 3.

Table 2
Factor Analysis for Motivational Variables

Items		Factor		
		1	2	3
Factor 1	Motivational intensity (MI)			
MI1	I spend lots of time studying English.	.90		
MI2	I am a diligent English language learner.	.87		
MI3	I concentrate on studying English more than any other topic.	.85		
MI5	I put much time and effort into improving my English language weaknesses.	.79		
MI4	I can break through any distractions when having important English assignments to do immediately.	.62		
SE5				
Factor 2	Ideal L2 self (IL2S)			
IL2S2	I can imagine a day when I speak English fluently with international friends/colleagues.		.93	
IL2S4	I can imagine a day when I use English effectively to communicate with people from all around the world.		.93	
IL2S1	I can imagine a day when I speak English like a native speaker of English.		.90	
IL2S3	I can imagine a day when I write effectively and read fluently in English.		.88	
Factor 3	Self-efficacy (SE)			
SE1	I can master even the hardest material in English if I try.			.79
SE4	I can learn the material for English class.			.76
SE2	I can do almost all the work in English if I don't give up.			.73
SE3	I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for English class.			.72

To address the first research question, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the interactive relationship between these factors. AI-FI was input as a dependent variable (DV, and AI-AW and AI-EX were independent variables (IV). Secondly, to examine how these AI-related factors are related to the motivational variables, a bivariate correlation was performed. Lastly, several mediating analyses were performed following the suggestions of Baron and Kenny (1986) to examine the role of adaptability as a mediator between AI-related factors and language learning motivational variables.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics (n = 180)

Variables	Number of Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Internal consistency (α)
AI-AW	4	1.00	6.00	3.59	1.14	.87
AI-EX	6	1.00	6.00	3.65	1.13	.86
AI-FI	4	1.00	6.00	4.13	1.05	.86
L2C	4	1.00	5.50	3.21	.95	.85
SE	4	1.00	6.00	4.05	1.07	.86
IL2S	4	1.00	6.00	4.28	1.25	.96
MI	5	1.00	6.00	3.50	1.14	.92
Adapt	9	1.00	6.00	4.27	.90	.92

Note. AI-AW = Awareness of AI-BPs; AI-EX = English learning experience with AI-BPs; AI-FI = Future-driven interest in AI-BPs; L2C = Perceived L2 competence; SE = Self-efficacy; IL2S = Ideal L2 self; MI = Motivational intensity; Adapt = Adaptability.

Results

The first RQ was to investigate the impact of AI-AW and AI-EX on AI-FI. With AI-AW and AI-EX as IVs and AI-FI as DV, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed. As described in Table 4, the first model with only AI-AW as a single predictor for AI-FI accounted for 17% ($r = .42$). However, the second model with AI-AW and AI-EX as the combined predictors accounted for 30%, an increase of 13%. Examining the impact of the two predictors, AI-EX ($r = .40$) had a higher impact than AI-AW ($r = .25$). It can be inferred that an individual's inclination to adopt AI-based programs in the future is more likely to be influenced by their familiarity with rather than their knowledge or awareness of such programs.

Table 4
The Effect of AI-AW and AI-EX on AI-FI

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β		
1	(Constant)	2.74	.24		11.57***	.17
	AI-AW	.39	.06	.42	6.13***	
2	(Constant)	1.96	.26		7.61***	.30
	AI-AW	.23	.06	.25	3.55***	
	AI-EX	.37	.06	.40	5.72***	

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001; AI-AW = Awareness of AI-BPs; AI-EX = English learning experience with AI-BPs; AI-FI = Future-driven interest in AI-BPs.

The second RQ examined the relationship between AI factors and motivational variables. The results in Table 5 indicate that AI-AW and AI-FI were positively related to all motivational variables ($.23 \leq r \leq .41$, $p < .001$), although the correlation between AI-FI and L2C was weak ($r = .18$, $p < .05$). Unlike AI-AW and AI-FI, AI-EX did not have any significant correlations with motivational variables.

Among motivational variables, SE had the highest correlation with MI ($r = .63$), followed by L2C ($r = .55$) and IL2S ($r = .46$). It was notable that adaptability was correlated with all motivational variables and was highly correlated with SE ($r = .51$) and IL2S ($r = .50$).

Table 5
Bivariate Correlations between Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. AI-AW	1							
2. AI-EX	.43***	1						
3. AI-FI	.42***	.50***	1					
4. L2C	.32***	.03	.18*	1				
5. SE	.32***	.13	.41***	.55***	1			
6. IL2S	.24***	.10	.30***	.27***	.46***	1		
7. MI	.26***	.07	.23***	.46***	.63***	.36***	1	
8. Adapt	.36***	.15*	.30***	.27***	.51***	.50***	.43***	1

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001; AI-AW = Awareness of AI-BPs; AI-EX = English learning experience with AI-BPs; AI-FI = Future-driven interest in AI-BPs; L2C = Perceived L2 competence; SE = Self-efficacy; IL2S = Ideal L2 self; MI = Motivational intensity; Adapt = Adaptability.

Lastly, the mediating roles of adaptability between AI factors and motivational variables were explored. As shown in Table 4, with the two AI-related predictors, AI-EX was found not to have any associations with the motivational variables. Therefore, it was investigated how AI-AW affected the motivational variables through adaptability. To investigate the mediation of adaptability between AI-AW and the motivational variables, this study followed Baron and Kenny’s (1986) step-by-step approach. First, the analysis revealed a significant relationship where AI-AW (IV) predicted adaptability (a mediating variable, MV) as shown in Table 6. Second, AI-AW (IV) was found to have significant relationships with the motivational variables (DVs), that is, L2C, SE, IL2S, and MI as observed in Models 4, 5, 8, and 10 in Table 7. Third, both AI-AW and adaptability exhibited significant relationships with the motivational variables (DVs). The direct effects of AI-AW on the motivational variables (DV) in Models 4, 6, 8, and 10 were greater than the effects of AI-AW (IV) on the DVs in Models 5, 7, 9, and 11. In other words, adaptability serves as an MA in the way AI-AW affects all motivational variables. Particularly, when adaptability was combined with AI-AW, the effects of AI-AW on IL2S and MI lost significance as seen in Models 9 and 11. This indicates that adaptability completely mediates the relationships between AI-AW and IL2S, as well as between AI-AW and MI. The summaries of the analyses are illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 6
The Effect of AI-AW on Adaptability

Model (DV = L2C)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>β</i>	
3 (Constant)	3.27	.21		15.78***
AI-AW	.28	.06	.35	5.06***

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001; AI-AW = Awareness of AI-BPs; L2C = Perceived L2 competence.

The strongest indirect effect coefficient was observed for adaptability with a value of .17 (*z* = 4.07, *p* < .001)¹, indicating its mediating role in the relationship between AI-AW and IL2S. This was followed by the coefficient of .16 (*z* = 4.02, *p* < .001) for the relationship between AI-AW and SE, .14 (*z* = 3.70, *p* < .001) for AI-AW and MI, and .06 (*z* = 2.13, *p* < .05) for AI-AW

¹ Sobel test was computed to examine if a mediator carries the mediating effects of an IV on a DV. It provides information about the significance and strength of the indirect effect.

and L2C. According to the results presented in Table 7, the models with the IVs with both AI-AW and adaptability exhibited significantly higher account-ability compared to when AI-AW alone served as the single IV in predicting the motivational variables. For example, the largest improvement, of 19%, was observed in Models with IL2S as a DV, increasing from 6% (Model 8) to 25% (Model 9). The next largest improvement was 18% in Models with SE, increasing from 10% (Model 6) to 28% (Model 7), followed by a 13% increase in Models with MI, advancing from 7% (Model 10) to 20% (Model 11). The smallest increase of 3% was observed in Models with L2C, going from 10% (Model 4) to 13% (Model 5).

Figure 1
A Causal Chain Including Adaptability as a Mediator on the Relationships between AI-AW and the Motivational Variables

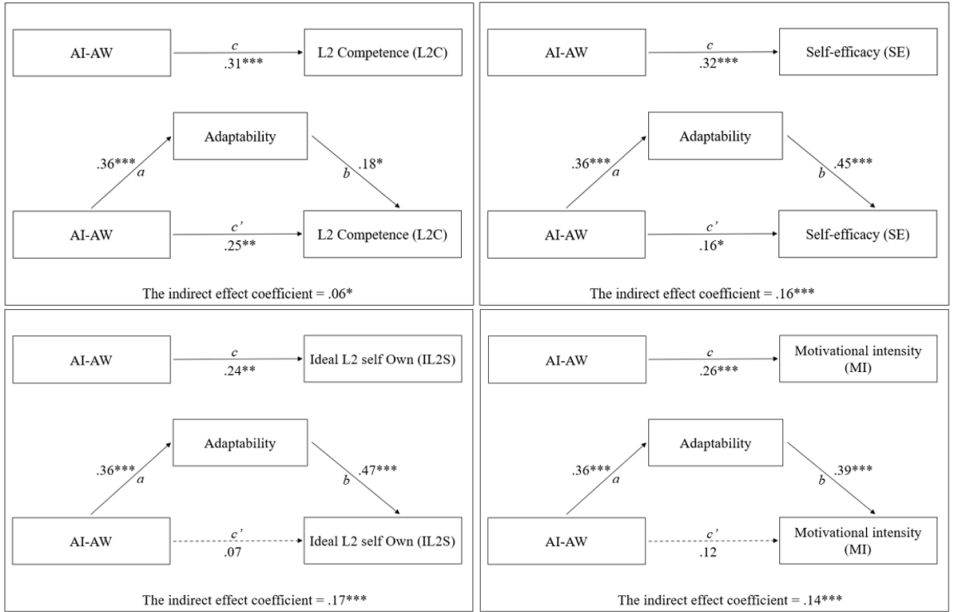


Table 7
The Effects of AI-AW and Adaptability on L2C, SE, IL2S, and MI

Model (DV = L2C)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Model (DV = SE)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>					<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>			
4 (Constant)	2.28	.22		10.38***	.10	6 (Constant)	2.98	.25		11.83***	.10
	.26	.06	.31	4.42***		AI-AW	.30	.07	.32	4.45***	
5 (Constant)	1.68	.34		4.99***	.13	7 (Constant)	1.21	.35		3.46**	.28
	.21	.06	.25	3.35**		AI-AW	.15	.06	.16	2.29*	
	.18	.08	.18	2.35*		Adapt	.54	.08	.45	6.60***	
Model (DV =IL2S)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Model (DV = MI)	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>					<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>			
8 (Constant)	3.34	.30		11.08***	.06	10 (Constant)	2.56	.27		9.43***	.07
	.26	.08	.24	3.27**		AI-AW	.26	.07	.26	3.60***	
9 (Constant)	1.16	.42		2.80**	.25	11 (Constant)	.94	.39		2.41*	.20
	.08	.08	.07	1.01		AI-AW	.12	.07	.12	1.70	
Adapt	.66	.10	.47	6.84***		Adapt	.49	.09	.39	5.42***	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; AI-AW = Awareness of AI-BPs; L2C = Perceived L2 competence; SE = Self-efficacy; IL2S = Ideal L2 self-own; MI = Motivational intensity; Adapt = Adaptability.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how engagement with AI-based programs—specifically through awareness of these programs, experience with them, and anticipation of future use—affects motivation in English language learning. To support this investigation, exploratory factor analyses and internal consistency assessments were conducted to validate scales measuring engagement with AI-based programs and motivational variables (see Tables 1, 2, and 3).

First, three factors that indicate engagement with AI-based programs were explored: awareness, experience, and future interest. The analysis showed that both awareness of and experience with AI-based programs were significant predictors of interest in their future use. This highlights that to foster interest in utilizing AI-based programs to aid English learning, not only awareness of these programs but also exposure and experience with them are crucial. This is emphasized by the model incorporating both awareness and experience as predictors exhibiting higher accountability for future interest, improving from predicting 17% to 30 % of the total variance than when awareness was a single predictor (see Table 4). It is worth noting that when experience was included along with awareness, the impact of awareness decreased. This suggests that while both awareness of and experience with AI-based programs are influential, it is the effect of practical experience using these tools that more robustly drives future interest in utilizing them. Taken together, fostering sustained interest in the future use of AI-based programs may be more effectively achieved not just through enhancing awareness and knowledge but by providing hands-on experience with these tools.

Second, the findings regarding the correlations between the three AI-related factors and the motivational variables showed that awareness of AI-based programs and interest in future use were positively related to all motivation variables. This indicates that awareness of the benefits and potential of AI-based programs as well as individuals' interest in future use may play substantial roles in motivating students to study English with AI assistance. However, experience with AI-based programs did not show a significant correlation with any of the motivation variables. Notably, the relevant survey items primarily quantified the participants' experiences with AI-based programs, without necessarily capturing the quality or depth of their engagement with these tools (e.g., “I *have used* an AI-BP to help me learn to speak English”). Thus, this quantitative approach may not have reflected a significant correlation with the motivational variables. This highlights the need for further research that provides a more qualitative or nuanced understanding. Similarly, the novelty of AI-based programs may have had an impact. The participants who have utilized them might not have fully recognized the extensive possibilities of incorporating new and advanced forms

of these programs into language learning. Students might have used AI-based programs, but their experience may not have been meaningful enough or had a positive enough impact on the participants' self-efficacy or their ideal goals in language learning. In this case, its impact on motivation could have been minimal.

Finally, the results of this study revealed the mediating role of adaptability between awareness of AI-based programs and the motivational variables, in line with how Zarrinabadi et al. (2022) identified the mediating role of adaptability. This study suggests that awareness and knowledge about AI may enhance adaptability, which in turn predicts several motivational variables in language learning. By serving as a mechanism, adaptability provides a pathway to explain the relationship between awareness of AI-based programs and language learning motivation.

Adaptability refers to an individual's capacity to effectively regulate and adjust to psychological and emotional challenges that arise in the presence of novelty and uncertainty (Martin et al., 2012). This capacity signifies the readiness for learning and growth, as its definition implies the ability to cope with change and embrace innovation. This study reported that awareness of AI-based programs was correlated with adaptability to a moderate degree ($r = .36, p < .001$). When adaptability was included in the relationships between awareness of AI-based programs and motivational variables, the direct influence of awareness on the dependent variables decreased (partial mediation) or disappeared (complete mediation), indicating that adaptability serves as a mediator. Specifically, the significance of the direct influence between awareness of AI-based programs and ideal L2 self, as well as between awareness and motivational intensity, was lost when adaptability was included. Adaptability fully mediated these relationships with significant indirect effects, showing its critical role in using their knowledge about AI-based programs to shape ideal L2 self-images and enhance motivational intensity for language learning goals. The largest indirect adaptability effect was .17 in the awareness and the ideal L2 self model, then .14 in the awareness and motivational intensity model. Partial mediation was noted in the awareness's links to self-efficacy and perceived L2 competence, with indirect effects of .16 and .06, respectively. Even with a smaller effect (.06) in awareness and perceived L2 competence, it was still observed that adaptability played a significant and partial mediating role.

In addition, adaptability significantly improved the accountability of the models, resulting in an 18% increase in the model with awareness of AI-based programs and self-efficacy and a 3% increase in the model with awareness of AI-based programs and perceived L2 competence. While the accountability of the models for the direct impact of awareness of AI-based programs on self-efficacy or perceived L2 competence was identical at 10% (Model 4 and 6 in Table 6), the increase in model accountability when adaptability was

included varied greatly. This reveals dynamic interplay among the variables. For example, adaptability may contribute to the way awareness of AI-based programs influences individuals' judgments on whether they can successfully conduct language-related tasks, leading to a larger impact on self-efficacy. On the other hand, the impact of adaptability on perceived L2 competence may be less closely related, resulting in a smaller increase in model accountability for perceived L2 competence.

The inclusion of adaptability significantly enhanced the accountability of models including perceived L2 competence, self-efficacy, ideal L2 self, and motivational intensity. Notably, marked increases were observed in the models encompassing motivational variables, namely ideal L2 self, self-efficacy, and motivational intensity, with improvements of 19%, 18%, and 13% respectively. This improvement highlights adaptability's crucial role in the connection between awareness of AI-based programs and essential motivational variables in language learning. Students with a high awareness of AI-based programs can adapt to new tools and technologies more readily, and this adaptability or flexibility can positively influence the development of language learning motivation.

To sum up, the findings of the study show that individuals who possess higher levels of awareness and knowledge of AI-based programs are more likely to exhibit greater adaptability, which in turn leads to higher motivation. This highlights the importance of adaptability as a key factor that helps account for the relationships between awareness of AI-based programs and the levels of motivational variables in their language learning processes. In other words, when considering the relationship between students' awareness of AI-based programs and the motivational variables related to their English learning, it is essential to also consider adaptability.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of increasingly sophisticated AI-based programs on students' motivation in English learning. The findings reveal that students' awareness of and experience with AI-based programs influence their interest in future use. Among the three AI-related variables, only awareness of such programs and future interest in utilizing them were found to be associated with motivational variables. The study also found that awareness directly influences language learning motivation. Notably, adaptability emerged as a crucial mediating factor, fully or partially mediating the relationship between awareness of AI-based programs and all motivational variables. This mediation significantly enhanced the model accountability. This insight

into the role of adaptability not only underscores its importance but also fills crucial gaps in the existing literature, offering a deeper perspective on the dynamics of AI in language learning motivation.

This study has a few limitations to mention. First, while participants were drawn from three different English courses, the majority were categorized as being part of the Basic English Level, based on a placement test. However, the proficiency levels in the other two courses were not identified. Varying levels of English proficiency may yield different insights into the relationship between awareness of AI-based programs and language learning motivation. In addition, for future research, it is recommended to employ an analytical approach such as structural equation modeling to provide a more holistic view of the mechanisms involving all variables. This could enhance the understanding of the complex interactions between awareness of AI-based programs, English proficiency levels, and language learning motivation. One of the results shows that experience with AI-based programs did not have any significant correlation with the motivational variables. This calls for a reassessment of the results using a method that not only considers whether AI tools were used but also examines the quality and depth of their use. Such an approach could provide more accurate information about the influence of experience with AI-based programs.

The present study suggests that it is important for teachers to guide students towards options in AI-BPs that can effectively assist in English learning. It underscores the need for understanding and experiencing how these tools can be utilized to make the language learning processes more efficient and easier. It also informs us that when considering the relationship between students' awareness of AI-based programs and language learning motivation, adaptability must also be considered. In other words, students' AI-related knowledge can further strengthen its impact on motivation if adaptability is enhanced. It is recommended to conduct further research in this area for deeper insight.

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Appendix 1

The Result of Exploratory Factor Analysis for Adaptability

Items	Factor (Adaptability)	1
Adap6	To assist me in a new situation, I am able to change the way I do things if necessary.	.85
Adap3	I am able to adjust my thinking or expectations to assist me in a new situation if necessary.	.84
Adap2	I am able to revise the way I think about a new situation to help me through it.	.83
Adap5	In uncertain situations, I am able to develop new ways of going about things (eg. a different way of asking questions or finding information) to help me through.	.81
Adap4	I am able to seek out new information, helpful people, or useful resources to effectively deal with new situations.	.79
Adap1	I am able to think through a number of possible options to assist me in a new situation.	.74
Adap7	I am able to reduce negative emotions (eg. fear) to help me deal with uncertain situations.	.70
Adap8	When uncertainty arises, I am able to minimize frustration or irritation so I can deal with it best.	.66
Adap9	To help me through new situations, I am able to draw on positive feelings and emotions (eg. enjoyment, satisfaction)	.64

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

STYLE GUIDE FOR THE AUTHORS

Please note that we are changing from APA 6th edition to newer 7th edition. Authors are requested to submit manuscripts formatted in APA style (*American Psychological Association*, 7th ed.).

All manuscripts must include an abstract in English (maximum of 250 words). After the abstract please provide keywords.

Main text: 12 Times New Roman

Long citations (more than 40 words): 10 Times New Roman, indent by 1 tab either side, one empty line above and below, no quotation marks.

1.5 spacing

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The following table demonstrates how to format headings in APA Style.

Level	Format
1	Centered, Bold, Title Case Heading Text begins as a new paragraph.
2	Flush Left, Bold, Title Case Heading Text begins as a new paragraph.
3	<i>Flush Left, Bold Italic, Title Case Heading</i> Text begins as a new paragraph.
4	Indented, Bold, Title Case Heading, Ending With a Period. Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.
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Note. In title case, most words are capitalized.

In-text citations (examples):

Author's name and date in brackets:

The experience of critical incidents and effective reflection upon them allows teachers to control their classroom actions more consciously and create critical events (CE's), which were described earlier as intended, planned and controlled (Woods, 1993).

Woods (1993) believes that critical events are structured and occur in well-defined staged of conceptualization . . .

Two authors:

(Ballantyne & Packer, 1995)

As Ballantyne and Packer (1995) demonstrate ...

Three authors:

(Barker, Callahan, & Ferreira, 2009)

Subsequent use:

(Barker et al., 2009)

Six authors or more:

Lorenz et al. (1998) argued...
(Lorenz et al., 1998)

Authors whose last names are the same:

(D. Francis, 1985; H. Francis, 2004)

Online sources (unpaginated), provide paragraph or section title instead:

(Peterson & Clark, 1978, para. 4)
(Moss, Springer, & Dehr, 2008, Discussion section, para. 1)

No author, provide shortened title:

("Primary Teachers Talking," 2007)
(*Reflective Practice*, 2005, pp. 12–25)

Secondary citations:

Smith (as cited in Maxx & Meyer, 2000) noted that "there is"

Citation within citation:

As it has been noted that "there is no relevance . . . (Smith, 2005)" (Maxx & Meyer, 2000, p. 129).

& vs. and:

As Smithson and Stones (1999) demonstrated. . .
. . . as has been shown (Smithson & Stones, 1999) . . .

References

Selected examples (for more consult APA manual 7th ed.):**Book, one author:**

Goldberg, A. (2006). *Constructions at work*. Oxford University Press.

Book, two authors and more:

Jarvis, S., & Pavlenko, A. (2008). *Crosslinguistic influence in language cognition*. Routledge.

Translated book:

Freud, S. (1960). *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. (J. Strachey, Trans.). Routledge & K. Paul. (Original work published 1905).

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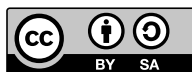
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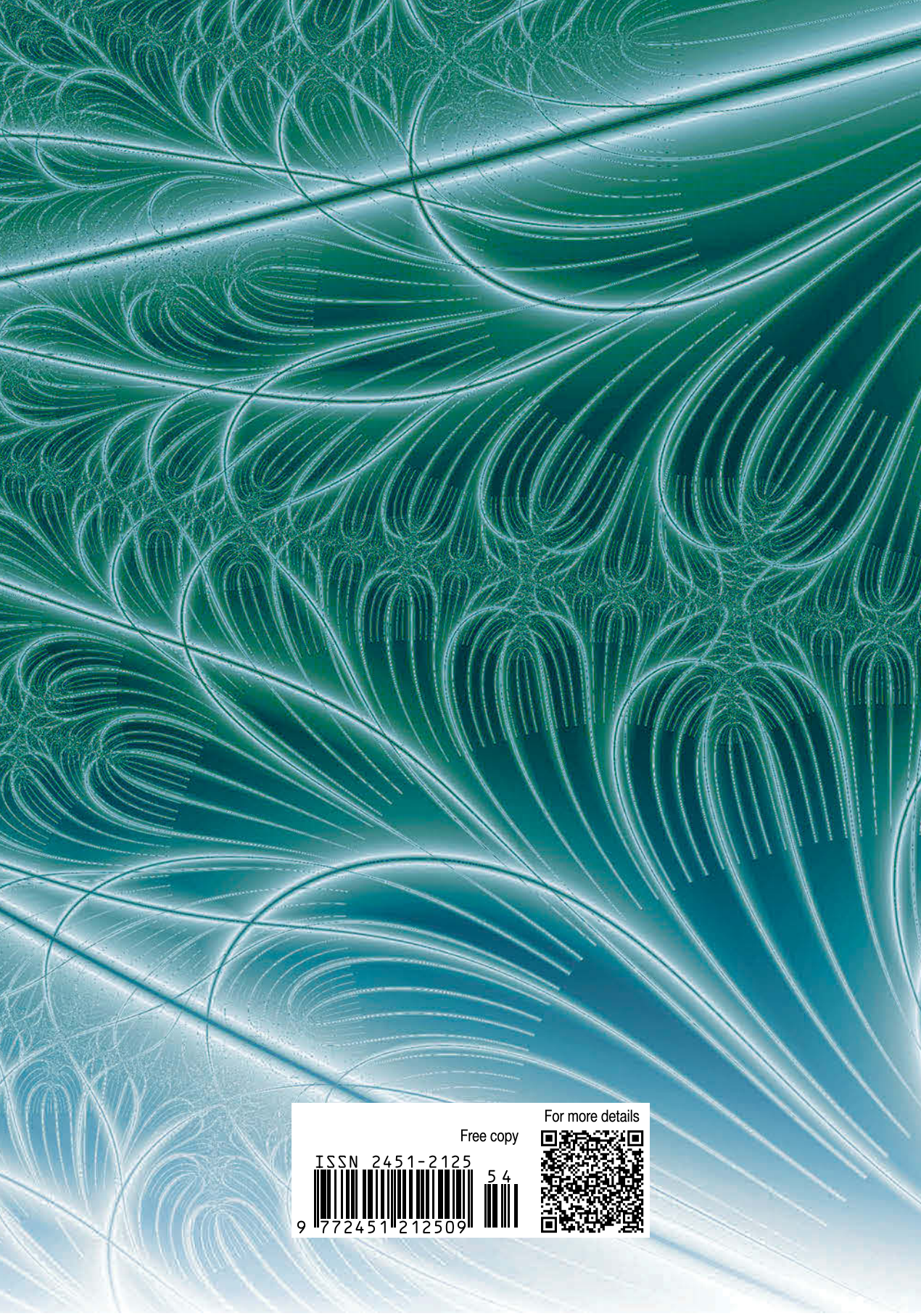
Copy editing: Gabriela Marszałek-Kalaga
Proofreading: Joanna Zwierzyńska
Typesetting: Tomasz Kielkowski
Cover preparation for printing: Paulina Dubiel

Electronic version is the original one.
The journal was previously published in printed form with the
ISSN 2450-5455

The journal is distributed free of charge
ISSN 2451-2125

Published by
Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego
ul. Jordana 18, 40-043 Katowice
www.wydawnictwo.us.edu.pl
e-mail: wydawnictwo@us.edu.pl

First impression. Printed sheets: 23,75. Publishing sheets: 27,5.



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ISSN 2451-2125



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